APA Newsletters

ASIAN AND ASIAN-AMERICAN PHILOSOPHERS AND PHILOSOPHIES
HISPANIC/LATINO ISSUES IN PHILOSOPHY
INDIGENOUS PHILOSOPHY
PHILOSOPHY AND COMPUTERS
PHILOSOPHY AND MEDICINE
PHILOSOPHY AND THE BLACK EXPERIENCE
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TEACHING PHILOSOPHY
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FROM THE EDITOR

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I have edited three issues of the newsletter so far pivoting around "Indian philosophy and culture." The rationale for it is that I have more familiarity with India and its cultural dynamics than the rest of Asia. However, the purpose of our newsletters is to be more inclusive in terms of integrating topics and issues that do not always fall under the rubric of typical philosophical scholarship, in addition to not being limited to one specific part of Asia. So it is time to expand our horizons, as philosophical issues developed in both classical and modern China are similarly important for our readers. This issue of the newsletter contains two papers on China and one on India where the names of those countries are used broadly. One of the papers on China deals with issues regarding the teaching of Chinese philosophy by a non-specialist, and the second one concerns philosophical and political problems stemming from the hegemony of the Communist Party in China. The third and final paper is dedicated to a well-known Advaita Vedānta philosopher in seventh century Bengal.

The paper by Julianne Chung discusses several potential advantages associated with non-specialist teaching of Chinese philosophy. Here, she responds to an earlier paper by Erin Cline, published in the spring 2016 edition of the newsletter (for reference, please see Chung’s paper). Cline contends that a recent trend toward having non-experts teach Chinese philosophy has generated two-fold problems: (i) It prevents departments from hiring a specialist in Chinese philosophy; and (ii) It overlooks difficulties involved in imparting Chinese philosophy to students, connected with the fact that specialized training in Chinese philosophy is needed to teach it well. Merely requiring some acquaintance with Chinese philosophy, Cline rejoins, fails to appreciate its complexity, which only a specialist can discern. Agreeing with Cline on most issues, Chung, however, launches a sustained defense of the benefits of non-specialists offering courses that include Chinese philosophy, for any philosophy department in particular and the profession in general. Moreover, she thinks that non-specialists are uniquely poised to provide new insights and novel ways of interpreting Chinese philosophy than otherwise possible. She believes that this is because a non-specialist is able to cross the aisles of two traditions (Western and non-Western) while utilizing their particular specialization(s) to bring to bear on their teaching. She concludes, for this reason, that a non-specialist is able to contribute significantly both to the teaching of Chinese philosophy to students and to the philosophy profession at large, as the work of specialists and non-specialists might be mutually informative.

Philip Williams looks at contemporary China from the perspective of its political and social development during and after the Mao Zedong Era (1949–1976). He investigates the relevance of Corliss Lamont’s comments on some nagging problems that political doctrines could beget. Lamont, who is a well-known American social/political philosopher with a strong leaning toward left-wing and civil liberties, writes that the worst feature of authoritarianism arises when a political doctrine saps into the vitality of an individual in the name of “Utopian promises.” Borrowing a cue from Lamont, Williams has weaved a narrative of how fundamentalism and orthodoxy have prevailed in modern China. To familiarize the reader with the debilitating influence of Maoist’s ideology, he distinguishes among five features of fundamentalist thought. They are (i) exclusivity of doctrines, (ii) incontestability of doctrine, (iii) salvationist rhetoric, (iv) demands for confession, and, finally, (v) oppositional character. Under the first category, he points out that although there exists some religious freedom in China in terms of what citizens could practice, he aptly argues that they are required to show allegiance to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which totally controls the government of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), as there exists nothing over and above the authority of the CCP. Although both the Dalai Lama and Falun Gong leader Li Hongzhi were long trying to co-exist with the Party-state, the power and influence of these two religious leaders have posed threats for the Beijing powerhouse. In the end, Williams explores a possible reason for the emergence of fundamentalism both in Europe and East Asian countries. His diagnosis for Russia and China is that dictators like Stalin and Mao, although belonging to the opposite ends of a spectrum, are at bottom of the same mold. They wanted to transform the citizens of their respective countries into a New Socialist Human framework where citizens are obliged to forfeit all the attributes of a human individual at the altar of social development.

The third and final paper by Niranjan Saha addresses two historical issues. The first concerns the point of origin of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, and the second one handles the influence of Śrīcaitanya (fifteenth century) movement on him. Sarasvatī is a fifteenth-seventeenth century intellectual icon in Advaita Vedānta, a non-dualistic philosophy advanced first by Śāmkara in the seventh-eighth century Common Era. Although Sarasvatī’s polemical skill was legendary, he also authored books on devotional theory in Advaita tradition.
There are controversies about the place where Sarasvatī both developed and sharpened his analytic acumen. Some scholars have argued that he might have hailed from the South rather than from Bengal. Saha is inclined to believe that it is very likely that Sarasvatī was from Bengal, and that the Bengal Vaishnavism or Gaudīya Vaishnavism propagated by Śrīcaitanya and his followers in the later period had a far-reaching bearing on his philosophical consideration and vice versa. However, although Saha is cautious that it is hardly possible to be conclusive regarding the genealogy and birth place for such a scholar when data are skimpy and lack historical underpinning, he tried to draw his conclusion both based on primary (textual) evidence and modern scholarship on the subject.

There is a list of referees who have contributed to the quality of the papers for this issue by their insightful comments. I am indebted to three such referees, Bo Mou, Ethan Mills, and Joseph Yick, for their helpful comments. As always, I am thankful to both Jay Garfield and Erin Shepherd for their constant help and guidance regarding the contents and formatting of the issue, and Philip Williams for some editorial suggestions.

NOTES
1. In fact, I co-edited those three issues with Matthew Dasti. It is possible that he may not fully agree with my take on the contents of the previous newsletters as I have stated here. This is why I have not mentioned his name in the body of the introduction.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

GOAL OF THE NEWSLETTER ON ASIANS AND ASIAN AMERICAN PHILOSOPHERS

The APA Newsletter on Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies is sponsored by the APA Committee on Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies to report on the philosophical work of Asian and Asian-American philosophy, to report on new work in Asian philosophy, and to provide a forum for the discussion of topics of importance to Asian and Asian-American philosophers and those engaged with Asian and Asian-American philosophy. We encourage a diversity of views and topics within this broad rubric. None of the varied philosophical views provided by authors of newsletter articles necessarily represents the views of any or all the members of the Committee on Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies, including the editor(s) of the newsletter. The committee and the newsletter are committed to advancing Asian and Asian-American philosophical scholarships and bringing this work and this community to the attention of the larger philosophical community; we do not endorse any particular approach to Asian or Asian-American philosophy.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

1) **Purpose:** The purpose of the newsletter is to publish information about the status of Asians and Asian Americans and their philosophy and to make the resources of Asians and Asian-American philosophy available to a larger philosophical community. The newsletter presents discussions of recent developments in Asians and Asian-American philosophy (including, for example, both modern and classical East-Asian philosophy, both modern and classical South Asian philosophy, and Asians and Asian Americans doing philosophy in its various forms), related work in other disciplines, literature overviews, reviews of the discipline as a whole, timely book reviews, and suggestions for both spreading and improving the teaching of Asian philosophy in the current curriculum. It also informs the profession about the work of the APA Committee on Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies. One way the dissemination of knowledge of the relevant areas occurs is by holding highly visible, interactive sessions on Asian philosophy at the American Philosophical Association’s three annual divisional meetings. Potential authors should follow the submission guidelines below:

   i) Please submit essays electronically to the editor(s). Articles submitted to the newsletter should be limited to ten double-spaced pages and must follow the APA submission guidelines.

   ii) All manuscripts should be prepared for anonymous review. Each submission shall be sent to two referees. Reports will be shared with authors. References should follow *The Chicago Manual Style*.

   iii) If the paper is accepted, each author is required to sign a copyright transfer form, available on the APA website, prior to publication.

2) **Book reviews and reviewers:** If you have published a book that you consider appropriate for review in the newsletter, please ask your publisher to send the editor(s) a copy of your book. Each call for papers may also include a list of books for possible review. To volunteer to review books (or some specific book), kindly send the editor(s) a CV and letter of interest mentioning your areas of research and teaching.

3) **Where to send papers/reviews:** Please send all articles, comments, reviews, suggestions, books, and other communications to the editor(s): Jay L. Garfield (jgarfield@smith.edu) and Prasanta Bandyopadhyay (psb@montana.edu).

4) **Submission deadlines:** Submissions for spring issues are due by the preceding November 1, and submissions for fall issues are due by the preceding February 1.

5) **Guest editorship:** It is possible that one or more members of the Committee on Asian and Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies could act as guest editors for one of the issues of the newsletter depending on their expertise in the field. To produce a high-quality newsletter, one of the co-editors could even come from outside the members of the committee depending on his/her area of research interest.
ARTICLES

The Upside of Non-Specialist Teaching: A Reply to Cline

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In “What’s Missing in Philosophy Departments? Specialists in Chinese Philosophy,” (published in the spring 2016 edition of this newsletter) Erin Cline argues that while “it is quite common in the United States for non-specialists to teach a token course in Chinese philosophy (or Asian philosophy) . . . this practice is an often-overlooked obstacle to the greater inclusion of Chinese philosophy in the discipline because it can prevent departments from ever hiring a specialist.” Further, according to Cline, “these departments appear relatively unconcerned about the quality of a course in Chinese philosophy that is taught by someone without graduate-level training in this area,” which “reveals some mistaken and troubling views about Chinese philosophy”: principally, that no formal training is needed to teach Chinese philosophy well. This, however, is patently false, and problematically so. For it betrays an ignorance of the vastness and complexity of the Chinese philosophical landscape and overlooks the fact that many of the relevant texts are not available in translation (along with the consequent need for specialists in Chinese philosophy to learn Classical Chinese—“a literary language that requires formal training and cannot simply be ‘picked up’ by those who are proficient or even fluent in Modern Chinese, any more than one who is proficient in Spanish could ‘pick up’ Latin enough to do serious scholarly work in it”).

I agree wholeheartedly, along with Cline, that philosophy departments should endeavor to hire more specialists—indeed, far more—in Chinese philosophy (as well as in other areas of so-called “non-Western” philosophy, as her arguments can be suitably reformulated so as to apply to them), and that the concerns that she raises are worth attending to very carefully. At the same time, however, I can’t help but wonder whether one of the best ways of promoting the hiring of specialists, as well as an increased appreciation of some of the problems engendered by current practices involving, e.g., the teaching of, and research in, Chinese philosophy, might, in fact, be to encourage and support serious, non-specialist teaching interests. In other words, I think that while Cline’s worries are warranted, it may be the case that, all things considered, having non-specialists teach at least some Chinese philosophy—and even to some degree specialized courses in it, depending on the circumstances—might help, rather than hinder, its greater inclusion.

Before I survey some of the reasons for entertaining this possibility, a caveat: while it is commonly remarked that having non-specialists teach at least some Chinese philosophy is apt to make it the case that more philosophers will take an active interest in it, whatever their area of specialization, this is perhaps likely to obtain only if their initial interest is sufficiently serious. This qualification is arguably crucial, though often overlooked. For, as Cline points out, it is easy to mistake the practice of having interested non-specialists teach courses in Chinese philosophy for an encouraging sign of interest in Chinese philosophy. It could, after all, be a sign of something else: a department’s desire to appear—if only to themselves, or their university’s administration—to be genuinely inclusive, for example (although I say this with some hesitation, the reasons for which will become apparent when case-specific anecdotal evidence is discussed below). Further, given the points that she raises pertaining to the richness and difficulty of Chinese philosophy, Cline is right to note that the practice of having (just) anyone (regardless of whether they have a sufficiently serious interest in Chinese philosophy) teach specialized courses in it reveals a failure to take Chinese philosophy seriously. But what I am not so sure about, pace Cline, is that departments who have non-specialists teaching, e.g., courses in Chinese philosophy will actually be less likely to hire a specialist (or to at least promote the hiring of specialists in some other way—more on that later), or that simply having a non-specialist teach specialized courses in Chinese philosophy reveals a failure to take it seriously. Granted, not just anyone with an interest in Chinese philosophy ought to be teaching specialized courses in it. But must that interest rise to the level of being a specialist in order to be serious enough for the purpose? Or might a highly dedicated non-specialist be considered to have a sufficiently serious interest, and might their teaching such courses encourage, rather than discourage, the hiring of specialists?

Here are a few reasons to think that the answer to this last question might well be “yes,” at least in certain cases. First, observe that what counts as a sufficiently serious interest in Chinese philosophy will presumably vary depending on the nature of the course being taught. I take it that the goal of incorporating some Chinese philosophy into, e.g., an introduction to philosophy course is worthwhile, and that one needn’t be a specialist to do so responsibly. Rather, interested non-specialists might begin to approach the task of incorporating Chinese philosophy into their courses by consulting the work of specialists, and teaching it through the lens of such work. If such a practice were to become more widespread, it is reasonable to expect that it would bring with it at least two immediate benefits. The first is that it would result in more non-specialists being better educated about Chinese philosophy (something that they might not have had the opportunity to accomplish, say, in graduate school, given the dearth of specialists—a factor which Amy Olberding, David Wong, Alexus McLeod, Yong Huang, and Bryan Van Norden also comment on in their contributions to the spring 2016 edition of this newsletter). After all, most professional philosophers’ educations after graduate school aren’t course, or even workshop, based—at least, not at first. Rather, they’re more along the lines of series of (self) directed studies, done for the purpose of teaching or research. Also, it is often the case that one is not only more motivated to learn something, but is more motivated to and, indeed, learns it better if one has to teach it. (In connection with this, Bryan Van Norden
reminded me of this old joke about one professor asking another whether he had read some particular classic text in the field. The other professor replies, "Read it?! I haven’t even taught it yet!" Because of this, one of the best ways to encourage non-specialists to learn about Chinese philosophy, and to do it well, is to encourage them to teach it—if in a small way, at least at the outset. And this, in turn, will help to offset some of the educational deficits and their resultant problems that have arisen as a result of the lack of specialists in Asian philosophies currently employed at Ph.D.-granting departments in North America: not only will it remedy ignorance about, e.g., Chinese philosophy to a certain degree, but as a result, it will naturally remedy apathy (at best) and dismissiveness (at worst) toward it as well—an important starting point, as others (including Huang and Van Norden) have pointed out.

The second—which would in part be a result of the first—is that non-specialists would be more likely to see specialists’ work as relevant and valuable. Thus, we can suppose that they would endeavor to engage it, which is apt to result in more specialists, e.g., being invited to give talks at conferences or contribute articles to edited volumes or special issues, or having their work published in mainstream, non-specialist peer-reviewed journals, whose organizers, referees, and editors tend to include far more non-specialists than specialists. For interested non-specialists will not only be more motivated to promote the inclusion of Chinese philosophy than will be disinterested ones, but they will be better able to do so as well, once they have an improved understanding of what it involves. And this, in turn, will help to address what Amy Olberding argues (in her spring 2016 contribution to this newsletter) is a problem less often addressed than the problem concerning the dearth of specialists discussed by Cline, but perhaps equally fundamental to winning greater inclusion for Chinese philosophy: publication rates for work in the field in non-specialist, general audience, philosophy journals. It will also help to make less problematic a phenomenon, discussed by both Olberding and Huang, that can be characterized as a double-bind on specialists in Chinese philosophy, who are expected to make their work appear at once applicable to the concerns of Western philosophy while nonetheless offering something of distinct value.

Granted, these considerations so far are framed so as to apply to those who would seek to include some Chinese philosophy in their teaching, and not to non-specialists who would propose to teach a specialized course in it. Why think, however, that they apply in their case? One way of responding to this question is to point out that, typically, with increased engagement comes both increased appreciation and decreased tendencies to overestimate one’s own competence. This claim is motivated, at least in part, by anecdotal evidence (which will be provided shortly) as well as by literature regarding the Dunning-Kruger effect: roughly, a psychological phenomenon that involves a common tendency for those with low competence levels to dramatically overestimate, and feel confident in, their competence regarding things that they know very little about. (Sometimes, when this effect is mapped on a graph using the x axis to represent, e.g., level of competence, and the y axis to represent, e.g., level of confidence, the resultant line is not anything like what one might expect, with relatively incompetent participants often professing nearly the same levels of confidence as highly competent participants, and with somewhat competent participants often professing less, making for something of a "U"-shaped dip in the line). Because of this, we might consider cautioning non-specialists who would engage Chinese philosophy to engage more than just a little (at least pending more targeted empirical evidence to the contrary), and to strive to teach, at minimum, a major course component, if not an introductory-to-intermediate specialized course, in it, depending on the circumstances—provided again, that their interest is sufficiently serious (the idea being that it might be better to know literally nothing about Chinese philosophy than just a scant amount, especially if one is not already disposed to give it its due). But, just how serious must one’s interest in Chinese philosophy be for one to responsibly teach such a course or course component in it, if not specialist-level interest? One proposal that I think worth considering, and that I alluded to earlier, is this: non-specialists who would teach a specialized course in Chinese philosophy should be able to characterize themselves as having a highly dedicated interest in it. Such an interest would presumably include a commitment to, at minimum, do it justice in its own right and promote its greater inclusion by actively incorporating it into one’s research as well as one’s teaching. For if this were so, it would be less likely that such non-specialists would see themselves as adequate replacements for specialists (after all, the more they do learn about Chinese philosophy, the more they will realize that they don’t know and need to learn, and they will have a better idea of its problems, its challenges, its complexities, etc.), and more likely that they would see themselves as contributing to the flourishing of a burgeoning and worthwhile trend toward inclusivity. Such non-specialists would be highly interested in, just for starters, getting things right and understanding the nuances of Chinese philosophy, as well as the complications associated with studying it that Cline mentions. They would also be interested in promoting the work of current and future specialists and developing their own expertise in Chinese philosophy, given that they would aim to produce high-quality scholarly work that incorporates it.

This perspective is bolstered by anecdotal evidence pertaining to a variety of examples of philosophers who have developed (at least some level of) expertise in non-Western philosophy after having left graduate school. Indeed, many who would currently qualify as leading figures in Chinese and Indian philosophy—at least in the English-speaking world—began their careers having been trained in what some might describe as “hard-core, Western analytic philosophy,” including (but of course not limited to) Eric Schwitzgebel, Owen Flanagan, Joel Kupperman, David Wong, Graham Priest, and Jay Garfield. In fact, as Garfield noted in an interview with the online magazine 3:AM, his initial reasons for seriously exploring Indian philosophy were—as it turns out—connected with teaching obligations. As he tells the story:

I was introduced to non-Western philosophy by the first student who walked into my office on my first
day of work at Hampshire College, where I taught for about 15 years. He wanted me to chair his senior thesis on "Indo-Tibetan Madhyamaka and the Social Contract Tradition." I thought he was joking. But of course he wasn’t. Bob Thurman was then teaching up the road at Amherst College, part of the same Five College consortium, and was supervising the Tibetan end of the thesis. So I signed on, and had to read some Tibetan philosophy. It was pretty compelling, but not anything I could spend time on at that stage of my career. Only about seven years later, when Hampshire introduced a strong multicultural requirement that demanded that we each teach some non-Western approach to our discipline did I start studying Buddhist philosophy, and then only to incorporate a little bit in an epistemology class to satisfy that requirement. But once I started, I got drawn deeper and deeper into the field, and it quickly became an important research area for me. An NEH Summer Institute on Nāgārjuna at the University of Hawai’i sealed my interest, and then a year on an Indo-American fellowship with my family at the Central University of Tibetan Studies in India where I studied Madhyamaka under the ven Prof Geshe Yeshe Thabkhas provided the foundation for my subsequent work in Buddhist philosophy.8

For what it’s worth, much of what I say above is also motivated by my own experiences. I personally did not encounter any Chinese philosophy until just before I began to write my dissertation, and when I did, it was by way of a non-specialist (at least in Chinese philosophy): none other than Jay Garfield, who had a visiting appointment at Yale, as he was affiliated with Yale-NUS at the time. Through Jay’s encouragement, and then, later, Bryan Van Norden’s (whom I met at a conference a few months after having defended, and a couple of months into my first job), I have been consistently inspired to learn more and more about Chinese philosophy, and hope to eventually cultivate genuine expertise in it, though this will obviously take much more time and effort than I can presently afford pre-tenure (especially given the language requirement discussed by Cline). Thus I count myself—and rightly so—as a highly dedicated non-specialist who relies on the hard-earned expertise of specialists in Chinese philosophy in my teaching and research. This, however, has only made me more appreciative of their importance, more respectful of their skill and hard-work, more awed by the vastness and complexity of the philosophical landscape that they survey, and more dedicated to their inclusion—rather than less. And I suspect that many who began their careers similarly, but later engaged non-Western philosophy, would feel much the same.

I would like to conclude by briefly remarking on just one more exciting—although admittedly less immediate—potential benefit of encouraging non-specialist teaching of Chinese (and other non-Western forms of) philosophy. Encouraging more non-specialists to take, e.g., Chinese philosophy seriously (say, by supporting their interests in teaching it) is not only more likely to raise its profile and the profile of those who specialize in it, but also more likely to make not only excellent comparative, but truly cross-cultural philosophy (a.k.a. “comparative philosophy without borders,” “fusion philosophy,” or “global philosophy”) possible. For if what is needed to do excellent cross-cultural philosophy is to have sufficient expertise in more than one major philosophical tradition, and we can expect for philosophers—given the current state of Ph.D.-granting departments—to generally emerge from graduate school having specialized in only one, then in order to do excellent cross-cultural philosophy, they will have to supplement their education afterward. And, for the aforementioned reasons, there is perhaps no better way to do this than by incorporating philosophy from unfamiliar traditions into one’s teaching—if in a gradual way—being sure all the while to rely on the work of established experts as a trusted, and necessary, guide. What’s more—and although this point deserves more elaboration than I am able to give it here—it should be noted that when the focus is on philosophical topics shared across traditions (rather than on dimensions of, e.g., Chinese thought in particular), non-specialists are often uniquely poised to make fruitful contributions, as they can utilize resources and draw on insights taken from their own areas of specialization to suggest alternative ways of interpreting and engaging Chinese philosophy, and to propose new approaches for bringing discussions from various traditions together. Thus, just as the work of specialists in Chinese philosophy might inform the work of non-specialists who engage it, so might the work of non-specialists in Chinese philosophy inform the work of specialists, too.9

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to Bryan Van Norden and Jay Garfield for reading and commenting on a previous version of this essay, as well as to an anonymous referee for providing a wealth of insightful remarks and suggestions.

NOTES

2. Ibid., 11.
3. Ibid.
6. This is not to say that someone seriously interested in Chinese philosophy should have published, or be working on publishing, e.g., an article on Chinese philosophy in a refereed journal, exactly, but rather that they should at minimum be working on, e.g., an article that engages Chinese philosophy in a substantive way. Thank you to Bryan Van Norden for encouraging me to clarify this point.
9. Cf. B. Mou, "On Some Methodological Issues Concerning Chinese Philosophy," in History of Chinese Philosophy (Routledge, 2009), 8–9. I would like to thank an anonymous referee for very helpfully suggesting that I elaborate this point along these lines.
Fundamentalist Thinking in Chinese Maoist “Thought Remolding”

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INTRODUCTION
The American philosopher Corliss Lamont has noted that some political doctrines have “functioned religiously, reflecting the worst features of orthodoxy and authoritarianism, especially when they sacrifice individuals on the altar of Utopian promises.”2 The Maoist institution and ideology of “thought remolding” [sixiang gaizao 思想改造, sometimes loosely translated as “thought reform”] would thus seem a likely candidate for fruitful analysis under the rubric of fundamentalist thought in twentieth-century East Asia. Untold millions of mostly professional-class citizens of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) were coercively subjected to the form of indoctrination known as thought remolding during the Mao Zedong Era (1949–1976), and the recent revival of coerced public confessions under the rule of Communist Party strongman Xi Jinping since 2013 suggests that this fundamentalist mode of thought might well be on the rise again.3

Confessional, charismatic, and doctrinaire aspects of this Maoist ideology that peaked during the middle of the twentieth century resonate strongly with many fundamentalist religious movements both then and since in East Asia and elsewhere in the world. In the face of optimistic twentieth-century predictions that fundamentalism would probably recede before an irresistibly advancing tide of scientific knowledge and the spread of relative affluence to more regions worldwide, the all-or-nothing mentality characteristic of fundamentalism has nonetheless continued to thrive in a world marked by accelerating progress in education and technology.4

Researchers of fundamentalism, such as Lionel Caplan, have highlighted a range of typical characteristics of fundamentalist thought, five of which I consider particularly applicable to the ideology and institution of Maoist thought remolding.5 First, fundamentalism embodies a pronounced exclusivity in what it will accept as a source of truth or understanding, whether through an infallible leader, canonical doctrine, or a combination thereof. The fundamentalist True Believer is expected to adopt a credulous, literalistic approach to understanding the favored religious or philosophical tract, and to assume that all major questions of worldview or sectarian belief have been resolved by that favored tract or collection of sacred tracts.

Second, fundamentalism typically assumes an incontestability of doctrine that tends to rule out debate over key tenets of the favored belief. In this view, rival doctrines are not merely wrong, but stubbornly wrong-headed. In other words, rival doctrines cannot ordinarily be tolerated as having different emphases but sharing certain basic common goals of the preferred doctrine, as is typical among individuals of liberalist rather than fundamentalist bent. Instead, rival doctrines come across as threatening heterodoxies towards which fundamentalists must remain vigilant and even combative.

Third, fundamentalism tends to adopt salvationist rhetoric when discussing the necessity of conversion or praising the favored source of its doctrine, such as a founder who purportedly “saved” the sectarian or national group from a terrible fate at the hands of non-believing outsiders. The gratitude that the multitude would be assumed to feel for having been “saved” by the founder and other sectarian leaders is often expected to result in a level of obedience and deference before sect authorities that would be considered excessively uncritical from a liberalist perspective.

Fourth, fundamentalists’ high expectations about the purity of others’ devotion to the creed often takes the form of pressure on group members to confess to real or imagined shortcomings. A layer of ritualism often develops around the sect’s demands for confession.

This preoccupation with confession is related to a fifth and final tendency among fundamentalists, namely, its oppositional character, in that it commonly defines itself as being in sharp contrast with one or more modes of thought that it reviles as absolutely objectionable or loathsome. Confessions commonly mention that the confessor’s sins or other failings to live up to the sect’s expectations stem from the baleful influence of one or another loathsome rival ideology or faith.

REFERENCES


The following sections analyze the ideology of Maoist thought remolding in terms of the five typical attributes of fundamentalist thought as defined above. The concluding section of the article traces the imperative for the conversion or remolding of an individual’s thought back before Marx to late eighteenth-century European socialist ideology, as well as discussing the relevance of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century East Asian assumption of the government’s need to provide its allegedly deficient citizenry with potentially endless “political tutelage.”

EXCLUSIVITY OF DOCTRINE
In the PRC, Marxist-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought have been all along enshrined as orthodox by both the state-controlled media and the PRC Constitution itself. Even within more recent iterations of the PRC Constitution under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s and Hu Jintao in the first decade of the twenty-first century, when the economy’s market-oriented sector has consistently outperformed the deeply troubled state-owned sector, state-socialist Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong Thought has continued to be held up as the regime’s exclusively and eternally true founding doctrine. As Caplan has characterized the fundamentalist’s narrow view of seeking truth, “Knowledge is gained not through expansion, but as an archaeology of truths that are already present in canonical texts.”

The giant portrait of Mao Zedong that has hung prominently above Beijing’s Tiananmen Square for over six decades serves as a daily reminder that Mao and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) he led to rule over the nation have an exclusive hold over doctrinal correctness. Although the post-Mao CCP’s policies have veered away from old-fashioned state socialist central planning to something akin to bureaucratic or state capitalism with a heavy nationalistic overlay, the open and public challenging of the founder’s state socialist doctrine remains a punishable offense, while writings along those lines cannot be legally published in the PRC. In an early twenty-first-century tally by a notable Australian scholar, the PRC imprisoned more politically “subversive” journalists and internet bloggers than the rest of the world combined for those two categories.

EXCLUSIVITY OF DOCTRINE
The expatriate dissident scholar Hu Ping (b. 1947) has quoted a related CCP slogan used during the early 1950s campaign to “remold commerce and industry” in the direction of nationalizing private enterprise: “With machine-gun nests pinning you down on three sides, you’re allowed to head off in only one direction.” Hu Ping argues that by having systematically and coercively closed off the intelligentsia’s doctrinal and practical alternatives to thought remolding in the early 1950s, the CCP helped promote the exclusivity of its own doctrine and practice. In having done so, the CCP was taking China in a determinedly fundamentalist direction.

INCONTESTABILITY OF DOCTRINE
Fundamentalist doctrine purports to have been established in a once-and-for-all fashion, and thus is presented as something that cannot be properly questioned ever again. Mao Zedong sweepingly claimed that every ideology other than Marxist-Leninism that had been tried in China turned out to be a failure; he portrayed his CCP’s military victory over the Nationalist party-state in the late 1940s civil war as an historic and irreversible choice of the Chinese people in favor of the ascendant Marxist-Leninist CCP party-state. Hu Ping has argued that having taken this late-1940s military success as the basis for a permanent Chinese political monopoly unrestrained by meaningful popular referenda or elections, the CCP demanded from the populace under its autocratic rule a thoroughgoing submissiveness that set the stage for the ideology of remolding to be implemented.

This proclamation of a lofty triumph beyond the range of accountability measures manifests a program of political emasculation of the citizenry and reveals an overriding tone of anti-intellectualism and hostility to independent thought.

Writing about anti-intellectualism in American life, Richard Hofstadter similarly characterizes the fundamentalists’ typical stance as “the one-hundred-per-cent mentality.” Such True Believers, he adds, are “inclined to proclaim certainties, to affirm universal, timeless moralities . . . [and] tolerate no equivocations, no reservations. . . . This conviction in the incontestability of their claims allows fundamentalists to deny others the validity of their own beliefs.”

Maoist thought remolding goes beyond denying other people the validity of their own beliefs to actively attack and in many cases dismantle or destroy those beliefs through a variety of pressure tactics that have been analyzed by scholars such as Hu Ping, Kathleen Taylor, and Robert Jay Lifton. This article is not intended to provide a typology or analysis of thought remolding’s pressure tactics such as isolation of the victim from sources of emotional support and the use of loaded language in interrogations. However, it should be noted that while the scale of thought remolding has decreased during the post-Mao Era compared to what it formerly was under Mao Zedong’s dictatorship, certain politically anathematized groups within the PRC such as Falun Gong practitioners continue to be subjected to quite severe thought remolding regimens. The crackdown on
During and after the late 1940s civil war between the Nationalists (Guomindang or GMD) and the CCP, the Maoists again drew upon salvationist rhetoric to dub this the War of Liberation—even though “liberation” is typically understood as throwing off the yoke of a foreign invader or military occupier, which the Chinese Nationalists were definitely not. Yet the CCP rulers of the PRC have never stopped referring to the late-1940s civil war in this salvationist manner. Moreover, though nearly seven decades have elapsed since the Chinese Communist army proved victorious in the civil war, it is still referred to in salvationist terms as the “People’s Liberation Army.” In similar fashion, even in the twenty-first century, eulogistic PRC songs and other propaganda continue to insist that “only the Communist Party can save China.”

From the standpoint of fundamentalist ideology, the unconverted individual is in urgent need of being “saved,” however painful or coercive that might turn out to be. Conversion to the correct Party ideology and especially a tamed deference before Party authority are considered to be so valuable in the salvation of an individual that even a two-decade stint in prisons and labor camps has not been considered too high a price to pay for it.

Salvationist rhetoric is often connected to a fourth feature of modern PRC fundamentalism, namely, a tendency toward inquisitorial demands for confessions from the ideologically impure. Lifton has termed this the “cult of confession” and remarked on how drawn out the confessions demanded by the CCP authorities have tended to become. Lifton has also etched a clear distinction between the thought-remolding cult of confession’s demands for individual self-abasement and deference to authority, on the one hand—and more benign types of confession that aim to help individuals unburden themselves of matters troubling their consciences, receive forgiveness, and hold their heads up in society, as sometimes encountered in Confucian or Judeo-Christian contexts. Thought remolding’s cult of confession is instead designed to psychologically bludgeon persons into throwing themselves on the mercy of their Party-ordained inquisitors.

The astonishing lengths to which confession has been taken in PRC thought remolding strikes many observers as pathetic or even risible at times. An example of this may be found in a short story by the liberal-minded fiction writer Wang Meng (b. 1936) entitled “The Anecdotes of Section Chief Maimaiti.” This satire features a low-level Uighur official in Xinjiang who is undergoing coercive thought remolding at a May Seventh Cadre School during Mao’s Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). In order to make his confession seem weightier and more sincere, Section Chief Maimaiti uses an ambiguity in the Uighur language to make it appear as though he is a friend of the recently purged top cultural official Zhou Yang, even though Maimaiti had merely heard about Zhou Yang’s recent downfall and had never actually met such a high-ranking official in the PRC’s cultural bureaucracy. Nevertheless, this was still not scandalous enough for the interrogator, who pressured Maimaiti to confess something even more damaging or shameful. Maimaiti thought for a moment and finally came out with a confession to make all the others seem pale by comparison. Not only was Maimaiti responsible for having started both World War One and World War Two, he confesses, but he was also currently hatching a plot to ignite World War Three.

A fifth and final feature of fundamentalism that is closely connected to thought remolding is its oppositional character. Fundamentalists tend to make high demands on others for purity of doctrine and deed, as they conceive them. Such demands for purity often are in tension with the everyday world, and commonly lead to what Sidney Greenblatt has characterized as “the manufacture of deviance.” Behavior and beliefs that would not ordinarily be considered deviant, or at least would not be criticized as such, frequently come under condemnation by fundamentalist purists. Confessions written by objects of thought remolding would thus have to become even lengthier, more detailed, and more self-flagellating to satisfy the demands for purity of the Party inquisitor.

There has also been a very practical organizational motivation behind the ideology of thought remolding’s intolerance of deviance, institutionalization of the cult of confession, and demands for ideological purity. Many of the CCP’s key successes in its struggle with the Nationalist Party were due to having infiltrated numerous moles and other spies into the upper levels of the Nationalist army and bureaucracy, especially during the 1940s. By requiring the ideologically suspect within their area of jurisdiction to detail in confessions all of their personal and career relationships, no matter how minor or temporary, the Chinese Communists greatly reduced the likelihood of having the same tactic used against them by Nationalist moles and spies. Of course, this feat was achieved at the
expense of respect for civil liberties and the right to privacy, but the CCP has never in practice placed a high priority on civil liberties or civil rights, anyway.

An analogous manifestation of fundamentalist oppositionalism that has a pragmatic side was in the CCP high cadre Chen Yun’s opposition to relaxing Party restrictions over PRC publishers in the early 1980s. The proposed change at that time to the Publication Law would have made the PRC Publication Law as lacking in thoroughgoing control by the ruling party as the Nationalists’ Publication Law had been in the 1930s and 1940s. In a secret statement that was made only for the eyes and ears of other top CCP leaders, and not for public consumption, Chen Yun advised that the CCP not allow rival or oppositional political forces to use the freedom the press against the CCP in the same way that the CCP had formerly used freedom of the press during the 1930s and 1940s against the then-ruling Nationalist Party.24

FROM FUNDAMENTALIST FEVER TO CYNICISM ABOUT SOCIO-POLITICAL CHANGE

The above-mentioned calculated stratagem by Chen Yun can be said to have gone beyond mere philosophical pragmatism and entered the realm of pure cynicism. As Hu Ping has persuasively argued in his 1999 monograph about thought remolding, post-Mao attitudinal cynicism has been one of the most widely observed outcomes of decades of Mao Era thought remolding.25

Sketched in broader terms, the outcome of attitudinal cynicism has been part of a three-phase process which begins with a fundamentalist project of social engineering that is supposed to create a radically “new socialist human” and eventually lead to a “socialist heaven on earth.”26

Of course, the fundamentalist fervor that gave rise to this misguided project of social engineering in the first place gradually has to rely more and more on coercion and other dystopian pressure tactics in the face of practical setbacks that any social engineer eventually encounters. Limitations in both human nature and in actually existing human societies inevitably frustrate implementation of the grandiose blueprints of social engineers. Thereupon, the initial phase of the launching of the project of social engineering gradually shifts into the dystopian and coercive Phase Two, in which annoyingly recalcitrant human subjects must be pressured and manipulated into converting themselves into new socialist humans.

Finally, a growing fatigue and disillusionment with thought remolding’s waste of human energies and human potential results in Phase Three, marked chiefly by a widespread cynicism about the possibilities of social and political change for the better. Phase Three also manifests an over-emphasis on improving the material conditions of life—that is, it has left a legacy of avid consumerism in the post-Mao PRC.

PRC thought remolding has thus left a quite negative legacy of having stifled independent and critical thought, along with having encouraged a widespread cynicism both inside and outside the Party about meaningful societal change. Perhaps this is no better than what most observers might have expected, given the middling-to-poor track record of fundamentalist movements worldwide.

EUROPEAN AND EAST ASIAN CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO FUNDAMENTALIST THOUGHT REMOLDING

One might take a step back at this point to ponder various key factors that may have left China under Maoism vulnerable to the blandishments of fundamentalist thought remolding. One such factor is the set of assumptions about human nature that have been made from the beginnings of state socialism as a fighting creed rather than merely a speculative fantasy. This occurred under political theorist and activist François-Noël Babeuf (1760–1797) in the late eighteenth century, especially during France’s tumultuous 1790s. The human psyche was commonly viewed by various utopian thinkers like Babeuf to be a highly malleable tabula rasa, and little or no thought appears to have been given to the unintended consequences that might spring from coercive manipulation of the psyche.

As the most important philosophical antecedent to Marx, Babeuf argued that socialism was not out merely to change the social and political systems, but to transform the human being itself. Babeuf’s chief goal, in his own words, was “to eradicate once and for all the desire of a person to be richer, or wiser, or more powerful than others.”27

To be sure, various state socialist strongmen and dictators gave more or less emphasis to Babeuf’s founding dicta. Josef Stalin and Mao Zedong were at opposite ends of a spectrum ranging from tepid to fervent interest in transforming the citizen into a New Socialist Human. Stalin focused on the citizen’s outward compliance with the Soviet Party-state’s dictates and was mostly uninterested in the private thoughts of Soviet citizens. The Soviet dictator’s stance on this issue greatly contrasted with that of his Chinese counterpart, for Mao demanded that the Chinese citizen’s private thoughts must march in lock-step with the citizen’s outward obedience to the Party-state’s decrees. Therefore, even though the Maoist concept of remolding unorthodox thought and behavior was to some extent anticipated by and modeled upon the 1920s Soviet Russian concept of perekovka [reforging] prisoners and other “troublemakers” into obedient and industrious citizens, the Soviets never implemented this conception with anything resembling the intensity with which the Maoists brought to bear on this issue.28

There are other factors in the legacy of state socialism worldwide that contributed to fundamentalist thought remolding, including Karl Marx’s advocacy of “dictatorship of the proletariat” and Lenin’s insistence that the doctrines of the Party “vanguard” take precedence over the “natural revolutionary tendencies” of the proletariat.29 However, instead of dwelling further here on issues outside of the East Asian orbit, it would be more appropriate to conclude by discussing the second set of factors that set the local stage for fundamentalist thought remolding.
This second set of factors turns upon the modern nation-building ethos that gained ascendency in both Meiji Japan and late Qing and Republican China. As analyzed by scholars such as Ann Anagnost, Takeshi Fujitani, and Prasenjit Duara, this late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century nation-building program advocated political tutelage of the citizenry in order to transform the people from passive subjects into active followers of government mobilization in such realms as the military, industry, and political participation. In this developmental model, the citizenry was regarded as not yet capable of the sort of political participation that had been noticed overseas among the industrialized nations of the West. That is, the rank and file among the populace in early modern Japan and China were not considered ready for full political participation in a modern nation until after having undergone a protracted period of political tutelage under government supervision.

Under this nation-building ethos, ordinary citizens were described as needing “renovation” [xin min 新民] or “remaking”; everyday folkways and traditions that were incompatible with the modernizing project were to be suppressed by the centralizing modern nation-state. Unfortunately, this period of political tutelage lingered on for decades under the Chinese Nationalists, not finally concluding until the first direct election of the president in Taiwan in the 1990s. Political tutelage has dragged on for even longer under Chinese Communist rule on the mainland, whose leaders to this very day still insist that the citizenry’s educational level or “quality” [zuishi 素质] is still too low to make them competent to elect government officials above the village level. This longue durée of political tutelage under the CCP continues in the face of obvious counterexamples such as democratically ruled India, whose demographic profile is not very dissimilar to China’s.

Thought remolding has been a particularly aggressive type of government intervention in the thought of citizens under endless political tutelage from patronizing and autocratic officials. Much less noticeable today than it was during the heyday of Mao Zedong’s fundamentalist rule, the legacy of thought remolding nonetheless continues to make its presence felt in China in two major ways: the widespread cynicism about politics that Hu Ping has analyzed, and the ongoing crackdowns on anathematized religious sects and on political dissent, whether real or imagined. As well as any other ideological phenomenon, thought remolding bespeaks the continuing presence of fundamentalist convictions at the highest levels of the CCP and the Chinese nation-state it dominates.

NOTES

1. This article has been peer-reviewed. Any inaccuracies are solely the responsibility of the author.
4. For instance, Lamont opines that the 21st century “can and should be the humanistic century” in *The Philosophy of Humanism*, 290.
8. Ross Terrill suggests that PRC government attempts to gag politically dissident bloggers will fall short of the regime’s ambitions to maintain its exclusive control over the flow of politically sensitive information. See *The New Chinese Empire* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2003), 326. Information related to the dozens of politically imprisoned bloggers in the PRC—more than in the rest of the world combined—came from BBC Radio News, 29 July 2006.
17. The CCP’s control and supervision over all large organizations in the PRC helps prevent any such organization from metamorphosing into a rival power base within the country. This is a deep-seated fear that the CCP leadership shares with premodern China’s imperial rulers, who often suppressed millenarian sects out of fear that the latter might develop into a rival political force—as indeed occurred from time to time, such as with the Taiping rebels who came close to toppling the Qing dynasty in the mid-nineteenth century.
25. Ibid.
26. The Chinese terms are shehuizhuyixinen and shehuizhuyixiantang, respectively.


29. The existence of Marxian-inspired one-party state socialist dictatorships facilitated the necessary milieu control over human objects of thought remolding. Leninist Party vanguards consisting mainly of intellectuals and semi-intellectuals (such as Mao Zedong) were more likely to promote Utopian or fundamentalist policies such as thought remolding than would a true proletariat of working-class types.


31. For more information on this issue in the context of Meiji Japan, see Takeshi Fujitani, “Inventing, Forgetting, Remembering: Toward a Historical Ethnography of the Nation-state,” in Cultural Nationalism in East Asia: Representation and Identity, ed. Harumi Befu (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1993), 77-106.


In the firmament of Indian philosophical thought Madhusūdana Sarasvatī is the last great luminary. Sixteenth century Bengal was the dawn of Renaissance in India. Raghnunandana with his Smṛtis, Raghunātha with his New-logic, Kṛṣṇānanda with his Tantricism, to name a few, opened up new vistas of human mind. Madhusūdana was a true representative of this epoch. He freely drew upon the rich heritage of the past, as he imbibed the treasures of the period, including new devotionalism initiated by Śrī Caitanya. In him the Vedantic tradition of Ācārya Śāṅkara fused with the devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa. Indeed Madhusūdana was the unique triumph of opposite forces…

The genius of Madhusūdana soared beyond contradictions. It knit into existence a world in which the uncompromising monism of Śāṅkara was wedded to unreserved surrender to the Almighty (sic). ¹

While the above note refers to Madhusūdana not only as a true representative of Śāṅkara’s Advaita Vedāntic tradition, but also as a promulgor of devotional theology there (a subject, the introduction with which this tradition came under fierce attack of the dualists, and that Madhusūdana, without forging his own root, succeeded in synthesizing between his non-dualistic philosophy and his theology of emotional love for personal God), he seems to have been one of the precursors of all-round revitalization that Bengal underwent in the sixteenth century CE. Thus, it can be noted that Madhusūdana, despite being a follower of Advaita Vedānta, according to which the sole and highest reality is nirguṇa brahman (unqualified brahman) that can only be attained through the path of knowledge (jñāna-mārga), found no incompatibility with the sentiment of devotion (bhakti), which entails a total surrender by the devotee to a personal Godhead like Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa or Hari, whom

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**A Brief Note on the Probable Place of Origin of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī and the Influence of Caitanyaite Movement on Him**

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Madhusūdana Sarasvatī (ca. sixteenth century CE), one of the seminal figures in post-Śāṅkara (Śāṅkara, ca. eighth century CE) Advaita (i.e., non-dualism) Vedānta philosophy, authored various works, including the Advaitasiddhi, a polemic of the highest kind against sectarian dualism, which is considered to be one of the influential works of this Vedāntic system of philosophy. In contrast, his Bhaktirasāyana is the only extant independent exposition on the nature of devotion written by a staunch exponent of Advaita. Thus, while his other works like the Siddhāntabindu, Advaitaratnakara, etc., establish his amazing polemic skills as an uncompromising defender of Śāṅkara’s non-dualistic Vedānta, Gūḍhārthaḍīpiṅka on the Bhagavadgītā, Mahimnastotraṭīkā (including the Prasthānabhedha therein), Bhāgavatapurāṇapratamālokāvīyākhyā, Harīlīlāvīyākhyā, etc., point him out to be a proponent of devotional theology in Advaitic tradition, a fact that seems to be an apparent dichotomy in both Indian philosophical and Vedāntic discourses. However, despite his renown, his concrete biographical details are scanty, as, like any other ascetic follower of the tradition, Madhusūdana has not given any significant autobiographical details in any of his works other than his name and the names of his preceptors appearing in colophons and salutatory verses. References to Madhusūdana in later literature are the only sources upon which a biographical history of the author may be based, but these are often hagiographical in nature and cannot be accepted uncritically.

Thus, with the acceptance of the fact that there is general agreement among scholars that Madhusūdana flourished sometime between the fifteenth and the seventeenth century CE, we must speculate on his place of origin, as scholars are not unanimous about this point either. It is commonly believed that Madhusūdana hails from Bengal and was a junior contemporary of Śrīcāitanya (1486–1533 CE, a mystic Vaiśṇava saint from Bengal) as is evident both in numerous legends and the supports of the exponents of Gaudīya or Bengal Vaiśṇavism in later period. However, before proceeding with this point proper, a brief description of the basic philosophical tenets of Madhusūdana and the movement initiated by Caitanya might be plausible.

Let us thus, reaffirming the content of introductory paragraph of this paper, introduce first briefly Madhusūdana Sarasvatī and his philosophical principles, with the following quote of a contemporary scholar of repute:

In the firmament of Indian philosophical thought Madhusūdana Sarasvatī is the last great luminary. Sixteenth century Bengal was the dawn of Renaissance in India. Raghnunandana with his Smṛtis, Raghunātha with his New-logic, Kṛṣṇānanda with his Tantricism, to name a few, opened up new vistas of human mind. Madhusūdana was a true representative of this epoch. He freely drew upon the rich heritage of the past, as he imbibed the treasures of the period, including new devotionalism initiated by Śrī Caitanya. In him the Vedantic tradition of Ācārya Śāṅkara fused with the devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa. Indeed Madhusūdana was the unique triumph of opposite forces…

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the dualist Vedāntins (e.g., Rāmānuja [eleventh century CE], Madhva [thirteenth century CE], Vallabha [fifteenth century CE], Nimbārka [ca. fifteenth century CE]) identify with brahman. And like all other advocates of Vaiṣṇavism, Madhusūdana was an upholder of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, a text considered to be the foundational source of Vaiṣṇava schools. In short, the basic philosophical principles of Madhusūdana could be viewed as non-dualism substantiated by the theistic-dualistic approach.

Regarding Caitanya and Caitanyaite movement, it can be pointed that, while the Gaudīya or Bengal Vaiṣṇavism is commonly applied to the religious movement started by Śrīcaitanya; he, unlike the proponents of other Vedānta schools, was not a philosopher or a theologian, but a mystic absorbed in devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa. But some of his noted followers like Śrīrūpa Gosvāmin, Śrīśaṅkara Gosvāmin, Śrījiiva Gosvāmin (sixteenth century CE), Viśvanātha Cakravartin and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣana (eighteenth century CE) gave a theological and philosophical overtone to this movement with their fundamental compositions, which subsequently came to be known as Acintyabheda (identity-in-difference, the nature of which is inexplicable) Vedānta. Though before the advent of Caitanya, a number of works by Jayadeva (1175 CE), Śrīdharadāsa (1205 CE), Caṇḍidāsa (ca. 1400 CE), Vidyāpati (1352–1448 CE), etc., enjoyed popularity among the mass in Bengal, propagating Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu religion, it was with Caitanya that a particular religious belief and metaphysical consideration developed there, and that none of these works could be solely considered to be a source of inspiration for Caitanya’s peculiar emotional and mystical path of devotion, i.e., Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa worship. He, however, as noted earlier, must have derived much of his inspiration from the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, a perpetual source of loving devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa.4 Thus, while the teaching of Caitanya is basically rooted in religion (where, following the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, the myths of Kṛṣṇa and his youthful beloved Rādhā represent the reciprocal love of God and human soul), it gradually led to a socio-religious movement in Bengal and in the eastern part of Orissa, the presence of which is still conspicuous in the broader cultural scenario of these places.5

Now, in support of the view that Madhusūdana hails from Bengal, the following points have been considered by scholars such as 1) the family lineage; 2) hagiographical details; 3) Madhusūdana’s own reference to a disciple, viz. Baladeva Bhāttācārya, [the surname, i.e., Bhāttācārya, which this disciple carries, is a common surname in Bengal] in his Siddhāntabindu; 4) other factors like reference in Madhusūdana’s Vedāntakalpalatikā to the Lord of Blue Mountain (i.e., Nilacalā-nāyaka or Nilacalā-nātha), etc., who is treated as Lord Jagannātha (a tutelary deity for many inhabitants of Bengal that time) of Puri,6 the place that belongs to the eastern part of India of which the then Bengal or Gauda was a part; 5) support of intellectual or rather socio-religious (such as finding similarity with Caitanya tradition’s way of treating ecstatic devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa) and institutional (such as efforts to preserve relics and memorials in Madhusūdana’s birth place) milieu of his time. If his Bengali origin is accepted, then it is likely that Madhusūdana was influenced by the Gaudīya Vaiṣṇavism and that the socio-cultural movement initiated by Caitanya and later continued by his followers might have influenced Madhusūdana’s thought. But while some of the later exponents of Gaudīya or Bengal Vaiṣṇavism have made use of the comments of Madhusūdana’s Gītā in support of their respective positions in their comments on the Gītā, none of the earlier proponents of Gaudīya Vaiṣṇavism is referred to by Madhusūdana in his work and vice versa. Besides, he does not explicitly discuss the philosophical views of Gaudīya Vaiṣṇavas in any of his works.

Again, in one of the legends it goes that Madhusūdana Sarasvatī perplexed the famous logicians of Navadvīpa in Bengal, namely, Mathurānātha Tarkavāgīśa (1550 CE) and Gadādhara Bhāttācārya (1604–1708 CE), during his visit there: “When Madhusūdana Vākpati (Sarasvatī) visited Navadvīpa, Tarkavāgīśa was trembling in fear and Gadādhara got confused.” Further, despite their dissimilarities in principles with those of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, the fact that the Gūḍhārtadhāpikā of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī is referred to by Viśvanātha Cakravartin and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣana (of the Bengal school Vaiṣṇavism in the eighteenth century CE), in their respective commentaries on the Bhagavadgītā, is noteworthy. On Bhagavadgītā 3.1, Viśvanātha, like Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, explains the term keśava as meaning ka as “brahmā,” iśa as “śiva,” and va as “controller of both of them.” Śrīcaitanya’s monastic teacher (ā-dikṣā-guru) Keśava Bhārati too seems to belong to the order of daśānāmī-sampradāya initiated by Śaṅkara, as the title bhārati is one of the ten titles used for the saints belonging to this order. Some hagiographical sources claim that Madhusūdana Sarasvatī was a Gaudīya Vaiṣṇava first and accepted Advaitic monastic orders later, in order to preach bhakti to the followers of the latter tradition. Further, we find that the concept of jīvanmukti, a prominent component of Advaita doctrines, is also accepted by Baladeva in his commentary on Bhagavadgītā 2.69-71, in almost a similar manner. Baladeva maintains that although controlling the senses appears to be hard while undergoing spiritual discipline, it becomes natural for one who is of steady knowledge (sthīta-prajñā) once he reaches his goal. Baladeva characterizes this person as one who is content with the bliss of his own self and unaffected by the results of pārabdha-karma, just as rivers cannot change the course of action of the ocean, though they mingle with it during the rainy season. The sthīta-prajñā maintains his body just for its bare necessity, without having any sense of possessiveness and egoism.7 Viśvanātha also quotes Gaudāpāda in his comments on Bhagavadgītā 6.20-23, while his comments on Bhagavadgītā 15.18 note Madhusūdana Sarasvatī’s explanation that eulogizes Lord Kṛṣṇa, with approbation. This is an admission that Viśvanātha has no objection to the non-dualistic interpretation of these verses equating Lord Kṛṣṇa as the supreme brahman.8 These points show that the exponents of Gaudīya Vaiṣṇavism are not always antithetical to the interpretations provided by Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, though they disagree with the basic principles of Advaita Vedānta. Again, we find that the commentaries on the Bhāgavata Purāṇa by Viśvanātha and Jīva Gosvāmin (of the Gaudīya Vaiṣṇava school) are sometimes compatible with the teaching of Advaita Vedānta.

However, there is also a minor body of opinion that Madhusūdana Sarasvatī belonged to the south rather than
Bengal. The reasons for this view are that 1) “Sarasvatī,” which is one of the ten titles for monks of the Śāmkara school, known as dasanāmī-sampradāyā, is generally assigned to the Śrīgeri Mutt in south India and that some Śrīgeri records talk about one Madhusūdana Bhārāfi Śvāmi as occupying the place of pontiff there around the thirteenth century CE; 2) Madhusūdana Sarasvatī was mainly preoccupied with rebutting the views of the Mādhva and Rāmānuja schools that flourished in south India, where the former was the bitterest critic of Advaita Vedānta, and against whose works Madhusūdana composed his magnum opus Advaitaśāstra; 3) Lord Kṛṣṇa, especially Lord Gopāla (i.e., Lord Kṛṣṇa as a child), with whom Madhusūdana Sarasvatī has great fascination, is worshipped mainly in Udupi Mutt in Karnataka established by the Mādhva school and in Guruvayur temple in Kerala; 4) there has been a tradition that there are a number of Brahmin families settled near Kaladi in Kerala, who are known as Gauda Śāravata Brahmins and are believed to have been migrated to Kerala from Gauda-deśa (i.e., the then Bengal) many generations ago, and that Gauda Brahmanānda Sarasvatī, a fellow commentator of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī might have belonged to this Śāravata Brahmin community; 5) the origin of the Bhāgavatapurāṇa and Vaiṣṇava devotional movement, to which Madhusūdana Sarasvatī had great attachment, is generally held to have been rooted in south India.

Thus, in the case of authors who belong to any of the monastic orders in India, it is almost impossible to find definite data about their genealogy and place of birth because once they enter such a monastic order, they virtually obliterate all data pertaining to their pre-monastic life. While it is not possible to arrive at any definite conclusion regarding the place of origin of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī with the data currently available, the view that Madhusūdana Sarasvatī hails from Bengal takes precedence while we take into consideration the nitty-gritty of his various works in the light of socio-religious scenario of Bengal and the observations of modern scholars in this regard. If his Bengali origin is proved convincingly, it will lead to better understanding of his philosophy, if one agrees with the scholars who describe him as belonging to the post-Caitanya period.

So, as a sequel of assessing the foregoing discussion, it should be pointed out that, though we do not have any concrete evidence of Madhusūdana’s being influenced by the Bengal school of Vaiṣṇavism or Caitanyaite’s movement but the other way round, as an upholder of devotional theology promulgated in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Madhusūdana stands unique, and that he was close in time to the Vaiṣṇava theology propagated by the followers of Caitanya (for whom too the Bhāgavata Purāṇa was held in high esteem). But Madhusūdana’s strong allegiance to Advaita Vedānta indicates that his ideas of bhakti are significantly different from those of theistic Vedāntins including Caitanya. As a modern scholar remarks:

Nevertheless, as part of the intellectual milieu of his time, he must have known Caitnya’s life and activities. Madhusūdana’s description of a Vaiṣṇava devotee who has achieved a devotee’s goal that is, the state of constant enjoyment of ecstatic devotion for Kṛṣṇa reminds one strongly of the traditional picture of Caitanya in ecstasy. I think it is Madhusūdana’s intellectual loyalty to Śāmkara’s non-dualistic Vedānta that prompted him to develop his own type of Vaiṣṇava theology. Though he stands alone in his interpretation of non-dualistic philosophy of bhakti based on the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, he has forged a bridge between the Śāmkara-school of philosophy and the Caitanya’s school of theology (sic). However, the abovementioned view can be easily corroborated with reference to Madhusūdana’s own work. In formulating his definition of bhakti, Madhusūdana not only followed the Bhāgavata Purāṇa as a basis, he was also influenced by its two important monistic commentators, e.g., Vopadeva (thirteenth century CE) and Śrīdhara Śvāmin (fourteenth century CE). Thus, by giving a new orientation in Vaiṣṇavism, they (i.e., Śrīdhara and Vopadeva) developed a devotional mysticism based on the Upaniṣadic unqualified indescribable brahman acclimatized to a personal godhead like Nārāyaṇa, Kṛṣṇa, etc.—a fact that is the fountainhead of the entire gamut of Madhusūdana’s philosophy. Again, the Harilīlāmṛtā, a summary of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa by Vopadeva, has been commented upon by Madhusūdana in his Harilīlāmṛtavākyāhā. Madhusūdana also quotes the Muktāphala of Vopadeva in his Īśvarapratiṣṭhāprakāśā. Though Śrīdhara adhered to Śāmkara’s non-dualism while erecting his philosophical foundation (by way of writing commentary on the Bhagavadgītā, Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Viṣṇu Purāṇa, etc.), his admission to the superiority of devotion as a means to liberation made his work acceptable to the Vaiṣṇava groups like the followers of Caitanya in Bengal, as is very much attested by Caitanya and his immediate followers. Besides Madhusūdana’s Gūḍhārthādhipikā on the Bhagavadgītā, his Harilīlāmṛtavākyāhā bears frequent references to Śrīdhara. This textual support, however, even if the legends are ignored, directs us to appreciate Madhusūdana’s philosophy better, so much so that a connection between Caitanyaism and Madhusūdana is established. Thus, to put it briefly, if it is determined that Madhusūdana hails from Bengal (where Caitanyaism too flourished close to his time), and that Madhusūdana was influenced by the factors common to Caitanyaism as well, then a lead could be found in answering an age-old dichotomy of giving bhakti a prominent place within the fundamental tenets of non-dualism and in considering nirgūṇa brahman (of Advaita Vedānta) as an object of devotion—in Indian philosophy in general and Vedānta philosophy in particular—thereby professing nirgūṇa-bhakti-mārga, which has been an important component of both the pre and post-Śāmkara Advaita Vedānta and, of course, of the theistic Vedānta and other schools, who were the forbearers of various devotional movements in India’s cultural history.

**Acknowledgements**

This humble attempt is dedicated to the memory of my late philosophy teacher in school (Habra High School, Habra, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal), Durgasankar Sen (d. September 12, 2015), and of my late philosophy professors in college (Barasat Government College, West Bengal State University; erstwhile University of Calcutta) Sarojnath Sanyal (d. February 22, 2012) and Papri Dhar (nee Bhadra) [d. March 21, 2013], whose “teaching-cum-affection” (for me) is a matter of continuance in perpetuity.
NOTES
3. However, it is the six (ṣad) Gosvāmins (e.g., Raghunātha Dāsa, Raghunātha Bhatta, Gopāla Bhatta, Saṅātana Gosvāmin, Rūpa Gosvāmin, Jīva Gosvāmin) who were instrumental in formulating the doctrinal trend of Bengal school of Vaiśnavism in its history and building up modern Vṛndāvana in the northern part of India as one of the chief intellectual and religious centers of this cult [Sushil Kumar De, Early History of the Vaisnava Faith and Movement in Bengal (Calcutta: Firma Kim Private Limited, 1986; reprint: 2nd ed., 1961), 111ff]. For a detailed history of this movement, especially its earlier phase, a critical approach to its philosophical foundation, and a brief note on its social implication with the emergence of different sects in the subsequent period, etc., see De, Early History of the Vaisnava Faith and Movement in Bengal; Sudhindra Chandra Chākravarti, Philosophical Foundation of Bengal Vaiśnavism (A Critical Exposition) (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2004) (originally published by Academic Publishers, Calcutta, 1969); N. N. Bhattacharyya (ed.), Medieval Bhakti Movement in India (Śrī Caitanya Quincentenary Commemoration Volume) (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1999) [first published in 1989], respectively.
5. Madhusudana Saraswati, Veṇrātīkā-vaśīkṣārtha (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1962), 10, 123
6. navadvīpe samāyate madhusudanavākṣpatau / cakampe tarkavāgīśa kāraro bhuṣūgd gāḍādharā // This incident relates to the fact that Madhusudana Saraswati, having left home (i.e., Unasiyā village in Kotālipād, a suburb of Faridpur district in East Bengal or present Bangladesh) in childhood, proceeded to Navadvīpa to study Nyāya and then to Benares to study Vedānta. It is during his visit to Navadvīpa, much later from Banaras, that the scholars of Nyāya in Navadvīpa got frightened of Madhusudana Saraswati’s scholarship. To highlight this point with more subtitle, we could mention that Phānibhūṣana Tarkavāgīśa (a famous Nyāyācārya from Bengal in the twentieth century CE) used to hold, “When Madhusudana Pandita visited (Navadvīpa) from Mathura Jagadīśa Tarkālkāra (1500–1600 CE) believed that Nyāya is a baseless and Gāḍādhar left his conceit” (madhuravāḥ samāyate madhusudanapandita // anilo jagadīśo bhuṭh na jagatī gāḍādharā //) [Rājendranāth Ghosha (ed.), Advaitasiddhāniḥ—Śrīyogendranāthī Tarkālokāveṇyadāntətāriṇi pariśodhāti, tatkhāle-vānganuvaṛāraṣyaśāntamāta, part 1, in Bengali script (Kalikātā: Śrīśrīstraṇāla Ghosha, 1931), Advaitasiddhinibhūmiḥ, 92–96; P. M. Modi (trans.), Translation of Siddhāntabindu being Madhusudana’s Commentary on the Dāsā’lōki of Śrī S’ankaracharya (sic) [Allahabad: Vohra Publishers and Distributors (1st reprint; 1st ed., 1929)], Introduction, 2.
7. However, Č. Bhattacharya, in his treatise on the learning neo-ontological tradition (Navya–Nyāya) in Bengal, refers to one logician, Madhusudana Vācaspāti, who, according to him, visited Navadvīpa from Mithilā and perplexed Govinda Nyāyācārya and Gāḍādhar. The verse quoted by him reads as mithilāḥ samāyate madhusudanapārtau / cakampe nyāyāvāgīśa kāraro bhuṣūgd gāḍādharā //, its source being an old manuscript in Bengali script (Calcutta: Bāgīśaya Pārhāt, 1952), 144. All this account thus leads one to wonder about Madhusudana’s place of origin, which is generally held to be Bengal.

APA NEWSLETTER  |  ASIAN AND ASIAN-AMERICAN PHILOSOPHERS AND PHILOSOPHIES

SPRING 2017 | VOLUME 16 | NUMBER 2
CALL FOR PAPERS

B. K. MATILAL: THE PAST AND FUTURE OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

B. K. Matilal (1935–1991) had an extraordinary influence on the direction of the study of Indian philosophy during his lifetime, and this influence has grown in the twenty-five years since his untimely death. The newsletter of the APA Committee on Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies seeks short papers (1,000–3,000 words) on the legacy of B. K. Matilal and his influence, both direct and indirect, on the study of Indian philosophy today and into the future. Topics might include, but are not limited to, the following:

• Matilal is known for his efforts at comparing classical Indian and contemporary analytic philosophy. Is this a promising strategy for scholars of Indian philosophy today, or are there other methodological approaches that might be just as fruitful? Might Matilal’s approach be combined with other approaches? For instance, Matilal himself became more interested in continental philosophy toward the end of his life, and he always considered his work to be a kind of history of philosophy as well.

• What were Matilal’s reasons for engaging in analytic-Indian comparative projects? Are his reasons still relevant going forward into the future of the study of Indian philosophy?

• How have Matilal’s contributions in areas such as logic, epistemology, ethics, the philosophical relevance of literature, etc., added to contemporary understandings of these topics? What are some avenues for new research in these areas that might be inspired by Matilal, either directly or indirectly?

• How has the story of Matilal’s legacy been told in the last twenty-five years? How is he likely to be remembered into the future?

Please submit your paper of roughly 1,000–3,000 words to Ethan Mills (Ethan-Mills@utc.edu) by June 15, 2017. Papers chosen for publication will appear in the fall 2017 issue of the newsletter.
FROM THE EDITOR

Carlos Alberto Sánchez
SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY

Although the present issue of the newsletter is not arranged around a singular theme—something we have done in the past—the issue is, nonetheless, a special issue. Included here is the winner of the 2016 APA’s Essay Prize in Latin American Thought, L. Sebastian Purcell; two papers by contemporary Mexican philosophers, Mario Teodoro Ramirez and Manuel Bolom Pale, writing on Luis Villoro and Indigenous Tzotsil philosophy, respectively; and, more relevant to our current political situation, three discussion pieces by three established members of the Hispanic/Latinx philosophical community in the U.S., José-Antonio Orosco, Susana Nuccetelli, and José Jorge Mendoza.

We begin with our discussion pieces: in the first, José-Antonio Orosco reflects on what the election of Donald J. Trump to the presidency of the United States means for us. In the second, Susana Nuccetelli argues against the Trump administration’s vow to repeal the Affordable Care Act (a.k.a., Obamacare). She writes that “no morally acceptable reason” can justify the repeal. In the final discussion piece, José Jorge Mendoza reflects on the future of Whiteness in American democracy in the context of the election of Donald Trump. He argues that, unlike the common opinion, and as the 2016 election showed, Whiteness will figure out a way to coopt certain sectors of the Latinx electorate so as to preserve its supremacy.

While the current political landscape might provoke its fair share of existential dread, especially amongst us Hispanics/Latinx, it’s safe to say that we will continue with the important work of diversifying and enriching the philosophical curriculum for future generations. A case in point is Sebastian Purcell’s prize-winning essay, which places Aztec philosophy in a very fruitful conversation with Aristotle. Sebastian Purcell considers the Aztec conception of the good life, neltiliztli. According to Purcell, “like Aristotelian eudaimonia or ‘flourishing,’ the Aztec understanding of neltiliztli functioned to justify concerns about action guidance, and so was conceptually prior to an account of the right. Unlike the Aristotelian conception, however, they did not hold that there was an internal relation between pleasure and the good life, understood as neltiliztli. The implications suggest that the Aztecs had a sort of virtue ethics, which has so far gone unrecognized in any study of Aztec philosophy.”

Deepening our connection to the Mexican indigenous philosophical tradition, the essay by Manuel Bolom Pale, translated here for the first time, introduces the concept of Tzotsil epistemology. Bolom Pale, himself Maya tōstōsō, from the region of Chiapas, defines and explains certain terms in Tzotsil cultural life that seek to capture significant philosophical insights. These insights, in turn, are meant to structure Tzotsil cultural, religious, and political life while, simultaneously, serving as guides for the construction of Tzotsil subjectivity.

From Michoacán, Mario Teodoro Ramírez gives us an authoritative philosophical portrait of the great Mexican philosopher Luis Villoro. Ramírez, who oversees the Institute of Philosophical Investigations “Luis Villoro” at the Universidad Michoacána San Nicolás, accesses the vast archive at his disposal to provide an outline of Villoro’s many and significant contributions to philosophy, ethics, and politics. This essay is also translated here for the first time.

In the final paper, Django Runyan reflects on Leopoldo Zea’s connections to the Greeks, to the origins of philosophy itself. Runyan finds in Zea a deep appreciation of philosophy’s roots and an almost obsessive impulse to return to those roots.

In all, the present issue of the newsletter aims both to connect us to the immediacy of our current social anxieties (in the Discussion section) and to remind us about the important work yet to be done in the history of our own philosophy. That is, it exemplifies those two impulses that characterize our calling as Latinx philosophers in the Americas: the impulse to advocate and be activists for causes that matter to our community, and the impulse for rigorous research into our own traditions.

CALLS FOR SUBMISSIONS

2017 ESSAY PRIZE IN LATIN AMERICAN THOUGHT

The APA Committee on Hispanics cordially invites submissions for the 2017 Essay Prize in Latin American Thought, which is awarded to the author of the best unpublished, English-language, philosophical essay in Latin American philosophy/thought. The purpose of this prize is to encourage fruitful work in this area. Eligible essays must contain original arguments and broach philosophical topics clearly related to the specific experiences of Hispanic Americans and Latinos. The winning essay will be published in this newsletter.
A cash prize accompanies the award along with the opportunity to present the prize-winning essay at an upcoming divisional meeting. Information regarding submissions can be found at http://www.apaonline.org/?latin_american. Please consider submitting your work and encourage colleagues or students to do the same. Feel free to pass this information along to anyone who may be interested. The submission deadline is June 5, 2017.

The committee is also soliciting papers or panel suggestions for next year’s APA three divisional meetings. The deadline for APA Eastern meeting committee session requests is rapidly approaching, so please send any ideas to Grant Silva (grant.silva@marquette.edu), who will relay these suggestions to the rest of the committee.

FALL 2017 NEWSLETTER
The APA Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy is accepting contributions for the fall 2017 issue. Our readers are encouraged to submit original work on any topic related to Hispanic/Latino thought, broadly construed. We publish original, scholarly treatments, as well as reflections, book reviews, and interviews. Please prepare articles for anonymous review.

All submissions should be accompanied by a short biographical summary of the author. Electronic submissions are preferred. All submissions should be limited to 5,000 words (twenty double-spaced pages) and must follow the APA guidelines for gender-neutral language and The Chicago Manual of Style formatting. All articles submitted to the newsletter undergo anonymous review by members of the Committee on Hispanics.

BOOK REVIEWS
Book reviews in any area of Hispanic/Latino philosophy, broadly construed, are welcome. Submissions should be accompanied by a short biographical summary of the author. Book reviews may be short (500 words) or long (1,500 words). Electronic submissions are preferred.

DEADLINES
Deadline for spring issue is November 15. Authors should expect a decision by January 15. Deadline for the fall issue is April 15. Authors should expect a decision by June 15.

Please send all articles, book reviews, queries, comments, or suggestions electronically to the editor,

Carlos Alberto Sánchez, at carlos.sanchez@sjsu.edu, or by post: Department of Philosophy
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FORMATTING GUIDELINES

DISCUSSION
The Solace of Mexican Philosophy in the Age of Trump
José-Antonio Orosco
OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

In Mexico Profundo, or Deep Mexico, Mexican anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla argued that the lives and experiences of ordinary Mexicans living in rural areas and poor urban neighborhoods in Mexican cities continue to be rooted in Mesoamerican civilizations. Their understandings of work, community obligation, health, time, and harmonious coexistence, he maintained, form a connection to indigenous folkways that go back to pre-Columbian societies. Most Mexicans may not recognize these habits, or themselves, as indigenous, especially since the Mexican state has gone to great lengths to “de-Indianize” Mexican national identity. But the everyday experiences of many Mexican people are shaped by these much older cultures and practices lying deep underneath the modern ways of life.

I was thinking about Mexican thinkers such as Bonfil, as well as other Mexican philosophers, when I walked to the university the day after the Trump electoral victory. My first appointment that day was with a Chicana student who explained, in an emotionally tired voice, that she had been up all night with her parents who were trying to determine what sorts of work they might be able to find if they were deported back to Mexico. I saw some of my colleagues in the hallways and later learned that a few of them had broken down crying in front of their classes. A Muslim student, later in the day, told me he had been on the phone with friends all night, gauging their fear; one of them admitted to him that calls to suicide hotlines were overwhelming some centers in the area and they were having to put people on hold. After my class on Latin American philosophy in the afternoon, an African-American student came to my office and admitted he was deeply worried about what his younger sibling was going to do growing up in this environment. Throughout the whole day, my social media feeds filled up with friends expressing amazement, disgust, and the feeling that they did not understand their country anymore.

The work of José Vasconcelos helped me not to be shocked. In his 1925 work The Cosmic Race, he described what he considered to be the main cultural differences between North and Latin America—the profound U.S. and the profound Latin America, particularly Mexico. He argued if you wanted to understand the modern history of these two Americas, you have to go back and look at the differences in their modes of settler colonialism. These formative
experiences created deep grooves and patterns into the culture and political development of the two societies that continue to shape the habits and practices of modern life.

In North America, according to Vasconcelos, the white settlers envisioned the continent as a utopia for themselves, a place to venerate the accomplishments of English culture, and proceeded to exclude or exterminate nonwhite populations. In the North you found “the confessed or tacit intention of cleaning the earth of Indians, Mongolians [sic], or Blacks, for the greater glory and fortune of the Whites.”

This vision of white utopia propelled the extension of the United States all the way across the West. It also grounded legislation that excluded Asians from immigrating or from most civic life in places like California, propped up the Jim Crow segregation in the South, and the Juan Crow segregation in the Southwest that Vasconcelos directly experienced while he attended high school in Eagle Pass, Texas. He surmised: "The English kept on mixing only with the whites and annihilated the natives. Even today, they continue to annihilate them in a sordid and economic fight, more efficient yet than armed conquest."

Terrance MacMullan’s work, Habits of Whiteness, corroborates Vasconcelos’s view that North American white supremacy originates in the colonial experience of the United States. MacMullan points to the Bacon Rebellion of 1676 as the catalyst moment in which Europeans started to think of themselves as “white” with special privileges in civil society. When poor frontier farmers revolted against the landed plantation gentry, the latter responded by promulgating new laws that established a white identity and limited the liberties of those classified as non-white, namely, Native Americans and Africans. Thus, the richer plantation owners were able to reduce dissatisfaction with their regime by convincing the poorer farmers and white indentured servants that they all actually formed a natural community of interest around their racial identity and that African slaves and Native Americans were the real threats to their well-being.

For Vasconcelos, what distinguished Latin America from the Northern settler colonialism was the way in which racial integration and miscegenation had become more acceptable in Spanish society. White supremacy still reigned, but the particular features of social and political life made the development of a variety of mixed racial identities possible (indeed, during the Spanish and Portuguese colonial period, places like Mexico and Brazil recognized hundreds of possible racial identities and combinations). Founding figures in Latin American independence during the nineteenth century, from Simón Bolívar and José Morelos, all recognized that Latin American republics would have to contend with multi-racial identity and the abolition of race-based slavery and caste in order to succeed and be stable. Vasconcelos did not believe that race-based discrimination had been eliminated in Latin America, but merely that the image of a white utopia never took root as deeply as it did in the North.

What made me think of Vasconcelos in the context of the Trump victory is that he identified white supremacy as part of the profound United States—that is, as part of the deep tendencies that lie underneath modern society in North America. According to Vasconcelos, the United States has learned very well how to develop over time the practices and institutional policies of exclusion, marginalization, and eradication of non-white peoples; these are the ready-to-hand tools that are reached for in moments of fear and crisis for white Americans.

Trump’s campaign reached deep into los estadounidos profundo—the deep white supremacist toolbox. Voting data reveals that, overwhelmingly, a majority of white people—men and women, rural and suburban, educated and non-educated alike—felt called to defend a society that Trump described as under attack by Mexicans, Muslims, and urban Blacks. Despite his misogyny and promises to undo reproductive rights, most white women felt summoned to protect that deep United States vision now in ways they did not just eight or even four years ago when they turned out for a Black president. This is not to say that all white people, or even the majority of white people who voted for Trump, have particular racial animus toward non-white people. I think what Vasconcelos would say is that these voters heeded the dogwhistle of white supremacy—the appeal to return to center and to keep menacing peoples at bay—that lies deep in U.S. culture and is turned on when times are uncertain in order to solidify a certain power base.

And it is this part of Vasconcelos’s analysis that keeps me from paralyzing despair. It means that what happened with the Trump victory should not be understood as something new, something unexpected, or strangely out of place. It is something profoundly American. That doesn’t mean it isn’t something to worry about, and that some groups shouldn’t now worry about their safety and security; but it is a reaction that has happened time and time again in U.S. history from the very beginning of our founding. To think that the habits of whiteness were eradicated with a decade-long Civil Rights movement and that eight years of a Black president have ushered us into a post-racial society is to naïvely underestimate los estadounidos profundo.

Vasconcelos offered a way forward. The Cosmic Race is an attempt to sketch an alternative to the white utopia of the United States: a cosmopolitan world in which our racial categories would no longer work because there would be so much interbreeding that the ordinary person would be profoundly mixed. It would be a place in which each person would see a part of themselves in others, racially speaking, and parts of others in themselves. Racism would become an irrational kind of self-hatred. The new religion of such a community would be based in faith that emphasized love and compassion for one another. The politics would be socialist—a world in which everyone had an ability to participate in decisions, and goods are distributed according to need.

There are many problems with Vasconcelos’s utopia of the Cosmic Race. The history and politics of racial mixing in Mexico and the rest of Latin America is fraught with lingering effects of racism toward indigenous and African populations. Vasconcelos glosses over these events in order to sharpen his contrast between North and Latin America. And he doesn’t offer very much in terms of institution
building—beyond hand waving at love and socialism, he doesn’t say much about what kinds of structures need to be put in place to build a world that stands up to the power of the white supremacist utopia.

But what Vasconcelos aspires to is thinking about the history and politics of race in the Americas in order to develop radical alternatives and possibilities, ones that respect and esteem the kind of racial mixing that was despised, and even made illegal in the United States in 1925. He wanted to imagine a utopia of elation, erotic attraction, and passion in which people would “feel towards the world an emotion so intense that the movement of things adopts rhythms of joy.” I think he calls on us not to despair in the face of white supremacy with its fears, stupidity, and its ugliness, but to envision a beautiful world of playful togetherness and sympathy amid our differences as we struggle for a better world of social justice. Indeed, this kind of attitude is one that motivates the social and political philosophy of several Latin American theorists, including Ignacio Ellacuria, with his notion of “fiesta” as an alternative to capitalist consumerism, and Graciela Hierro’s conception of “pleasure” as an alternative to the patriarchal fascination with control and death.

Vasconcelos’s project reminds us that social organizing is not just a dry, practical matter of political pragmatism. Radical imagining, writing, and theory building is also organizing work that makes another world possible. As the science fiction author Ursula K. LeGuin said upon her being awarded the National Book Award in 2014: “Hard times are coming, when we’ll be wanting the voices of writers who have broadened access to a decent minimum of health-care benefits for these groups. . . . We live in capitalism, its power seems inescapable—but then, so did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings. Resistance and change often begin in art. Very often in our art, the arts of words.”

NOTES
3. Ibid., 18.

Repealing Obamacare: An Injustice to Hispanics

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On January 13, 2017, the Republican-controlled House of Representatives approved by a 227–196 vote the formation of committees charged with preparing legislation to repeal the 2010 Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA), in a move regarded as the first step in one of Donald Trump’s key policies during his presidential campaign. In spite of grand language to the contrary, as shown here, the move targets those PPACA mandates that have broadened access to a decent minimum of health care, mostly for individuals from low socioeconomic status and/or underrepresented groups, including Hispanics. I argue that no morally acceptable reason can justify the narrowing of health-care benefits for these groups.

SOME FACTS ABOUT OBAMACARE AND HEALTH-CARE COVERAGE FOR HISPANICS IN THE U.S.

Medicine is increasingly making possible services for which there is great demand but also limited availability and high cost. Under these circumstances, the moral question of what counts as a fair distribution of health-care resources is particularly pressing for societies with the means to provide access to “a decent minimum” coverage for all. Many countries, including some in the developing world, do provide such access for their residents. They include most European countries as well as Australia, Canada, Cuba, Japan, New Zealand, South Africa, and Taiwan. Their approaches to financing and organizing universal access vary from a single-payer system of health care administered by a health authority and funded by taxes (in, e.g., Australia, Britain, and Canada) to multi-payer systems (in, e.g., Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland). By contrast, the U.S. long stood alone among developed nations in failing to ensure a decent minimum of health care for its residents. Only in 2010 did it conform to the emerging standard among industrialized nations by adopting a multi-payer system with the enactment of the PPACA, known informally as “Obamacare” or “ACA.” Initially, some ACA critics charged that it was unconstitutional, but that objection was largely put to rest in 2012 by the U.S. Supreme Court. Yet the public debate over health-care reform in the U.S. continued beyond 2010, as shown by the House’s resolution designed to repeal some of its provisions. Although it is still unclear which ones are being targeted, “radical” ACA mandates include that
1) Every (authorized) resident must either be insured or pay a special tax.

2) Exchanges to buy insurance, in part subsidized, are made available.

3) Medicaid, an existing insurance program for economically disadvantaged workers that is funded from both federal and state sources, is expanded.

4) Insurers remove annual and lifetime caps on coverage, offer coverage to all, eliminating discrimination on the basis of age, sex, or pre-existing condition, and eliminate some co-pays on services such as preventive screening and reduce other co-pays.

5) Employers either “play or pay.”

These provisions have expanded significantly the number of people with health coverage in the United States. By 2014, the number of uninsured residents in America had fallen about 5 percent, according to the RAND Corporation, the Commonwealth Fund, the Gallup Poll, and the Urban Institute. As a result of the ACA, about 20 million people gained health coverage, a considerable number given that in 2010 there were 50 million uninsured in the U.S. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the ACA’s impact on Hispanics is evident:

- Approximately 8 in 10 gained access to a decent minimum of health care because of the ACA mandates (2) and (3) above—together with the Children’s Health Insurance Plan.
- Four million adults gained health-care coverage
- The uninsured rate dropped 11.3 percent (from 41.8 percent to 30.5 percent)
- About 35 percent of Hispanic patients relying on Community Health Centers for their health care gained access to them because of the ACA investment of $11 billion in those centers.

True, the number of uninsured Hispanics went from 29 percent in 2013 to 40 percent in 2016, at a rate higher than any other underrepresented group. But since unauthorized immigrants, among whom Hispanics are more numerous proportionally, are included in these numbers, the data only points to the injustice of providing access to a decent minimum of health care only to authorized residents—a flaw affecting many systems of universal coverage. As a result, the data does not undermine the conclusion that the ACA amounted to moral progress given the reasons to be considered next.

FAIR EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY AND THE RIGHT TO HEALTH CARE

An influential account of moral obligation in bioethics contends that people have a positive right to health care. Accordingly, society has a duty to provide universal coverage, and that duty may be defeated or overridden only by (i) more stringent moral obligations, such as other obligations of justice or respect for persons; or (ii) practical considerations concerning society’s means, whether financial or technical. In Norman Daniels’s Fair Equality of Opportunity account, this conclusion follows directly from the application of Rawls’s principles of justice to health care. Roughly, according to Rawls, when bargaining behind the veil of ignorance about society’s basic structure, the contractors would choose to distribute primary social goods fairly for the self-advancement of all individuals. Among the sets of such goods is “freedom of movement and choice of occupations against a background of diverse opportunities.” Daniels regards health care as derivative from this set of goods because of the special value of health. People who have, as a result of injury or disease, lost “species-normal functioning” are deprived of a Fair Equality of Opportunity for self-advancement. Physical and mental impairments reduce individual opportunity relative to what’s normal range of opportunity for members of the species. Given this account, the following argument supports a right to health care for all:

1) If justice in health care requires protecting fair equality of opportunity, then there is a right to health care for all.

2) Justice in health care does require protecting fair equality of opportunity.

3) Therefore, there is a right to health care for all.

This right may, however, be overridden when society lacks the appropriate resources. But affluent nations such as the U.S. do have the means, and therefore, the prima facie obligation to promote fairness of opportunity by taking the steps necessary for prevention and treatment of disease for all. Since, as shown by the above list of facts, the ACA is a step in that direction; therefore, unless the current plan to repeal it comes without an appropriate replacement, it should be condemned as a moral injustice.

A PLURALISTIC GROUND FOR THE ACA

Furthermore, the moral obligation to provide universal access to a decent minimum of health care may exist even if there is no right to health care. On Allen E. Buchanan’s Pluralistic Account, since the category of human rights is a contested one in political theory, a more plausible strategy for universal access relies on multiple reasons. First, affluent societies must provide such coverage for all because they owe compensation to the victims of past wrongdoing. Historic injustice creates a duty of reparation to make fair restitution to victims. In the U.S., the grievances of racial and ethnic minorities and other underrepresented groups justify the provision of a decent minimum of care for all as a fair restitution. Second, some prudential considerations support the same claim: they concern emergency room costs for uninsured people from low-income groups, and the consequences for labor force’s productivity (and defense personnel’s fitness) of lacking appropriate care. Third, humanitarian reasons concerning...
avoidance and prevention of harm recommend access to a decent minimum of health care for all.

LIBERTARIAN PRINCIPLES FOR REPEALING THE ACA

Rawlsian and Pluralistic accounts suggest that limiting access to a decent minimum of health care on the basis of income or racial and ethnic identity is a serious moral injustice. What moral reasons, if any, might justify the current plan to repeal the ACA? Bioethicist H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., for example, has invoked libertarian principles to argue that “A basic human secular moral right to health care does not exist—not even to a ‘decent minimum of health care.’” After all, in order to fund health-care coverage for all, the government would have to use its coercive power for collecting and redistributing the needed financial resources. But that violates people’s negative rights to liberty and property, for it requires the government to (i) coercively take their property through taxation, and (ii) regulate a health-care system, thereby limiting individual free choice in health care. From the libertarian perspective, this is a deeply unjust arrangement that conflicts with a free-market system of health care, where services are delivered according to ability to pay, through the private, voluntary purchase of insurance by individuals or groups. In fact, libertarians often emphasize the difference between negative and positive rights, doubting the very existence of positive rights and arguing that only negative rights have correlative duties, because they are easily fulfilled just by doing nothing. But such claims are misleading since it is not exactly true that duties of forbearance are easier to fulfill. At the very least, they require governments to keep criminal law systems, revenue services, police departments, military forces, and other protective branches. Other libertarian objections to the ACA focus on its failure in securing (i) consumer choice, (ii) quality care, and (iii) cost containment. Yet objection (i) is weak because the ACA does not render private financing of extra levels of health care incompatible with universal access to a decent minimum for all: those who have the means to purchase extra levels can do so. Objections (ii) and (iii) are empirical claims that remain unconfirmed by data gathered so far. In fact, a close look at the annual averages of health-care costs per capita in Canada and the U.S. since 2010 does point to the superiority of Canada’s system, which is not exactly what those seeking the ACA repeal have in mind. In the absence of better arguments justifying such a repeal, I submit that any restrictions to the already limited scope of the ACA amounts to a serious injustice that should be condemned on moral grounds.

NOTES


5. As in other multi-payer or single-payer systems, unauthorized immigrants, who amount to approximately 12 million people in U.S. at present, are left out of “universal” coverage.


7. Daniels, “Health-Care Needs and Distributive Justice.”


11. I would like to thank Gary Seay for his comments on this paper, and for allowing me to use ideas first discussed while co-writing our Engaging Bioethics: An Introduction with Case Studies (Routledge, 2017).

Latinx and the Future of Whiteness in American Democracy

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INTRODUCTION

For Americans on the left of the political spectrum, there are not many positive takeaways from the 2016 presidential election. However, one potential silver lining could be the dramatic increase in the Latinx vote. This increase gave Hillary Clinton a rather easy victory in Nevada, a state that many pundits had considered a toss-up going into Election Day, and made usually solid republican states, such as Arizona and Georgia, a lot more competitive than they had been in recent elections. The increase in the Latinx vote is also the reason Clinton was able to hold on to the state of Virginia, a state which on election night was much closer than polls had predicted. Those of us on the left of the political spectrum might be tempted to take comfort in this and might even tell ourselves that despite the disappointing result, the future of progressive politics in America remains bright and this is in no small part thanks to the browning of America.
At one level this makes a lot of sense. Latinx are the fastest growing minority group in the United States, so much so that by around 2050 it is estimated that Latinx will comprise almost a quarter of the U.S. population. This will make Latinx not only the largest minority group in the U.S., but also the driving force behind the U.S. becoming a minority-majority country. In other words, it is estimated that by around 2050 the U.S. will be a country in which more than 50 percent of its citizenry will be nonwhite.\(^1\) The leadership in both the Republican and Democratic parties agree that this change in demographics could forever alter the American political landscape. This is because Republican candidates rarely get above 30 percent of any minority group’s vote and this lack of appeal among minority groups has made Republican politicians accustomed to winning elections by capturing a sizeable majority of the majority (i.e., winning 55 percent or more of the white vote). Given the ongoing demographic changes, which will be driven primarily by the growing Latinx community, it would stand to reason that Republican candidates will find it increasingly difficult to continue their current electoral strategy and expect to win national elections.

In this respect, the state of Florida might seem like a strange outlier. Ever since the infamous 2000 presidential election, Florida has been a very closely contested state and this year was no different. Back in 2000, Latino/as made up approximately one sixth (15 percent) of that state’s population. Sixteen years and four presidential elections later, Latino/as now comprise almost a quarter (25 percent) of the state’s population. Given what was just outlined above, it should stand to reason that in this year’s election Florida should have been a fairly reliable Democratic state. Instead, Donald Trump carried the state by nearly two percentage points! So is the case of Florida merely a hiccup in the forward march of progressive American politics, or does it actually forecast something else? In this essay I want to suggest, following the work of critical race theorists such as Ian Hany López and Derrick Bell, that Florida is not an aberration but instead provides us with an underappreciated insight into American “whiteness” that should trouble progressives who optimistically believe that we are merely living through the final throes of white supremacy.

Whiteness, as most race theorists have noted, is neither fixed, essential, nor bounded. In other words, whiteness can and does change depending on context. We also know from past experience that in order to obtain or maintain a dominant position—even and especially in democratic political communities—whites have resorted to either eliminating (e.g., genocide) or isolating (e.g., apartheid and segregation) any threatening non-white group(s). There is no doubt that these sorts of strategies continue in the U.S. today, as is evident from everything from calls for stricter immigration enforcement focused primarily on keeping certain kinds of immigrants out, to the gerrymandering of congressional districts and voter ID laws whose real aim is to suppress or dilute the non-white vote. What is less discussed, however, is a third strategy that can and has been deployed when these other two strategies have proven insufficient. When a sizeable majority of the majority in a multi-racial democracy is no longer enough to guarantee electoral victory, that majority group (in this case whites) have also historically shown themselves amenable to expanding the boundaries of whiteness and coopting key segments of the non-white population. By “key” segments here I do not mean most or even many, but just enough nonwhites and only those whose inclusion into whiteness would require the least amount of change or dilution.

What I am suggesting in this essay is that Trump’s election, and especially his win in a state like Florida, is in fact signaling a change in American whiteness but not the kind of change that some progressives might have been hoping for.\(^2\) What the results of this past election seem to show is that certain segments of the Latinx population (e.g., the Cuban community in Florida) are and will continue to be coopted into whiteness. To be clear, this offer to be included into whiteness is not open to all Latinx, but to just enough to both keep whites as a perpetual majority and only to those Latinx whose inclusion would require the least amount of change or dilution to our current conception of whiteness. In other words, a state like Florida is not so much an aberration or outlier in our current political climate as it is a harbinger of American whiteness to come and of Latinx role in it.

**SPACE TRADERS REVISITED**

Recently, Ian Haney López has popularized the phrase “dog-whistle politics.”\(^4\) This phrase refers to a strategy for winning democratic elections in societies with a large white majority. The underlying premise of dog-whistle politics is that most whites are still willing to vote, oftentimes even against their own better economic interests, for candidates that affirm their fears, anxieties, and prejudices about nonwhites. Given the political climate in the U.S., where at least since the end of Civil Rights Movement racist, nativist, and even xenophobic appeals have been considered politically out-of-bounds, candidates have had to signal their sympathy for white supremacy in more coded language. In an anonymous interview given in 1981, Republican Party strategist Lee Atwater infamously outlined how this coded appeal to white voters worked for Richard Nixon in his 1968 presidential campaign, a campaign whose methods have come to be collectively known as the “Southern Strategy.”

You start in 1954 by saying “Nigger, nigger, nigger.” By 1968 you can’t say “Nigger.” That hurts you. It backfires. So you say stuff like forced busing, states rights and all that stuff and you get so abstract. Now you talk about cutting taxes and these things you’re talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is, blacks get hurt worse than whites. And subconsciously maybe that’s part of it. I’m not saying that. But I’m saying that if it is getting that abstract and that coded, we are doing away with the racial problem one way or the other. Obviously sitting around saying we want to cut taxes and we want this, is a lot more abstract than even the busing thing and a hell of a lot more abstract than nigger nigger.\(^5\)

Haney López’s principle claim is that despite Barack Obama’s electoral victory in 2008 and his subsequent reelection in 2012, dog-whistle politics remain alive and
well in American politics. Nowhere is this claim more evident than in Donald Trump’s recent election—where Trump blew the dog whistle so loudly that his racist message became audible to even the most racially tone-deaf of Republicans like Mitt Romney. The result of this was that Trump won almost 58 percent of the white vote, but in turn lost nearly 75 percent of the non-white vote—an outcome that is consistent with traditional uses of dog whistle politics. Despite the pummeling Trump took among non-white voters, Trump was still able to win the election because nonwhites comprised only about 25 percent of the electorate. In other words, Trump could afford to lose a super-majority of the non-white vote because a substantial (although not necessarily super) majority of the white vote was still enough to win a national election in the U.S. The effectiveness of dog-whistle politics is not only clear to those of us on the political left, but has also been clear to many on the far-right who for years have openly implored Republican candidates to use this strategy more.⁸

Even if all of this is true, would it not also follow that as nonwhites become a larger percentage of the electorate—as is expected to happen in the near-future, thanks largely to the growing number of Latino—the less likely it will be that dog-whistle politics will remain effective and, in fact, might backfire and come to haunt the Republican party for decades?⁹ Furthermore, is this not also what most reasonable Republicans (i.e., the non-far-right conservatives) also believe and why so many of them have been so dismayed with the recent Trump phenomenon? The short answer to these sorts of questions is yes, but only if we assume that American whiteness in 2050 will look the same as it does today. I want to suggest that we have good reasons to believe that this assumption will not hold up. Instead, I believe that for the foreseeable future white supremacy will continue to play the pivotal role it has been playing in American politics, and it will do so because of (and not in spite of) the changing nature of American whiteness. This is a conclusion that I think is not only consistent with but also follows naturally from the work of renowned legal scholar Derrick Bell.⁹

In perhaps his most well-known work, “The Space Traders,” Bell poignantly articulates both his “permanence of racism” and “interest convergence” theories.¹⁰ In this piece, Bell recounts a science-fiction story about visitors from outer space that come to Earth and offer the American people marvelous gifts which will solve most of their pressing domestic concerns in exchange for every Black American. In the story the majority of Americans accept this bargain with the space traders and once again show themselves willing to sacrifice the lives of Blacks when it is in their best interests to do so—despite their professed abhorrence of racism.

The point Bell is trying to make with this story is that the view most of us have of “racial progress” in the U.S. can be a dangerous illusion. It can lull us—especially us good progressives—into thinking that racial justice in America has a forward bent to it, which can at times be slowed but never stopped. Bell does not necessarily deny that in some ways things have gotten better for Blacks in America. Slavery, after all, is abolished and segregation is no longer legally permissible. Still, he wants to emphasize that racism is a permanent feature of U.S. society (i.e., not an aberration) and that what might look like forward progress has really been just a collection of historical moments where the interests of a significant number of whites just happened to converge with those of Blacks. The concessions that Blacks have been granted with the help of a majority of white Americans (e.g., Civil Rights legislation) has been the result not of moral persuasion (i.e., not out of the better selves of whites) but because of interest convergence (e.g., when Jim Crow segregation became a liability in the context of the Cold War). When those interests are no longer aligned, when they diverge as they do in the story of the Space Traders, whites have and will continue to take those concessions back and then some.

The Space Traders story, with its underlining themes about the permanence of racism and interest convergence theory, can help us understand what happened with states like Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania. The simple truth of the matter is that Clinton lost the election because she could not hold on to these three usually reliable Democratic states. These states were considered so “in the bag” that she hardly campaigned in those states. Some pundits have argued that the tipping point in those states, the white working class that has traditionally voted Democratic, voted for Trump this time around because they had grown tired of how the new globalized economy was negatively impacting them. Most of these voters have come to believe that both Democrats and Republicans are committed to promoting the kinds of trade policies that have driven down their wages and, in many cases, eliminated their jobs altogether. A vote for Trump represented for them a break with the current status quo and a harkening back to better days.¹¹ In other words, their vote for Trump was motivated more by economic fears than by a desire for white supremacy.

To a large degree I think that something like this account is ultimately correct, and I don’t mean to downplay these causes or to claim that most working-class whites are racists. But let us also remember that in the Space Trader story, most whites who voted to make the trade were not living in the best of circumstances nor were they necessarily racist either. Bell’s point is that they made the trade not so much because they hated Blacks, but because of what the aliens promised to give in return. Trump, much like the aliens, promised to “make America great again,” and it makes sense why this appeals to many good-hearted people. The problem is that there is an underside to this bargain, which someone has to pay for. Trump promised to make places like Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania great again, but only in exchange for further ostracizing nonwhites. It is a very small consolation to nonwhites that most of the white working-class who voted for Trump might have been repulsed rather than attracted by his racism. The only thing that really matters is that they went ahead and made the trade anyway. When their interests no longer aligned with those of nonwhites, no amount of moral exhortations were strong enough to get them to vote against white supremacy.

Let us now retell the Space Traders story, except this time let us imagine that it is 2050 and that demographic changes have occurred as they have been predicted to
occur. America is now a minority-majority country and the visitors from space ask Americans to sacrifice all nonwhites in exchange for marvelous gifts that will solve their most pressing domestic problems. Keep in mind that in this scenario, members of groups who in 2016 were considered nonwhite (e.g., Black, Asian, Latin, Middle Eastern, and Native Americans) now collectively outnumber members of the group that in 2016 would have been considered white. If it would seem reasonable to predict today, taking a good progressive view about the future, that in 2050 there would not be the numbers to make such a trade—in fact, nonwhites could probably band together and make a trade in exchange for whites.

This hopeful view of the future, however, rests on the assumption that whiteness in 2050 will look a lot like it does today. This is an assumption that I find faulty for at least two reasons. First, American whiteness was not the same in 1950 as it was in 1850, so why assume that it will look the same in 2050? Second, Latinx are not a homogenous racial bloc and if given the opportunity, many Latinx would probably jump at the chance of being white. If this is so, then there is good reason to be suspicious that mere demographic changes will be enough to ensure that in the future nonwhites no longer get “space traded” by whites.

AMERICAN WHITENESS

American whiteness and American democracy have always been closely aligned. This history can be traced all the way back to the initial exclusion of Blacks and Native Americans from U.S. citizenship and thereby the vote. It also extends to the various efforts that were and continue to be made to suppress their vote even after they were granted U.S. citizenship. Similarly, Asians for a long time were denied the opportunity to become naturalized U.S. citizens because from 1790 until 1943, naturalized U.S. citizenship was reserved exclusively for whites. So while Black, Asian, and Native Americans have historically been the exemplars of non-whiteness in the U.S., American whiteness has itself never been a definitive or fixed concept. For a long time, American whiteness was reserved exclusively for people of Northern European descent and even then only to certain segments of Northern Europe, so Irish and Polish were initially denied full white status.

The worry that U.S. elections might be decided contrary to the will of the majority of whites began to arise sometime in the mid-1800s—well before Blacks, Asians, or Native Americans could become citizens—and it led to the creation of the now infamous Know-Nothing Party. The majority of people who joined the Know-Nothing party did not come from very wealthy or elite backgrounds. In fact, a lot like the populist movements we see today, its members came largely from lower- and working-class backgrounds. The platform of this party was based around nativism and, in particular, an opposition to Catholic immigration. The worry about Catholic immigrants was that they were coming in droves and were bringing with them a subversive religion. The fear was that Catholics planned to have as many children as they could in order to eventually have the numbers necessary to vote in a government that would be more loyal to the Vatican than to the U.S. constitution.

For this reason, the modus operandi of the Know-Nothing Party was to do everything in its power to prevent Catholics (which came to be associated with both Irish and “Latin” European immigrants) from obtaining any political post and also deny them jobs, arguing that American business owners had a patriotic duty to employ only true Americans. They were also certain that Catholics were already trying to rig elections by having non-citizens vote. Know-Nothing activists would therefore stand watch at polling stations during elections, and this would often lead to violent confrontations.

By the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, the worry about Northern Europeans losing their majority status went from a fringe conspiracy theory to a mainstream crisis. This concern was exemplified in the writings of people like Madison Grant, who in 1916 wrote the widely influential book The Passing of the Great Race. In that book Grant argued that the founding race of the United States, the Nordic race, was heading towards extinction because of various factors, none of which was more pressing than the continued immigration of inferior races into the United States, especially of the Alpine (i.e., Eastern Europeans) and Mediterranean (i.e., Southern Europe) races.

The initial reaction to this threat was to try to keep out non-Northern Europeans through immigration restrictions. This was the reason U.S. immigration policy was radically changed in 1924, adding quotas for the first time on Southern and Eastern European immigrants. This, however, did not solve the supposed problem. Immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe continued at a much higher rate than immigration from Northern Europe. Eventually, the solution that was settled upon was to expand the notion of American whiteness and include Southern and Eastern Europeans, who at least were closer to embodying American whiteness than Blacks, Asians, or Native Americans (as a kind of aside, it is also around this time that Arabs came to be legally classified as “white” in the United States).

The usual reason cited for how and why Southern and Eastern Europeans came to be included in American whiteness is the advent of World War II. As the story goes, the utter hypocrisy of morally condemning fascists who held a similar racial ideology as we did, coupled with the need for a united American front to fight European fascism, provided to be too much. American whiteness had to be expanded, and this project of expanding American whiteness was not much of a secret. It was made explicit in projects that we can still see today, such as the award winning short film The House I Live In. In that film, Frank Sinatra stars as himself and makes the case to a group of multi-ethnic young boys (all of whom we would today consider white) that they should not let their differences in religion or nationality divide them because at the end of the day they were all Americans who stood up against everything fascism represents. By the end of WWII various immigration reforms were passed, removing various immigration restrictions and adopting instead policies that put Southern and Eastern Europeans on par with Northern Europeans.
The result was that by 1950, American whiteness was no longer what it had been in 1850. If whiteness had not undergone this change, America would have already been considered a minority-majority country. In fact, this is what gets covered over in the assimilationist claim that America has always been a "nation of immigrants." A claim that for most of its history was, in fact, used as a derisive slur about oncoming demographic changes.15 The fact is that American whiteness changed and while this change had dramatic effects that reshuffled the electoral map, the basic structure of American democracy—where a sizable majority of the white majority was sufficient to carry the day—remained the same. In a way, Latinx might today be playing a similar role as Southern and Eastern Europeans did in the early part of the twentieth century. Even as their continued migration is currently decired, thirty years from now certain segments of the Latinx population might seamlessly come to be seen as just another part of the white melting pot.

CONCLUSION
In short, it’s not clear that changing demographics alone will be enough to sever the link between white supremacy and American democracy. While supremacy has shown that it is not only willing to resort to the elimination and isolation of nonwhites, but that it is also willing to expand and recruit from certain segments of the non-white population if that is what is necessary for it to maintain its dominant position. By doing so it will ensure that political decisions continue to be made by a significant majority of the majority and, even more troubling, that dog-whistle politics will remain an effective political tool for the foreseeable future.

NOTES
2. See, for example, Linda Martín Alcoff, The Future of Whiteness (Malden, MA: Polity, 2015).

ESSAYS
Eudaimonia and Neltiliztli: Aristotle and the Aztecs on the Good Life

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1. EUDAIMONIA AND NELTILIZTLI
How shall we live? What sort of life would it be best to lead? Does that life entail obligations to other people? If so, which? These, briefly, are the questions at the heart of ethical philosophy. The first two, concerning the best sort of life, address the topic of the good. The latter, concerning our obligations to others, address the right. Among many of the philosophers of classical Greek antiquity, including Plato and Aristotle, questions concerning the good were understood to be conceptually prior to those of the right. They held, in short, that one needed to know what kind of life one sought to lead before one could raise questions about what sorts of obligations followed. The best life, they maintained, was the happy or flourishing one—a life of eudaimonia.1 They considered, moreover, the skillful leading of such a life to be a virtuous one, and that is why this form of ethics has been called a eudaemonist virtue ethics.

What the present essay argues is that the pre-Columbian Aztecs, or more properly the Nahua, the people who spoke Nahuatl in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica, held a view about ethical philosophy that is similar to Aristotle’s. They held to a conception of the good life, which they called neltiliztli,
and they maintained that understanding its character was conceptually prior to questions about rightness. What this thesis suggests is that they also held to a form of virtue ethics, though one different from the eudaemonist sort that Aristotle and Plato championed. Since neltiliztli means rootedness, one might call it a rooted virtue ethics.

One consequence of this thesis is that it articulates an alternative understanding of the good life which, while similar to Aristotle's eudaimonia in the way it guides our thinking about right action, raises a new problem for ethical philosophy: Just how closely linked is pleasure (hēdonē) to the good life? There is a similarity here with the fundamental ethical problem of classical antiquity, which asked whether virtue was sufficient for happiness (eudaimonia). Yet the focus of the present problem centers not on virtue's relation to the good life, but on just what counts as a good life in the first place. Can one really have a conception of the good life that does not have any internal relation to elevated or positive emotional states (hēdonê)? The Nahua would have us believe that we can and must, at least for any life led on what they called our "slippery" earth.

A second consequence is that this essay makes some strides in filling a gap in comparative philosophy. The Nahua are finally beginning to receive philosophic attention among Anglophone scholars, but this work has so far tended to focus on their metaphysical views. This is generally true even among Spanish-speaking scholars, who have been better in addressing the Nahua philosophically. The present essay, then, moves some direction in developing our understanding of Nahua philosophy by articulating their conception of the good life. Since the matter at hand is rather complicated, I begin with the features of eudaimonia and neltiliztli as the highest end.

2. THE HIGHEST END

There are two key features of the good life which have a reasonable parallel in Aztec and Aristotelian thought, namely, that the good life is the highest end of action, and that this highest end may be spelled out by its relation to the human condition. On this last point, however, Aristotle differs somewhat from the Aztec approach since he relates eudaimonia to the human function (ergon), while the Aztecs draw their reasoning from a wider characterization of what life is like on our earth, on what they called tlalticpac.

Aristotle begins the Nicomachean Ethics (N.E.) rather (in) famously by making a case for the good as the highest or ultimate aim of our actions as follows:

Every art and every inquiry, and similarly, every action [praxis] and every decision [proairexis] is thought to aim at some good; hence men have expressed themselves well in declaring the good to be that at which all things aim. But there appears to be a difference among the ends; for some are activities, others are products apart from [the activities which produce] them. The quality of the reasoning at stake in this passage has been the source of scholarly controversy. Just because every inquiry, action, and decision aim at some good, it does not follow that the good is that at which all things aim. This would be a little like arguing that all roads lead somewhere, so all roads lead to the same place. Piecing together what Aristotle intended, then, has occupied scholars for some time.

With respect to the controversy, briefly, it seems that two points clarify what Aristotle had in mind. First, recall that Aristotle's method for ethics is to find "a view [that] will be most in harmony with the phenomena." To do this, he begins from a piece of reputable wisdom, an endoxa, and then proceeds to tease through possible implications to arrive at a better statement. In this case the endoxa is the statement: "hence men have expressed themselves well in declaring the good to be that at which all things aim." What the rest of the passage is meant to do, even if it is not fully complete, is to bridge the gap between the first observation, as a premise, and the endoxa, as a conclusion. In brief, the argument he develops runs thus:

[1] If the goods of each (inquiry, action, etc.) are hierarchically ordered (and they are),
[2] And if goods do not go on to infinity (which would be absurd),
[3] Then there is a highest good.

The conclusion, [3], is the highest good at which "all" things aim in the opening line.

Since Aristotle, a little later, identifies the highest good with eudaimonia, what the opening argument suggests is that the good life is that sense of happiness that emerges when one considers one's life as a whole, when one considers the ordered relation among one's goals and hierarchizes them. While a variety of commentators have noted that Aristotle does not quite complete this argument in the opening passages of the N.E., they tend to agree that this is the sort of argument he intends to make. If that is so, the real difficulty is not the quality of the inference from the premises to the conclusion but the soundness of [1]. It is not clear that all of our goods are hierarchically ordered. Aristotle makes his argument by analogy to the sciences, and while it is true that they may be hierarchized, individual human aims often are not. Aristotle even acknowledges this much in accounting for the different sorts of pleasures that are sought. It turns out, then, that some sort of skill will be necessary to manage this relation—and this, in brief, is the purpose of the virtues: those excellent qualities of character than enable a person to live her life well.

Still, there is disagreement concerning just what that highest end should be, and in the first book of the N.E., Aristotle proposes to settle the matter by appealing to the proper activity or function (ergon) of human beings. He writes:

If, indeed, the function of humans is the soul's performance according to reason, or not without reason, and if we acknowledge that the function of an individual is also that of a good individual in a generic way, just as is the case with a lyre
player and a good lyre player, and so on for all the others without qualification . . . if it is thus, then the human good would be the soul's performance according to virtue, and if there are many virtues, according to the best and most complete.  

Given the way that Aristotle loads in premises to his argument, mostly here marked by ellipses, it is not surprising that the grounds for his claim have also been the subject of some rather intense philosophic scrutiny. The core of his reasoning, without addressing much of the metaphysical backdrop behind it, appears to turn on the thesis that to be is to be good. Expressed differently, he holds that to be a thing of a certain kind, say a lyre player or a bicycle, or whatever else, is to be a good lyre player, or a good bicycle, or a good anything else. For example, if my bicycle were to be damaged, so that its wheel were bent slightly, it would ride poorly. As a result, it would be a worse bicycle. If the bicycle were to lose its chain, then it would resemble something closer to a scooter. Were it to lose its wheels altogether, then it would cease to be a bicycle and would, rather, be only a bicycle frame. What goes for bicycles, other objects, and practices also goes for humans. The human function is to make use of reason, understood in a broad sense (i.e., as logos). Activities, insofar as they are properly human, thus make use of logos. To be a good human, by the same reasoning, is thus to be one who leads a life by means of logos, or at least not without it. To the extent that one fails to use logos, one leads a bad or vicious human life.

In sum, the good human life is the one which exhibits human excellences or virtues. The bad one is that which exhibits human vices. Since this understanding articulates (some of) what it means to lead a human life at all, it establishes a basic set of conditions for our highest human aim, for eudaimonia. We are obligated to pursue it, if we should seek to lead a human life at all. This argument settles the dispute concerning happiness by establishing objective conditions for all human pursuits. Finally, and to connect these points to one of Aristotle's arguments in Book 10 of the N.E., it is only by pursuing this sort of life that we can enjoy human pleasures at all.

For the Nahuas, just as for Aristotle, it is the human condition that limits and enables one to pursue the best sort of life. Unlike Aristotle, for the Nahua there it is the character of our circumstances as humans on earth that primarily determines this condition, not a property of what we are as animal beings, like logos. For the Nahua, our lives are ones led on earth, on tlalticpac. This place has three pertinent characteristics which set the conditions for the sort of life that we can hope to lead. It is, first of all, a slippery place. This point is amply recorded in extant Nahua texts. For example, the sixth volume of Florentine Codex (F.C.) has a catalogue of common sayings. There we read the following one:

Slippery, slick is the earth.
It is the same as the one mentioned
Perhaps at one time one was of good life; later he fell into some wrong, as if he had slipped in the mud.  

The “one mentioned” is the saying which is listed just above in the codex, which reads:

How is this? Look well to thyself, thou fish of gold.
It is said at this time: if one some time ago lived a good life [and] later fell onto some [other one]—perhaps he took a paramour, or he knocked someone down so that he took sick or even died; and for that he was thrust into jail: so at that time it is said: “How is this? Look well to thyself, thou fish of gold.”  

A few observations are in order. A first is that the range of things that are slippery (tlalahui) includes the sorts of actions that we might commonly include in the ethical, because they are under our volition, and those that are not, because we have little or no control over them. We would say that taking a paramour is a choice, while knocking someone over, by tripping for example, is a bad outcome, but pardonable because out of our control. Yet these are descriptions of our condition on earth, and their point seems to be that regardless of individual choice, this is just the sort of place where we can expect these lapses. We may have to go to jail as a result, so that appeal to the condition of tlalticpac is not exculpatory, but it is descriptive of the general character of our human lives. A second point is that the slipperiness of tlalticpac, then, is not something that one can hope to avoid by reasoning well. One does not slip through an Aristotelian hamartia, an error in the practical syllogism of one's reasoning. Rather, this is just the sort of place in which one is prone to slip, where lapses in judgment will occur. The ideal for one’s life, as a result (and third), cannot be one that includes no errors, no lapses in judgment. Purity in this place cannot be the goal after which we strive asymptotically. Rather, it must be the sort of ideal that recognizes that these slips occur, and yet manages them as well as possible.

A second feature of our human condition, life on tlalticpac, is that it is transitory. Again, this point of view is well attested in extant texts, yet no one is a better spokesman on this point than Nezahualcoyotl. In a work of poetic philosophy entitled “Ma zan moquetzacan, nicnihuan! / My friends, stand up!” he writes the following (this is the piece in its entirety).

My friends, stand up!
The princes have become destitute,
I am Nezahualcoyotl,
I am a Singer,
head of macaw.
Grasp your flowers and your fan.
With them go out to dance!
You are my child,
you are Yoyontzin.
Take your chocolate,
flower of the cacao tree,
may you drink all of it!
Do the dance,
do the song!
Not here is our house,
not here do we live,
you also will have to go away.
The character of this piece cannot but strike one as of a similar character as 1 Corinthians 15:32, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." Still, the context is much wider in Nahua thought. For Nezahualcoyotl, in fact, this is the basic problem of our existence (and not merely the slipperiness of our lives). For not only is it true that our lives are ephemeral, but it is also the case that even the structure of the cosmos is ephemeral in character. The fifth age, the one with a sun of motion, is one which, like the previous four, will sometime pass.

These considerations lead one to the third feature of life on tlalticpac, namely, that it is far from clear that it is a happy place. As part of an extended poem, Nezahualcoyotl writes:

Is it true that we are happy,
that we live on earth?
It is not certain that we live
and have come on earth to be happy.
We are all sorely lacking.
Is there any who does not suffer
here, next to the people?  

For Nezahualcoyotl's own work these considerations led him to seek the only sort of stability and eternity for which one can hope, namely, that to be found in philosophical-poetic reflection, in the composition of "flower and song." These for the Nahua's broader ethical outlook (more below), these reflections supply the reason why the pursuit of happiness is not something that they thought could be a suitable objective for one's life's plan. The transitory and slippery character of life on tlalticpac would make elevated emotional states, i.e., "happiness," a foolhardy goal.

The general aim of Nahua ethics, then, is not happiness but to achieve rootedness (neltiiltzili) on tlalticpac. To support the idea textually, it will be helpful to have in mind a linguistic point. Should one like to form a new word in Nahuatl, the language is well equipped with the capacity for compounding, much as ancient Greek was. Yet one may also make use of what Angel Maria Garibay has called a "difrasismo," which is the expression of one idea in two words. Examples in English might be "with blood and fire," or "against wind and tide." This sort of expression was extremely common in Nahuatl, and one must be careful to catch the metaphorical meaning at work. For if taken literally, the meaning of a difrasismo is almost totally lost. One of the commonest of these in a philosophic context is the phrase in xochi in cuicati, which, translated literally, means "with flower and song," but taken metaphorically means something like "poetry."

Returning to the discussion of rootedness, I would like to examine the short piece "Flower and Song / Xochi Cuicati," found in the Cantares Mexicanos, which was composed and recited before a meeting of wise men and poets in the house of Tecayehautzin. The question at stake in the piece is how to achieve some sort of permanence. Lord Ayocuan is said to be acquainted with Life Giver, one of the names for the single being of existence, teotl. Invoking and recalling the lord, the suggestion of the piece is that it is by creating "flower and song" that one finds this permanence.

We read the author's realization that this (poetic creation) must be the answer to the transitoriness of life on tlalticpac in the following lines:

So this is how that lord, the vaunted one,
comes creating them. Yes, with plume like
bracelet beads he pleases the only-being.
Is that what pleases the Life Giver?
Is that the only truth [nelli] on earth [tlalticpac]?  

So the author comes to the conclusion that by writing flower-song, especially the type that addresses the greater problems of our human existence, one is best able to find "truth" on the slippery earth.

What matters for ethical purposes is obscured in the English translation. The phrase "aço fie nelli in tlalticpac" is best translated as "Is that the only truth on earth?" But the word nelli is related to nelhuáyotl, which is a root or base. The metaphorical idea behind the Nahua understanding of "truth," then, is that it is a matter of being rooted like a tree, as opposed to sliding about on our slippery earth. The goal, the solution to our human problems, then, is to find rootedness, which as an abstract substantive would be expressed in Nahua as neltiliztli.

An important point here is that the context of the poem makes clear that one is to find rootedness in the only being of existence, in teotl. Just as is the case with Aristotle's function argument, there is equally a metaphysical backdrop to the Nahua account of the good life. The Nahua were pantheists of a sort and took our world to be an expression of the single fundamental being of existence. A rooted life, then, is not only our highest end, but carries a similar normative force. One ought to seek rootedness not only on prudential grounds, but because rootedness is the way that one truly is given our circumstances.

The philosophic poem "Flower and Song" provides one source of evidence for the normative similarity between Aristotle and the Nahua understanding of the good life. For additional textual evidence, one might turn to the tenth volume of the F.C., which addresses "the people" of the Nahua culture. There one finds descriptions of persons at work in socially recognized roles. The codex author Bernadino de Sahagún is responsible for asking what the good and bad forms of each is, e.g., asking, What is a good feather worker? What is a bad one? So one cannot say that the Nahuas would have formulated the matters explicitly in terms of good and bad. What one can note is that in their responses, one finds their general understanding of how approval and disapproval were allotted in each case, and how they reasoned about what ought to be. In describing an adult nobleman, we read the following:

The good [quali] middle-aged man is a doer, a worker [who is] agile, active, solicitous.

The bad [tluelilloc] middle-aged man is lazy, negligent, slothful, indolent, sluggish, idle, languid, a lump of flesh [quiltatzcopic], a lump of flesh with two eyes [quiltatzcopicitl], a thief.
Similar statements are found throughout the F.C. so that one can be certain that this sort of language is not isolated. The suggestion is double. First, good adult men are those who perform their duties and roles well, while the bad ones are indolent. Second, bad adult men hardly resemble men at all. They become, rather, mere lumps of flesh. Stated otherwise, there are conditions for leading a life in a human community, and should one not observe them, one tends towards not leading a human life at all.

To bring all these points together, one might write that Aristotle and the Aztecs both held to a conception of the good life as one that is the highest aim one could have, or, more aptly, live out. They differed in the grounds they provided for their views. Aristotle’s argument turns on a thesis about the function (ergon) of a human being, while the Nahuas held that one should aim for rootedness as (i) a reasonable response to our circumstances on earth, and as (ii) a basic condition for leading a life in the human community as part of teotl. What needs to be clarified now is how exactly this understanding of the good life could guide our actions.

3. VIRTUE AND ACTION GUIDANCE

To spell out how their accounts are action guiding, one must broach two questions. First, Aristotle’s eudaimonia is clearly linked to his discussion of excellence, arête, but this close link between neltliztli and excellence has not been shown for the Nahuas. While the above shows that they had an understanding of the human good which supports this line of reasoning, is there a Nahuatl word or phrase that serves roughly the same role as arête, and is it connected to an account of rootedness? Second, even though the above shows that the Nahuas had a conception of the good life, it does not show that neltliztli functioned in the way required. Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill both had conceptions of the good life, but neither was a virtue ethicist. How do we know that neltliztli functions like Aristotle’s eudaimonia and not the summum bonum for Kant and Mill?

I begin with the matter of “virtue.” In some ways the topic is difficult because of the abundance of possible terms available. One should recall that arête in Greek is derived from the god Ares, and in Homeric times the word meant primarily nobility and strength on the battlefield. Over the following several hundred years of recorded Greek texts, one finds the term slowly changing from a quality of character primarily focused on competitive activities to one focused on cooperative ones—ones that foster life in the city state (polis). Plato and Aristotle, moreover, played a significant role in this change, rather willfully adapting common terms to their purposes.21 “Virtue” or “human excellence,” in short, did not spring from Zeus’ head fully armored, but was a concept developed over the course of several centuries among the Greeks. One should be wary, then, of finding an exact equivalent in other cultures. Additionally, one should not expect the Nahua to have only one such term just because Hellenistic philosophers ultimately settled on one. In the Confucian tradition, for example, one finds two words used for “virtue,” namely, de and ren.22 It might turn out that the Nahuas had more than one term. The proposal that I venture here is that there is one broad phrase for excellence, and that there may be further, more specific terms for excellence available in other ways, just as de is the broad term for virtue in the Confucian tradition, and ren the more specific term focused on human relations.23

To begin, in Nahuati, as in Greek, there are several words for the good, the noble, and the beautiful. Generally, the most broadly used term for “good” is “qualli,” and I have indicated it in brackets in above quoted texts.24 The root of the word derives from the verb qua, which means to eat. The general idea indicated, then, is that something is good because assimilable, edible in a way that will aid in one’s flourishing. Another common word is yectli, which is something good because it is straight. Likely the best translation for yectli, then, is rectitude. The Nahuas also made use of a difrasismo with these two words as components: in qualli in yectli, meaning, too literally, “with goodness and straightness.”25 My suggestion is that this is the Nahua way of expressing “excellence.” In the tenth volume of the F.C., for example, one finds a description of the “good” daughter which reads: ichpuchtl in irectli in qualli, in qualli ichpuchtl, which might be translated as “the excellent daughter, the good daughter.”26

In this passage, one also finds an explicit connection between excellence, so understood, and the good life as rootedness. Since the matter is critical, I provide a word-by-word translation and commentary in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>yn tecueuh yn ichpuchtl</th>
<th>One’s daughter [who is]</th>
<th>This is a phrase indicating the whole idea of a daughter in her relation both to a male and female speaker.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>quiztica, macitica, vel,</td>
<td>unspoiled, perfect, good,</td>
<td>These terms are all difficult to translate, because Christianity had already influenced the meaning of the words. Yet, none of them in Nahuatl have a fundamental connection to Christian understanding of virginity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nelli,</td>
<td>rooted,</td>
<td>Dibble and Anderson omit this word in translation, as it fits poorly with the Christianized interpretation of the Nahuatl description.21 It is the root of neltliztli.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ichpuchtl in irectli in qualli,</td>
<td>[who is] the excellent daughter,</td>
<td>There is no sentence break in the Nahuatl, so the idea is continued: the rooted daughter is the excellent one…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in qualli ichpuchtl . . .</td>
<td>the good daughter . . .</td>
<td>the good one, et cetera.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
One here finds a description of the “good” daughter as one who is rooted, who is leading the best life possible, and one who is excellent in doing so. The passage is a difficult one to analyze and translate because some Christian influence was present at the time that it was recorded, but it does indicate that the Nahuas thought to connect virtue (in yectli in qualli) and rootedness (neltiliztli). The best life available on earth, in short, is one that is performed excellently.

I turn now to the question whether the Nahuas understood the good life in the way required for a virtue ethics. One may begin by recalling what is distinctive about eudaimonia as it functions for action-guiding purposes. For eudaemonists generally, action guidance follows from the priority of the good to the right. This is to say that in the order of justification, one appeals to a conception of the good first, and then concludes to a judgment of right action. A eudaemonist, then, might argue that one ought not cheat on one’s partner, or that cheating on one’s partner is morally wrong, because it harms her by inhibiting her flourishing. For a modern philosopher who holds to the priority of the right to the good, as Kantian deontologists do, moral wrongness functions in a premise to one’s conclusion. One ought not cheat on one’s partner because it is morally wrong, and one can discern this moral wrongness by appeal to an independent test, like the categorical imperative procedure.33

If this difference in the order of justification is what distinguishes Aristotle from Kant on the good, then what distinguishes Aristotle from Mill on the good? Utilitarian consequentialists also appeal to a conception of the good, say, a maximum of average utility, in order to determine whether an action is right. How is Aristotle, or the eudaemonist generally, different?

To answer this question, one is returned to an untranslatable point in the second line of the N.E., since it is there where Aristotle introduces an important qualification about the character of the highest good as an end. He writes: “But there appears to be a difference among the ends; for some are activities, others are products apart from [the activities which produce] them.”44 In writing this, Aristotle distinguishes between two sorts of activities: ta erga (productions) and hai energeiai (performances/activities).35 Productive actions are of the sort that yield a product apart from the action, such as a potter’s vase. Performance actions are those that are actions (erga) in (en) themselves; the doing constitutes what they are. They are like a dance or a jazz solo. Importantly for Aristotle, the highest end, eudaimonia, is a performance. This means that he is thinking of it in a fundamentally different way than a utilitarian would. To clarify, in the opening lines of Utilitarianism Mill writes: “All action is for the sake of some end, and rules of action, it seems natural to suppose, must take their whole character and color from the end to which they are subservient.”45 Happiness, as Mill understands it, then, is the product of acting in such a way as to promote the happiness of the greatest number. For Aristotle, by contrast, eudaimonia is not conceived of as a product, the end result of action, but the performance of living one’s own life well. It is your life performed well, not a set of mental states. As a result, it would be incoherent to speak of maximizing this sort of happiness, apart from living it better—with more virtue.

Did the Nahuas think of neltiliztli as Aristotle thought of eudaimonia? One may answer in the affirmative for two reasons. First, in no extant literature is there a discussion of an independent test for assessing right action, so they did not think of it in the way that Kant does. Second, if one looks to their analysis of good and bad performance of social roles, one sees that they justify assessment by appealing to a harm or help rendered. For example, here is how the philosopher, or tlamatini, is described in volume ten of the F.C.:

The good [qualli] tlamatini is a physician, a person of trust, a counselor; an instructor worthy of confidence, deserving of credibility, deserving of faith; a teacher. He is an advisor, a counselor, a good example; a teacher of prudence, of discretion; a light, a guide who lays out one’s path, who goes accompanying one. . . . The bad [amo qualli] tlamatini is a stupid physician, silly, decrepit, pretending to be a person of trust, a counselor, advised. . . . [He is] a soothsayer, a deluder, he deceives, confounds, causes ills, leads into evil. 37

What one notes in this description is the way in which a person performs her social role, the quality of her contribution to the community, is the source of praise or blame. The bad [amo qualli] philosopher specifically causes ill, both to the person counseled, and to the community at large. The good [qualli] philosopher is he who is a light and a mirror for his patients and the community. Assessments of right action, then, follow from an understanding of what it means to lead a good human and communal life. I think it clear, then, that the Nahuas reasoned about the good and the right in the same sort of way as eudaemonists do.

4. WAYS OF LIFE

At this point one might have some further pertinent questions. Aristotle’s understanding of eudaimonia is connected to a way of life, the contemplative, and a program for general living. To what extent is something like this present in the Nahuatl understanding of neltiliztli? The answer, I think, distances the Nahuas from Aristotle, since the Nahuas do advocate for two (or more) approaches to rootedness, but they have no notion that is like the Greek bios.

Beginning with Aristotle, much of the picture for his understanding of eudaimonia emerges from the foregoing. Each of us leads her life by organizing and deliberating about her ends. This is not something that happens easily, and so it requires skill, virtue (arêthê), to perform such organizing well. Moreover, Aristotle tells us that the way that we lead our lives as humans, the way that we enjoy human Eudaimonia, is to employ logos, to employ reason broadly understood.38 The special virtue of logos for ethics is, of course, prudence, phronêsis. And is it phronêsis which acts in consort with the other virtues to enable each of us to live well, to lead a eudaimon life. None of this, however, tells us what sits at the top of the telic hierarchy. Is it just anything we could choose?
Aristotle’s answer is somewhat elliptical, but it looks as though he suggests that what sits at the top of the telic hierarchy is a way of life, a bios. He writes:

For three ways of life stand out most; the one just mentioned [i.e., of pleasure], the political, and, third, the theoretical [theōrētikos]. The many appear to be quite slavish in deciding [proairopomeno] on a way of life [bion] fit for livestock, but their argument has support on account of the many of means who share the sentiments of Sardanapalus. The refined, on the other hand, and those of action decide on a life of honor; for the life [biou] of politics has nearly this end [telos].

In this passage Aristotle gives a few brief rebuttals to the life of pleasure, and that aimed at honor, though he waits until book 10 to provide a full defense of the life of contemplation. What matters for the present is what Aristotle’s comments suggest for the structure of eudaimonia, namely, that a bios is decided on as an end (telos). This is not the same, however, as choosing a particular outcome, or set of outcomes. For a way of life is a characteristic way of choosing and ordering one’s ends so that their performance is of a typical kind. At the top of our telic hierarchy, then, is not a final goal, but a way of life. And Aristotle later argues (in book 10) that only one such way of life, that typified by theoretical contemplation, is suitable to humans as a complete goal.

There is an additional point which proves helpful for a comparison with the Nahua conception of the good life. One of the reasons Aristotle so hastily dismisses the life of pleasure is that he identifies it with one that is fit for livestock, boskēmatōn—literally for fattened animals. Implicit in Aristotle’s language is a distinction between a way of life, bios, and mere life, zoē. In the opening passages of his Politics, Aristotle distinguishes between a natural tendency, like procreation, which he does not think is the result of a decision (proairopēsis), a natural union, like a household, which is an association to meet the needs of daily life, and a state, which “exists for the sake of living well.” While humans also lead a life of zoē, one of satisfying those necessities like eating, we also decide on certain goals for the sake of living well. When we engage in activities or practices (like music and dance) for these latter ends, we are leading a way of life, a bios. This is why it is a sort of category error, for Aristotle, to decide on a way of life that would be co-extensive with the activities needed for mere survival. It also means that eudaimonia ultimately concerns the performance of one’s life by organizing ends that are chosen above and beyond necessities.

The specification of which way of life is best for Aristotle has been a source of controversy, not because it is unclear, but because scholars have been puzzled in trying to explain the compatibility of the intellectualist account of eudaimonia, in book 10, with the comprehensive account that is articulated in the rest of the N.E. I shall not here try to provide my own sense of the compatibility of these two accounts in Aristotle. Rather, I would like to note that the Nahua also seem to give an account of the good life that is in some ways split between a comprehensive and an intellectualist approach. Yet, because they do not make use of anything like bios as a concept, they do not have a similar tension.

To understand why the Nahua may have this advantage, it might be helpful to recall that nehtlīltztli is recommended both on prudential grounds and on the grounds that one takes root in teotl, the way things are. So that if one is to lead a life in a human community, one must lead a rooted life. Surveying the existing literature and anthropological record, one finds that for the Nahua one’s life appears to take root at four related levels: in one’s body, in one’s psyche, in one’s community by social rites and role, and in teotl.

Rootedness in one’s body was made possible by participating in a number of practices. The Nahua held that the body serves as a temporary location for three forces which animate us: tonalli, which resides in the head and provides the energy needed for growth; teyōlōia, which resides in the heart and provides memory, emotion, and knowledge; and ihiyōtli, which resides in the liver and provides passion, bravery, hatred, and life, among others. Anthropologists have recovered many figurines posed in ways that look like yoga poses; they include, for example, a position almost exactly similar to the lotus position. From the description of the body and its movements, one gathers that a regular practice of yoga-like movements was thought to help balance or root some of our bodily energies.

An additional way in which one sought a rooted life was in one’s psyche—bearing in mind that the difference between psyche and body was not nearly as sharp as our current understanding. The point in this regard is that if one learns to assume an identity, a certain kind of personhood, one gains rootedness. For example, in the Hueheutlatolli, the Discourses of the Elders, one finds a congratulatory speech in which the elders discourse with the new bride and groom, new owners of a face and heart. The groom, for example, responds to the elders, stating,

Ye have shown me favor, ye have inclined your hearts [amoiolotlōtin]; on my behalf ye have suffered affliction. I shall inflict sickness on you, on your face [temuxtli].

In this case the face (ixtli) and heart (yollōtli) together indicate the whole person, one’s character. The groom’s responses address both facets of the elder’s personality. In marriage, likewise, the elders bind the couple together as a new identity, by tying the man’s cape to the woman’s skirt, and speak both to their faces and their hearts. The suggestion is that in such a way they gain personhood, a way by which they will stand here on the slippery place. Character virtues, then, primarily find their place at this level in facilitating the acquisition and maintenance of one’s “face and heart,” one’s character.

Yet, these points already slide over into rootedness in the community, the third level of rootedness. For the bride and groom are not only bound together, but bound within and before the community. Participation in one’s community, then, was carried out in festivals and social rites of various
sorts. In the marriage ceremony described, for example, the fathers, mothers, grandparents, and related family members all have specific roles to play. It was, moreover, the role of tlamatini, the philosophers, to foster the acquisition of a face through counseling, and the goal of education to teach young Nahua children the dispositions that would sustain healthy judgment. One’s character, then, enabled one to execute the offices of one’s social role well, but these not only had more specific demands, they also served the purpose of training or habituating one into that character.

A final way to achieve rootedness was in teotl directly. The three dimensions of rootedness just discussed are, of course, ways to be rooted in teotl, but in an indirect sort of way. The Nahua appeared to have held that there were also a few other, more direct, ways to be rooted in teotl. In the above quoted passage from “Flower and Song,” the specific answer given to achieve rootedness is to compose philosophic poetry. This is not too distant from Aristotle’s insistence on the life of the mind. In some of the more mystical passages, it appears that some thought the use of hallucinogenic substances was perhaps another way. Any of these ways, though, were thought to be ways to make something of beauty of our short time on tlalticpac.

At this point, one might wonder how the Nahua are not saddled with the same sort of difficulty that faces Aristotle. Rootedness appears to have both a comprehensive meaning, and an intellectualist one, reserved for those who can compose flower and song. In response, I think the problem is at least not so acute among the Nahua. A bios, to recall, has two important features. First, it is a characteristic way of choosing among our goals and ordering them in the telic hierarchy of our life’s plan. This is the sense in which it sits atop that hierarchy. Second, it is a form of life that is chosen above and beyond the necessities of zoē. While the Nahua did have various social roles, which in the case of a philosopher, or physician, might be counted as a characteristic way of choosing among ends, they did not distinguish such ways as something distinct from the necessities of mere living. All people, then, were to aim for rootedness at the levels of mind, psyche, and community. It just turns out that for some people, participation in the community also afforded the possibility for a more direct rootedness. The philosophers, for example, found rootedness in their communities, in part, by composing “flower and song,” which just happened to be a direct way of finding rootedness on tlalticpac. The ways are complementary among the Nahua, then, rather than exclusionary, as they appear to be in Aristotle.

5. MORAL MOTIVATION

While the discussion concerning ways of life (bios) highlights one difference between Aristotle and the Nahua on the good life that might count in favor of the Nahua’s view, another related topic might pose a challenge for it. That topic concerns the role of pleasure, hēdonē, or elevated emotional states for the good life. The specific difficulty is that by retaining a connection between pleasure and the good life, Aristotle also solves an important problem for moral motivation. To the question, why should we be good? Aristotle can answer: because it is more enjoyable than not being good. If the Nahua do not retain this connection, then it would appear that they lose this advantage.

In response, one might begin by recalling the grounds for Aristotle’s argument in the N.E.” For Aristotle, pleasure perfects, in the sense of completes, the performance of eudaimonia as an “end which supervenes like the bloom of youth to those in the prime of their lives.” If it is not a constitutive or essential component of eudaimonia, then it is internally related as its completed form. The reason for this is that eudaimonia spells out what it means to lead a life as a human, as opposed to the life of a beast or angel. This life must make use of logos in some way, and it is ultimately led in the company of others (as the arguments in Aristotle’s Politics makes clear). The pleasure that follows for this life, as a result, is a properly human pleasure, and this is the only way to achieve it. While misfortune may intervene, as Aristotle’s discussion of Priam suggests, even in those tragic cases “the beautiful shines through.” Only by living well could Priam have had human happiness anyway. Should fortune favor us, moreover, then our lives enjoy not only happiness, eudaimonia, but blessedness, makaria. For the Nahua, life of tlalticpac has no similar perfection. The good life, understood as neltliztli, bears only an accidental relation to elevated emotional states, to one sense of hēdonē. Composing flower-song, or uniting one’s face and heart, makes for a better and more beautiful, if still transient existence. It is better and more beautiful, finally, because it is ultimately one rooted in teotl, in the way things are through their changes.

While it is too much for the Nahua to think that pleasure is more than an incidental feature of our life’s performance, one nevertheless has reasons to act for it that are distinct from prudential or dutiful considerations. This is why the rooted life ought to be considered a conception of “the good life,” and why the Nahua do not face a problem concerning moral motivation. The argument so far has reviewed some of the many roles and rites at work in Nahua culture. What one sees in these descriptions is that the feather-worker acts out of a passion for his craft. The philosopher acts for a love of wisdom. And mothers and fathers act out of love for their children. These reasons—namely, passions and loves—are neither prudential nor dutiful, and yet they provide us with reasons for acting. They are, moreover, some of the more common motivations that we have for undertaking action. Seeking to leading a rooted life, then, ultimately means that one is seeking to lead a worthwhile life. Even if pleasure is incidental to this way of life, one still has the greater bulk of reasons to pursue it.

6. CLARIFICATIONS

The present argument has so far established a number of points of agreement and noted a few differences between Aristotle’s conception of the good life and that of the Nahua. Yet, I must now pause to clarify two points regarding the analysis of Nahua understanding of neltliztli specifically. I pose these points as objections and supply responses in order to clarify the nature of the claims so far made.
A first concern might run as follows. Does the present analysis of neltiliztli cohere with broader Nahua conceptions? For example, in the popular religious beliefs of the Nahua, mothers who died in childbirth went to the heavens of the afterlife. Their understanding of rewards and punishments, then, seems to be rather fatalistic. How is this religious understanding compatible with the account so far outlined, in which deliberation about ends, or at least highest ends, seems to play so central a role?

Two distinctions could aid in answering this question. One concerns the difference between neltiliztli, which is a conception of the good life here on tlalticpac, and whatever rewards were thought to follow in the afterlife. It is true that in common religious belief, warriors who fell in battle (in specific ways) and women who died in childbirth were both thought to go to Tamoanchan. But they would not, then, be leading lives on tlalticpac. There is nothing incompatible between the idea of leading a rooted life on tlalticpac, and that of receiving rewards in the afterlife on account of a very specific occurrence. What seems to be at stake in the question is a broader sense of justice that would obtain between actions performed in this life and rewards in the afterlife. Yet it is not clear to me that the Nahua held to such a (Christian) view. In broaching religious beliefs, however, one is led to a second pertinent distinction.

The second distinction concerns the character of the present study. My goal, unlike that of anthropologists, has not been to reconstruct the general understanding of the good life among ordinary Nahua. Philosophers of classical antiquity look to understand specific philosophic claims among the Greeks and Romans, and so they do not try to make their arguments consistent with wider cultural notions like miasmic contamination. I do likewise here, and so have prescinded from a consideration of the broader Nahua understanding of tlazolliz, which is remarkably like the Greek miasma in certain respects.

We have evidence that the elders and tlamatinitliz (plural of tlamating, i.e., “philosopher”) often did break with ordinary understandings. Nezahualcoyotl, for example, openly wonders whether there is an afterlife, or if it is only a comforting fable. In a philosophic poem entitled “I Am Sad,” he writes:

I am sad, I grieve
I, lord Nezahualcoyotl.
With flowers and with songs
I remember the princes,
Those who went away,
Tezozomocztin, and that one Cuauhautzin.
Do they truly live,
Where in some way, one exists?

Nezahualcoyotl is in these lines clearly expressing doubt about life in a place after death. It is a place where one in some, non-fleshy way exists? This doubt in the afterlife, further, explains Nezahualcoyotl’s ongoing preoccupation with death, since he is little comforted by the ordinary stories. In brief, the philosophers and elders broke with established religious beliefs in their recorded writings, and so it would seem unreasonable to criticize the present philosophic study for not conforming to the religious beliefs of other segments of the population.

An additional concern is that in presenting neltiliztli in relation to Aristotelian eudaimonism, I have shaped the Nahua claims in a way that is too “individualist,” especially in my focus on action guidance and the search for the good life. How does that square with the broader, more sociocentric, understanding of the Nahua culture that anthropologists have described?

In response, one notes that “individualism” and “sociocentrism” are slippery terms. What I hope to have shown is that the Nahua were in two specific ways more “sociocentric” than Aristotle. This is the case, first, in the multi-leveled way in which one achieves rootedness. While I believe that Aristotle is often misunderstood in contemporary scholarship as focusing exclusively on the individual pursuit of happiness, the Nahua emphasis on finding rootedness through one’s specific social role in the community adds a social dimension that is not present in Aristotle’s account. Indeed, a greater part of action guidance for the Nahua turns on how well one executes the offices of one’s social role, and this is strikingly different from Aristotle’s focus on excellences that any human should develop. Second, the way that social rites and practices were thought to be an essential part of character formation finds no parallel in Aristotle. He nowhere discusses character formation by way of participating in social rites, but the Nahua do often rather elaborately. The above excerpts are taken from exhortations by elders for youths engaged in just these rites. In these two ways, then, I believe that the Nahua were more community oriented, or “sociocentric,” than was Aristotle.

There is another sense, however, in which it might be thought that the Nahua were more “sociocentric” than Aristotle. They might be thought to have held to a sense of ethical life that is socio-holist. On such an understanding, the Nahua would have held that the fundamental unit of moral concern was the community and not the individual. If this is right, then the present development of neltiliztl, especially in those sections concerning action guidance, would be true, but rather misleading.

In response, I do not think it accurate to claim that the Nahua held that the fundamental unit of moral concern was the community, rather than the individual. In the text reviewed above, various agents are criticized for harming other people directly, and not for harming the community by way of harming individual people. The texts themselves, then, conflict with this interpretation. Moreover, socio-holism is problematic from a philosophic point of view, and so I think it counts toward the greater cogency of their position that the tlamatinime were not inclined to support it.

7. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS
The present essay hopes to have taken a first step toward serious philosophic reflection on the ethical understanding of the good life, neltiliztl, among the Nahua. Their conception is in many ways like Aristotle’s understanding of eudaimonia. What one seeks in life, they held, is a response
to the basic conditions of life on tlalticpac is rootedness. What one seeks in choosing ends that are above mere necessities, Aristotle held, is eudaimonia. For the Nahua philosophical poetry provides the best kind of answer, the best rootedness, in response to the slipperiness of tlalticpac, since flower and song outlast and are more beautiful than other transient creations. For Aristotle, the life of theoretical contemplation is that which is best suited to an animal which leads its life by means of logos. For both, however, this best way of life is related to the broader aim of living well in other activities, which require excellent qualities of character (i.e., virtues) to achieve. Finally, in both cases, right action is assessed by appealing to a conception of what is good, how one flourishes, which is thus justifiably prior to a conception of the right.

At the end of these reflections, then, one is presented with two different articulations of the good life. Most of us, I would venture, would like to believe that pleasure is somehow internally connected to the best performance of our life’s act on the world’s stage. Yet we also recognize that perhaps this may be but much hopeful thinking. Nor is it clear, moreover, that this sort of difference is one that can be resolved simply by an analysis of concepts. Aristotle and the Aztecs each have a different preferred sense of “pleasure,” and so different understandings of its relation to the good life. Which sense is better for ethical purposes can be resolved simply by an analysis of concepts. Aristotle is it clear, moreover, that this sort of difference is one that to some of the remarks León-Portilla makes in this book. I have also profited greatly from his Aztec Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahua Mind, trans. Jack Emory Davis (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963).

4. Of course, anthropologists and art historians have long been interested in Nahua ethics, but their concern is rather with what might be called the practical syllogisms of indigenous peoples. There are many in English that have been particularly influential for the present essay are Louise M. Burchard’s The Slippery Earth: Nahua-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico (Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 1989) and Pete Sigal’s The Flower and the Scorpion: Sexuality and Ritual in Early Nahuatl Culture (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011). In the former case, one learns to be cautious of Castilian influences and interpolations, even in the construction of some Nahua cultural mores. Two pieces in which much of the present essay relies. In the latter, one comes to recognize the rather tendentious approach to (especially sexual ethics) one finds presented in almost any recorded work, including the Florentine Codex. Alfredo López Austin’s Cuerpo humano e ideología: Las concepciones de los antiguos Nahuas, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Mexico City, UNAM, 1984), has also proven helpful for understanding the general Nahua worldview, though the implications of his study are more immediate, I think, for Nahua metaphysics.

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NOTES


2. I have in mind especially James Maffie’s Aztec Philosophy: Understanding a World in Motion (Boulder: Colorado University Press, 2014). Maffie has, in his entry “Aztec Philosophy” for the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, http://www.iep.utm.edu/aztec (last accessed September 30, 2016), provided what is likely the most philosophic overview of Aztec ethics. His purpose here, however, was much broader.

3. In this respect, I have in mind especially Miguel León-Portilla’s La filosofía nāhuatl: Estudiada en sus fuentes con un nuevo apéndice, new ed., prologue by Angel María Garibay K. (Mexico City: UNAM, 2001 [1950]). The present essay is much indebted to some of the remarks León-Portilla makes in this book. I have also profited greatly from his Aztec Thought and Culture: A Study the difficulties with Bierhorst’s “ghost songs” hypothesis, see León-Portilla’s response in the “Introduction” to his Fifteen Poets of the Aztec World, especially pages 41–44.

19. For the Nahua transcriptions, see Ballads of the Lords of New Spain, fols. 21 r.—22 v. The translation is from Fifteen Poets of the
Aztec World, 91.


21. One may find the original Nahua text in Cantares Mexicanos: Songs of the Aztecs, transcription and translation by John Bierhorst (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), fol. 9v. The translation, for the above noted reason, is substantially modified.

22. An important implication of this point, but which I cannot develop at length here, is that the Nahua sense of "truth" is rather different from a correspondence theory of truth—something which I've often thought to be Aristotle's stance on truth. For the Nahua, one not only comes to know the truth, but most fundamentally comes to live the truth.


25. This topic has long been the subject of study among classicists. While Werner Jaeger develops this thesis to some extent, I have in mind the patient argument which A. W. H. Adkins develops in his Moral Values and Political Behaviour in Ancient Greece: From Homer to the End of the Fifth Century (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1972). The whole of the book is devoted to supporting the points just made.

26. For the specifics on the Confucian tradition on virtue as de and ren, see chapter one of Jiuyan Yu’s The Ethics of Confucius and Aristotle: Mirrors of Virtue (New York: Routledge Press, 2007).

27. Following Lopez Austin, in The Human Body and Ideology: Concepts of the Ancient Nahua, trans B. Ortiz de Montellano and T. Ortiz de Montellano (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1998), 189, another possible candidate would be the "upright man," tlaçamahualnetl. This term derives from tlaçati, meaning human, and melauacayotl, meaning rectitude or making something straight. The term, however, likely had a more specific sense. I tend to think it a closer candidate for Aristotle's phronimos. Another possible candidate is tlaçohuayotl, which is sometimes translated as "excellence." Yet this term derives from tlaçohi, which means valuable or expensive, and so is more likely a term for inherent worth, or (better) highest worth.

28. In what follows, it may be helpful to bear in mind that Nahua does not have a standard orthography, though current scholarship tends to use a modified Franciscan lexigraphy. The F.C. in particular tends to make non-standard use even from one line to the next. One should bear in mind, then, that "r" and "y" are often substitutes, and "x" and "h" are as well. In the F.C., the existence of glottal stops and breathers is most commonly indicated with an "h."

29. In fact, the "-ness," indicating an abstractive substantive in English, is not present in the Nahua. I added it for the purposes of readability.

30. Florentine Codex, vol. 10, 2. These translations are my own. Dibble and Anderson render the entire phrase as "the good daughter."

31. To be fair to Dibble and Anderson, one purpose of their translation was to stay in contact with the insights that informed the Spanish and to translate through Spanish to English. If Sahagún interpreted the Nahua in a specific way, then their task was to make that known in English as well. My goals are different ones.

32. Florentine Codex, vol. 10, 2. Translation is my own.

33. Of all the authors that make this contrast, John Rawls is likely the clearest. For his account of the categorical imperative procedure and its difference from the categorical imperative itself, see his Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy, ed. Barbara Herman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), especially chapter ten on the categorical imperative. He makes the contrast between orders of justification in A Theory of Justice, rev. ed., 24–30 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

34. N.E., 1094a.

35. “ta men gar eisin energiai, ta de par’ autas erga tina” (1094a2-3).


38. N.E., 1098a.

39. Ibid., 1095b.

40. This approach to the organization of our preferences, so that (1) eudaimonia is the skillful (i.e., excellent) management of our telic hierarchy, and (2) a way of life is what sits atop the hierarchy would appear to enable Aristotle to avoid the sorts of concern Larry Temkin raises in Rethinking the Good. Moral Ideals and the Nature of Practical Reason (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). A key objection Temkin raises is that our preferences cannot be demonstrated to be strictly transitive, so that preference orders (and so equivalence relations) cannot be said to obtain for our preferences. This spells trouble for informed preference consequentialists and anyone who agrees broadly with John Rawls' descriptive account of the good in part three of A Theory of Justice. Aristotle's conception of the good, if the above is correct, would appear to allow him to avoid this sort of concern, since a bios requires only a characteristic way of putting goals in relation to each other, and not anything like even a partial preference order. The matter, clearly, is more complex than can be addressed here, but I thought it worth noting that Aristotle's approach may avoid a number of modern headaches concerning the good.

41. This is Aristotle’s argument in the Nicomachean Ethics, 1177a10-1178a10.


43. Ibid., 1252b.


45. These points have been made at length in Lopez Austin’s work as well as David Carrasco’s Religions of Mesoamerica: Cosmimson and Ceremonial Centers (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1990).

46. Florentine Codex, vol. 6, 127. Translation modified. Incidentally, this phrase, which looks to be an insult, is a compliment in Nahuah culture. One "balances" one’s wishes of good fortune with bad fortune in order to wish another well. The section ends, for example, by welcoming the new couple into the society by telling them that they are abandoned. The statements read: “for it is our way of doing things on earth (in ihaltlicpac); for no one is concerned with anyone; for we have already abandoned thee. Take heed of this,” 132–33. Translation modified.

47. The present discussion makes use of points that Aristotle develops in books 1 and 10 of the N.E., but for the sake of clarity, I have omitted Aristotle's distinct discussion of pleasure in book 7. I do not think the present argument turns on the difference between pleasure understood as an uninterrupted activity, as one largely finds it in book 7, and pleasure as a sort of perfection of our other activities. See Julia Annas’ essay, “Aristotle on Pleasure and Goodness,” in Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics, ed. Amelie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 285–99 for an account that reconciles Aristotle’s various statements on this topic.

48. N.E., 1174b.

49. Ibid., 1100b.

50. Ibid., 1099b.

51. Cantares Mexicanos, fols. 25r and v. Translation is slightly modified for readability from Miguel León-Portilla’s in Fifteen Poets of the Aztec World, 93.

52. I write "philosophers and elders” to indicate the possibility that these were distinct groups, though they likely were not.
53. I think the problems are well-known. Yet, to be a little more specific, a principle problem facing any morally “holist” account of action guidance is that forms of fascism come to be readily supportable. If the community is the ultimate unit of moral concern, then the sacrifice of an individual is of no more consequence than the sacrifice of a gangrenous finger to save the life of the individual (maybe even less so).

Tsotsil Epistemology: An Intangible Inheritance

Manuel Bolom Pale

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When we think that reality is constructed, what we are doing is considering a space needing of conquest.

—Hugo Zemelman

INTRODUCTION

In what follows, I will reflect on originary peoples [pueblos originarios]. Specifically, my reflections will focus on the thought, cosmovision, and philosophy of the Tsotsil peoples of Huixtán, Chiapas. The main objective of this work is to propose arguments that will allow us to better understand the postures and forms of resistance that characterize the thought of these people, as well as their communal practices, their principles, enunciations, and sayings, so as to open up the possibility of reconsidering our own reality, especially in the realm of education.

Authors such as Leopoldo Zea, Enrique Dussel, Walter Mignolo, Aníbal Quijano, Arturo Escobar, Edgardo Lander, Francisco López Segrera, Hugo Zemelman, Boaventura Sousa Santos y Daniel Carlos Gutiérrez Rohán share as a common theme the advent of a new Latin American thinking; however, it is not my objective to take up the critical apparatus of these authors, but rather, what interests us here is to show that there are other forms of thinking and other points of departure that can be found outside [established] theory and external to academic philosophies, namely, the philosophical practices of originary peoples.

In our study, we have decided to look at thought, experience, and knowledge from the standpoint of the specific philosophical practices of the Tsotsil, risking, of course, that we have involuntarily situated ourselves in the myopic vision of our own perspective. Affirming “our own perspective” means that we also accept the existence of “other” perspectives; even if it is just in the act of indicating this or that, we present ourselves with every judgment of comparison, and we make distinctions because there are certainly things about us that we recognize but would rather not. For this reason, we must distinguish, in the construction of knowledge, between thought and practice.

The study of thought requires vigilance and, simultaneously, the capacity to admire. Thus, we are allowed to contemplate the otherness of the indigenous given that the myth of homogeneity has been, finally, demolished. This is significant since in the past the problem has always been the negation of indigenous knowledge, brought about by the need to legitimate the paradigms of the great theorists, and has also made it so that other, more urgent things in relation to thought have to be kept out of consideration. Thus, in what follows we aim to see past a fissure, with critical eyes, toward the thought of originary peoples, namely, the thought of the Tsotsil.

With the Tsotsil, knowledge is constructed in accordance with certain categories that point to the profundity of their historical thinking in relation to practice. This means that practice has a lot to do with the construction of subjects; as such, the objective of this text will be to undertake an approximation of a Tsotsil philosophy in order to reflect on the different perspectives that this philosophy takes and, thus, broaden our own sociocultural historical horizon. For this reason, and as we go, we will introduce certain concepts that will allow us to reflect on diverse philosophical categories, such as p’iij, p’iij o’ントonal, pasel, ich’el ta muk’ na’el.

P’IJ

The concept of p’iij has several layers. We’ll mention just a few in what follows. To begin with, we should mention that p’iij refers to something that is found in its fullness, complete, and mature [integro, completo y maduro]. In one linguistic variation, the peoples of San Juan Chamula call it bij; however, both roots can be traced specifically to a numerical root in the tsotsil language referring to things or objects which are circular. Moreover, bij is the capacity of the subject to fulfill himself as subject, or a subject that has the necessary qualities to live in the community. This implies a moment in which the subject becomes complete, something that may not have much to do with the way in which this completeness comes about, but which is, rather, about an analogy between knowledge and the capacities of the subject, for instance, with dialogue, which has its beginning and its end, slikeb and slajebe, referring to a circling around a conversation. These two elements have to do with Mayan numbering practices. Furthermore, the person who is p’iij has knowledge, is wise, manages wisdom [sabiduría]; we could say that this person is a person who knows about life, a person with common knowledge.

Outlines of what will eventually become knowledge are manifested in dreams (vaech); dreamers then project these outlines in conversation [plática] and coexistence as a form of sharing. Much of what these outlines become, these knowledges, are not going to be written in texts, but will remain at the level of dialogue, in the construction of possible worlds, in which dreams constitute a pre-comprehension and pre-construction of reality and of the world; moreover, this is knowledge that must be put into practice—elders say that words have ch’ulel, they contribute to the constitution of subjectivity.

Concepts for reality and constitution are but schemas or frameworks that subjects construct on an individual, familial, and community basis and point to a complexity of interconnections, a complexity that has neither a center or a simple multiplicity of centers, but a species of
The experiences of dreams and of life are configured in dialogue; dreaming and living represent the duality of real world and possible world projected in narrative: here we have the construction of thinking. The narrator organizes a sense and, simultaneously, reconfigures reality. This happens when the narrator takes as his point of departure a lived experience that he is familiar with or when he interprets a fact; interpretation forcefully summons the imaginary, which makes the individual represent within himself a specific form, in such a way that the narrator configures the context from his own schemes, generated from the experiences of his own life. As such, the construction of thought, through the word, and through communal education, are plotted as labor made possible by the unity of circumstance and subject. This is why narrative only comes alive in the act of sharing. To understand always implies interpretation, and all interpretation and application begins with a pre-understanding. At work in understanding, there is always an idea of what one wants to understand, and what one wants to understand is rooted in the situation of the one who interprets; that is, I understand the other from my understanding of his horizon, and I understand the horizon of the other from an understanding of mine.

P’IJIIL O’NTONAL
Sk’an chi jilo’laj xchi’uk ti kontontike is part of a profound reflection undertaken in order to understand oneself as subject, and it implies dialogue with one’s heart in order to know one’s self. Kaibetik sk’op ti ko’ntontike is to listen to the suggestions of the heart. As such, to think with one’s heart is important to Tsotsil culture. P’iijil jol o’nton refers to the intellect or the capacities of one’s head and heart, but the connection between thoughts and emotions has to do with the way of being tsotsil. Lek o’ntonal kerem refers to a child with a good heart and is also a synonym of learning. Jamal yo’nton refers to an open heart, that is, to the existence of a disposition to know or to learn. Sna’ yo’nton means that one’s heart knows, but also that one’s heart remembers. T’abesel ta o’ntonal, vulesel ta o’ntonal refers to a return to the heart.

The heart is that which carries p’iijil, that wisdom that distinguishes persons from other types of living beings; it must be developed by all individuals following . . . the directions of one’s life (or following the guidelines given by day of one’s birth). When a person fails to act in accordance with the directives of his p’iijil, it is said that he has no heart, that he is incomplete (mu ts’akaluk), or, simply, that he has no head nor heart.
The heart is the intermediary for the relation between the individual and the world. In this sense, we consider as fundamental that the person utilize her heart in the business of everyday, that is, that the person must analyze, reflect, and corroborate her social practices before making any decision. Thus it is said that the heart, in relation with the head (joj), fulfills an important role for the group to which one belongs because it allows individuals to think for themselves, that they understand their environment and their relations with others. The formation of the Tsotsil individual is constructed, moreover, on the basis of a vital principle, which is the heart in relation with the ch'ulel, that is, with his interior, his being, his heart, his center, and his nucleus.

That vital principle which is the heart is perceived as a specific place for thought to take place, but also for the emotions, as is alo ti k'usi xchi ti avo'ntone (“say what your heart thinks or feels”), which is an expression of feelings, what identifies and knows your heart, on the basis of this expression, certain other feelings are identified which are derived from personal, familiar, communal, or social situations or problems. J’a ti k’usi chal ti avo’ntone (“what my heart feels”) and ja’ ti k’usi tsnop ti a vo’ntone (“what your heart thinks”) are expressions used to manifest the emotive state and certain types of feelings and sensations of p’ijilal. Moreover, the heart is where the cognitive, emotive, and sensational processes take place, those that express the experiences of the Tsotsil people in accordance with their own reality.

It is clear that whoever educates must be aware of the proper way of understanding the world that surrounds him in order to be part of it, that is, to be p’ij in the heart of a culture or society. For that reason, preparing the youth means to allow them to take ownership of themselves, to have them be responsible in the culture, that they are capable of lending life to their word, that they are capable of self-criticism. They must listen to their parents and to the words left behind by their elders; that is, it is not about listening to words divinely dictated, but rather to those words spoken which are the product of actual experience and self reflection. In this way, children are educated so that they may be capable of dialogue with their heart, so that they may be owners of only one heart.

There are three great imperatives related to one’s speaking with one’s heart. They are:

- Lo’iilaj xchi’uk ti avo’ntone.
- K’ojojojan xchi’uk ti avo’ntone.
- Chi’no ta lo’iil xchi’uk avo’ntone.

These imperatives constitute the manner in which one must educate and develop oneself in order to understand the word of the heart. Lo’iilaj xchi’uk ti avo’ntone means to dialogue with one’s heart; it is a way of talking with one’s heart. K’ojojojan is dialogue itself and ch’ino refers to bringing one’s heart to a conversation with others. When we speak of reflection, thought, dialogue, or ideas, we refer to a thinking from the heart, to that speaking with oneself, to being with oneself in the act of dialogue; this is why we speak of unfolding oneself, since that is the way to understanding.

Analyzing each one of these concepts would take some time, since about each one of them a book could be written. But the central idea is that understanding each concept awakens the heart, as well as the individual’s social conscience. Each expression tells us how to behave in some determinate context—individual, familiar, or communal—and each word, each proclamation, aims to attach itself to thought and to the heart so that one is able to reflect the wisdom of totil- me’iletik, bankiilal, jnitvanej, jam k’o’opteiy, those who open dialogues. . . .

All of this makes possible that the heart is not lost. The heart is forged by the word and the chanubtasel, p’ijubtasel, which is the only action capable of forming the human heart and of orienting it in accordance with the desires of the community, since only through chanubtasel, p’ijubtasel does each man and each woman give meaning to their lives, a meaning that goes beyond the meaning given in everyday existence. Yut o’n’onal refers to a place within the heart, which is a type of sacred place for wisdom. The heart is characterized by its capacity to think and to live—what my heart says, ja’ ti k’usi chal ti ko’ntone. The heart has its word, it speaks its own tongue, in a murmur that is unintelligible but magnificent. . . . [W]hat the heart dictates is what words express so that words become but a part, a vibrant thing, rhythmic and sonorous that . . . refers to the soul and those feelings of which it speaks. There are words that violently strike and there are words that lovingly embrace, hard and terse words, some acidic, others sweet, others bitter, others poisonous. That is the way of the heart, and the word that is spoken is the profound ancestral word that is deposited in our heart. Previous words watch over us, they educate us, and in naming them the elements appear. Some condition us through time; others change from one episteme to another according to the expressions of our hearts, giving them the possibility to understand and name our world.

Nicolas Bolom tells us, sk’an xch’ani jutuk ti ko’ntontike (to silence the heart is a primordial act) because the word is born from silence given that the intellect is able to feel non-verbally (ak’o snijan sba ti avo’ntone yu’un chchan). It thus appears that silence is really communicative when it is contrasted with speaking. As such the word that comes from the heart’s education is not lazy, idle, or empty, but it knows what it wants to say or express; it is consciousness and ch’ulel and it goes together with other human attitudes. Moreover, it is impassioned and rebellious since it is not written on paper but is read in the heart. We can ask ourselves why the words are so jealously guarded in the heart, and perhaps our answer will be that learning requires a perfect silence in order to speak; it is a means to return to the origin, to the first principle, to the silkeb of what is expressed. In the originary language, abstract ideas are frequently expressed through the use of the word heart (o’n’onal), as such, some fundamental existential expressions emanate from it.

OJTIKINEL IN RELATION WITH NA’EL
Ojtikinel and na’el are verbs that have great significance in the Tsotsil language. The first means to be acquainted
with [conocer]. If the child is acquainted with something, it is because he adopts a manner of being and knowing in which he can identify any other kind of knowing and how it applies to everyday life. That is, ojti kinel implies an approach to the real from a place of dynamic complexity; this is because the space is made up of a system of relations between multiple communal subjects. This is why the child must dutifully confront the equilibriums or disequilibriums between different faculties that make up the subject, giving importance to intuition and imagination, as well as will, over analytic and synthetic cognition and relating specialized cognition with cognition in general.

The second verb, na’el, has to do with knowledge and memory. Na’el means to know, but it also means to be, knowing how to be, and knowing how to do. It suggests that whoever thinks must live in accordance with his context and is at the same time recalling knowledge. . . . This verb is never separated from ojti kinel. Both concepts relate and complement each other because when the child is acquainted with or knows, then he is becoming complete even if he lacks ch’ulel (consciousness).

Appreciating acquaintance and knowledge, k’uxubinel ti ojti kinele xchi’uk ti sna’ele, is extremely important since it constitutes the genealogy (slikeb) of all that has been known and confronted. If these are not appreciated, this means that they do not form part of one’s thought, one’s practice, and one’s being in Tsotsil life.

What has been said refers to the formative resources available to Tsotsil individuals as they seek to develop themselves in an integral fashion so as to adequately participate in their society. As such, elders (tolti-me’iletilk) propose various value concepts of great importance that determine the character and personality, signified by sna’el snopel, spasel, and, consequently, the form of comportment in society and with nature. These concepts or values are

- **J-abetes**: a person with initiative, solidarity, economic power, and hard working.
- **P’ijilal**: a person with wisdom, good thoughts, and respectful.
- **Jtak’ivanej, j-al mantal**: a person with strength of mind and spirit, capable of addressing others with wisdom and philosophy.
- **Chanel**: a person that learns new things daily.

These four values, concepts, or principles are significant because they not only have to do with the comportment and behavior of human beings but also with nature. For the raising of children, different interrelated aspects of Tsotsil culture intervene. These are k’el bai, k’an bai, tak’iel, as grounds of personal and social identity; ich’bai ti muk’ ta p’ijubbasel, which makes possible the transmission and generation of spiritual and religious cognitions; and k’otesbel yo’ntron, ak’bel yil, as the forms themselves of education and formation, aspects that are developed in the process of socializing individuals into Tsotsil culture.

The main instrument for the transmission of these values is language, which allows sharing the symbolic universes of culture itself.

**NOTES**

1. A subject who is responsible, that knows how to work, that has initiative, that has principles that accord with the context in which he finds himself, that has the reflexive capacity to participate in an assembly. In the case of women, that she knows how to sow, prepare meals. . . . take care of fowl, garden, and knows how to care for the children, etc.

2. Slikeb is the beginning, but it is not numerical. Rather, it is represented by the figure of a snail, a seed, or a flower. Each one of these elements is fundamental: the snail represents the beginning or the end, and in iconography is used in Maya’s numbering practices; the seed represents the birth of all being and the flower represents the beginning for the fruit or the seed. This means that Mayan thought is cyclical, but not infinite, as it is limited in its numbering to 1 to 20. Tsotsil thought is likewise organized into units of 20.

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**Luis Villoro: Universal Mexican Philosopher**

Mario-Teodoro Ramírez

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**INTRODUCTION**

Luis Villoro, the most important philosophical figure of contemporary Mexico, was born on November 3, 1922, and died on March 5, 2014. He began his academic and intellectual activity in the late 1940s in the context of the impact produced by the Mexican Revolution of 1910 in all areas of national life. Along with other young philosophers—Leopoldo Zea, Emilio Uranga, Jorge Portilla—Villoro helped to found el grupo Hiperión, which sought to apply to the national situation the ideas of the European philosophical currents in vogue at the time, in particular, historicism and existentialism. Overall, the group set out to philosophically think the Mexican problem and produced, in its brief existence (1948–1952), some of the most significant essays in Mexican philosophy of the twentieth century, e.g., Emilio Uranga’s “Analysis of Mexican Being,” or the “Phenomenology of Relajo” by Jorge Portilla. Villoro published two books in this time: Great Moments of the Indigenismo in Mexico (1950), and The Ideological Process of the Revolution of Independence of 1952, which showed a sophisticated and original combination of philosophical talents and historical skill. Villoro is clear that the question about Mexican being should be answered on historical-critical grounds and not purely on conceptual or philosophical grounds or in a psychological or sociological manner.

However, dissatisfied with certain derivations and nationalist/ideological questions opened up by Hyperion, Villoro refrains from these issues and sets out to seek, or better yet, build a philosophical conception appropriate to his own worries and purposes. He thus undertakes some valuable reflections on Eastern philosophy, Husserlian phenomenology, modern philosophy (Descartes, in
particular), analytical philosophy, Marxism, philosophy of culture, etc., which give him theoretical tools that allow him to work and contribute to issues in such diverse philosophical disciplines as philosophical anthropology, epistemology, the critique of ideology, ethics, political philosophy, philosophy of religion, and others. But beyond specific issues, trends, and doctrines, Villoro was and wanted to be primarily a philosopher, that is, someone who intended to think the totality of existence in its complexity and in its realization. He had the ability and interest to deal with universal themes, to dedicate the rigor that the philosophical discipline requires, and yet he also had the sensitivity to address the problems of his concrete historical and social reality, i.e., the Mexican reality. In the tension between the universal and the particular—a string that stretches across the entirety of twentieth century Mexican philosophy—Villoro was able to situate himself in the realm of the “concrete,” that is, the universal-individual or the particular-universal, where there was no denying any of these two poles. The task was not, for the Mexican philosopher, to simply find a “dialectical solution” to the universal-particular dilemma but, moreover, to know how to move intelligently and with sensitivity from one pole to another, from one dimension to another.

The conception that Villoro deploys onto the relationship between culture and values better allows us to understand his notion of the meaning and place of philosophical practice (which is also a varlorative practice). As a matter of principle, regarding the nature of value, the Mexican philosopher questions both the universalist conception as well as the particularistic conception, that is, both the position that values are simply universal as well as the position that holds that values are relative to a context or are particular, historically and geographically situated in a world. For Villoro there is no direct apprehension of values, rather values are mediated by culture, by the specific cultural world in which the human subject unfolds and properly exists. This because, and we can propose this by our account, values are not concepts or formal definitions that can be grasped by a purely intellectual process. Values are qualities that are said of objects, events, or people and are understood—valued [valorados]—in the context of a specific socio-cultural world. However, this does not mean that values as such are something “particular,” that every culture has its own distinctive set of values, and thus that the cultures are incomparable or incommensurable in their axiological conceptions. What is unique is the way we apprehend and understand values, not values as such. Now, if there is no direct apprehension of values, then there is no “universal culture,” which is the most questionable assumption of axiological universalism leading to that vice that we call ethnocentrism, and, more precisely, "Eurocentrism" as the assumption that European culture (and Western-modern, in general) is the "universal culture," the culture that does not need a culturally mediated apprehension of values—which is simply a contradiction and, therefore, allows itself the right to impose its conception to other cultures. According to Villoro, "axiological universalism" is an ideology that legitimates domination. But “value relativism” is not the solution, as it disarms cultures of their critical-rational capacity: that is, if all cultures are "equal," then we have no basis to criticize the dominant, hegemonic, or ethnocentric cultures.

For our philosopher both are true: values are indeed universal, but there is no universal culture; each particular culture is a way of apprehending, understanding, and realizing universal values. Thus, there is no incommensurability between cultures, which are all, in their complex diversity, pointing one way or another to those values. To the extent that every culture is capable of apprehending values (universal values), every culture has the ability to transcend its closed particularity and be open to the Other, to separate it. Certainly, a culture can deny that openness and stay in a self-affirmation of identity, but this means precisely that culture refuses universal values, i.e., the value. A culture thus ends up denying itself, ceases to be, properly, culture. This implies, and Villoro holds this to be the case, that the essential dimension of what we call "culture" consists of evaluative possibilities (autonomy, authenticity, meaning, effectiveness’). Each culture is a way of valuing, or making values: justice, freedom, equality, dignity, solidarity, truth, beauty, etc., and, simultaneously, values are nothing and signify nothing—they have no worth—but only to the extent in which they are realized, in which they are brought to bear on the living space of their social-practical application.

We can now define the Villorian conception of philosophical activity. We can say that for him there is no universal philosophy but merely a particular access which culturally mediates the philosophical universal. But it is just not about making philosophy which is "particular" philosophy, identified with a specific context and peculiar features, alienated from the major themes of universal thought. But neither is it about denying any reference to the particular, identified only with an abstract and general philosophical activity, which is the same for everyone. What our particularity determines is the way we treat philosophical universality: the order of importance of the topics, the meaning or nuance we give them, the consequences we draw from our treatment, and the context to which we direct our theoretical and philosophical contributions. We bow to the universal while not denying our uniqueness but deepening ourselves in it, radically thinking its conditions and essential features, and noting that these are not contrary or too distant to our ends or to what every thinking human being posits for herself anywhere in the world.

For Villoro, to philosophize is to build that space of “concreteness” where the universal and the particular, far from opposing each other, resonate with each other and configure a thinking that, as universal, continues to show signs of socio-cultural particularity, and being particular continues to open horizons and vectors of universal significance. This mutual determination, this movement of double reversibility, is what constitutes the form of philosophical practice that Villoro exercises and somehow constitutes a reference or even a model for philosophers in Mexico and elsewhere.

On the basis of this relationship between universality and particularity, we can now explain what we consider the three basic philosophical contributions of Luis Villoro: 1)
the epistemological contribution, as a theory of the plurality of knowledge; 2) the ethical contribution as a political philosophy of the community from the experience of the indigenous peoples of Mexico; and 3) the metaphysical or ontological contribution, as anticipation of current philosophical realism, both a new and old philosophical and universal perspective.

1. THE EPistemOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTION

As we said a moment ago, Villoro conceives philosophy as an essential and integral activity. His activity as a philosopher is not exhausted by any philosophical discipline or assignment to any current or doctrine of thought. Villoro is not thinking theories or philosophies but reality as such and the problems it poses. Philosophy is not an end in itself but a means to understand what there is and how to act and live in the world. Philosophy has a telos that points beyond itself, is not thinking for the sake of pure thinking.

From this perspective we must locate the important theory of knowledge that our philosopher develops and presents in his book Creer, Saber, Conocer.1 We want to make clear, first, that Villoro’s aim is not to construct a theory of knowledge per se, but it must be understood in the context of questions posed by his overall philosophical quest. The problem Villoro raises as the basis for his project, and considering the Mexican context of his reflection, is whether we can have an adequate theory of the relationship between knowledge and practical-social life, or, more generally, between thought and life, between reason and praxis. That is, can we have a rational practical or philosophically oriented life? Can knowledge help us live better, allowing us to overcome violence, domination, injustice? This point is what allows us to observe that the specific contribution to the theory of knowledge that Villoro makes is found in the third epistemological category he analyzes, “conocer,” i.e., personal knowledge and wisdom.23 Somehow Villoro believes that the tradition of the theory of knowledge has forgotten or ignored that third possibility of knowledge, focusing solely on the analysis of the first two: belief (belief, ideology) and knowledge (valid belief, science), and forcing us to choose between one or the other: social practice can only be either ideological, based on a more or less valid ideology, although insufficiently rational, or scientific, founded on a scientific and technical know-how, on the knowledge of experts and a purely methodical-objective rationality. None of these options is acceptable to Villoro, as both have had questionable and disastrous consequences in the world of practical life.

It’s worth noting those definitions that our philosopher provides for those epistemic terms that give title to his book. He understands “creer” (belief) as a disposition of the subject to behave in a certain way under the assumption that something is the case. This assumption, “the belief,” can be justified on motives or reasons that the subject can claim. The motives are purely subjective motives for belief and can refer to desires, interests, conveniences, emotional states, or convictions which are religions or of some other kind; negatively put, these are conditions of the belief that have no objective and rational basis. On the contrary, the reasons for a belief are the arguments that an individual can give in order to hold it. As such, the belief becomes a “saber” (knowing) when the reasons that support it have a character of objectively and are methodically supported. The reasons affirm that the object of belief is the case and, therefore, that it exists regardless of what the particular subject creates. Villoro states that the “objectively reasonable reasons” are those that a particular epistemic community assumes as accepted according to the epistemological criteria governing the community. In this way we can explain the intersubjective character that, for Villoro, scientific knowledge possesses.

As for the definition of “conocer,” it is important to note the fundamental difference between it and creer (belief) and saber (knowing). While the latter epistemic functions refer to the world of beliefs, “el conocer” refers to a reality as it is apprehended through personal and lived experience. “Conocer” is to have an experience of the thing or situation; it is knowledge about the entity and its real qualities. In Spanish, there is a big difference between saying “conozco a Carlos” [“I know Carlos”] and saying “I believe Carlos is michoacano” or “I know Carlos is michoacano.” The first formula expresses knowledge that can be justified on real experiences or data or evidence to realize that this experience is real. The second formula is based on grounds or probable reasons, more or less certain (other beliefs, certain assumptions), while the third formula is based on reasons that are considered objectively valid (his birth certificate, his identity card, or other objective) tests. It can even be the case that it can express the third but not the first formula; for example, I can say “sé quién es Donald Trump pero no lo conozco”—“I know who Donald Trump is but I do not know him” (or want to know him). Thus, it is clear that “conocer” (familiar knowledge) constitutes a kind of knowledge which is original and irreducible to the other types.

“Conocer” refers to all the forms of knowledge we have of reality or of the human world through those experiences that cannot be reduced either to ideology or science. This includes not only personal knowledge, but also interpersonal knowledge, aesthetic knowledge, emotional knowledge (religion as a form of experience and not as ideological doctrine), and ethical-axiological knowledge (i.e., understanding of values). According to Villoro, “conocer” can be formed into a set of consistent concepts and shared communally, which is what is designated by the term “wisdom,” which is not mere belief or mere knowledge, but a way of being and living. Says our philosopher, “A scientist is not necessarily a wise man. For a sage it is not one who applies theories, but applies lessons learned from life experiences.”23

Now, in the same way that ideology can refer, albeit vaguely or extrinsically, to a certain group or social class, and that scientific knowledge is held in the rules and procedures of an epistemic community, wisdom refers to what the Mexican philosopher calls “sapiential communities,” or better yet, we could name them on our own terms as “cultural communities,” i.e., a set of subjects that concretely and experientially share in certain knowledges, experiences, values, ways of acting and living, of feeling, etc. Thus we have, for example, a community of artists, or teachers, a professional community or a religious...
community; finally, an ethnic community or one that exists in a particular geographical area and shares a common tradition of ideas, values, and social practices, such as the indigenous peoples of Mexico.

For Villoro, knowledge (sabiduría) constitutes a form of self-knowledge (conocimiento) and also possesses a kind of specific rationality that lies in the notion that beliefs (convictions) of knowledge (sabiduría) are founded on real praxis or, more precisely, on the consistency between the subject that believes and thinks and that which that subjects makes or lives. Although this consistency may be the subject of theoretical justification, it is usually a practical "justification"; that is, it is shown in action, in the work or behavior of an individual. Naturally, this requires the existence of other individuals who can testify to that justification.

Finally, with respect to modern epistemological discussion, Villoro proposes an alternative: to recover and observe the value of wisdom (sabiduría) as a specific and fundamental form of human knowledge and the exercise of human reason. Against those visions that reduce reason to its scientific form and which leave for practical life the dominion of non-rational, ideological forms of thinking, the Mexican philosopher finds that the possibility for human life lies elsewhere, in another place, in another dimension: it lies in a rationality that is rooted, vitalistic and practical, and communitarian. In general, Villoro sees wisdom (sabiduría), as a form of thinking that is different from both science and ideology, the alternative for social and human life.14

2. THE ETHICAL CONTRIBUTION

A turn or change of perspective occurs in the intellectual trajectory of Villoro sometime in the early 1990s. This shift consisted, in line with the same preoccupation with praxis and the vital existential dimension, in his passing from an epistemological critique of ideology and a general proposal for the living of life under rational-epistemic parameters to a political critique of ideology and the more specific proposal of ethically grounding social praxis. In the same way that we find in philosophical thought and wisdom an alternative to the ideology-science dichotomy, in the practical field we can find an alternative to the dichotomy between ideological morality and rationalist utopianism: that is precisely the alternative of ethical thinking. This ethical-political trajectory is best reflected in Villoro’s Power and Value.15

In that book ourphilosopher deals with various issues of ethical theory and political philosophy; both are treated under the hypothesis that both issues should be closely linked. To think ethically in political terms and to think politically in ethical terms is the proposition that allows us to overcome the impasses of both a pure ethical theory (and its inveterate idealism) and a pure political theory (and its incorrigible pragmatism). Between the ideological idealism of established morality and the immorality of a policy subject to power one finds, according to Villoro, a double mediation between ethics and politics: an ethics that is not as such if it does not position itself in the matter of its own socially effective realization and a politics that is a sign of a human failure if it does not allow itself to be guided by ethical values. Ethics—that is, a life according to basic and universal values—is only plausible if it arises in the social context and in the struggle for the common good, that is, if it knows to link itself with a commitment to political praxis, to rationally coordinated social action. At the same time, political life suffering from a lack of ethical guidelines is reduced to a mere mechanism for the reproduction of social order and loses all critical and emancipatory possibility. For Villoro there is no purely “individual” ethics, but rather all ethical commitment involves a commitment to others. And there is no political or relevant collective social action without the assumption of values and ethical principles.

Starting from the question into the possibility of an ethically oriented social life, according to the universal values of freedom, autonomy, equality, and, particularly, as the value of solidarity justice, Villoro engages in a critical analysis of the forms of socio-political organization or state in which they have existed. He discusses three types: the State for Order, the State for Freedom, and the State for Equality. The first is the form that prioritizes the value of order (security, survival of the social group, etc.) and operates under the principle of the subjection of individuals and social groups to an autonomous power that supposedly guarantees the smooth running of society. The second type of state, which is a product of modern revolutions, aims to ensure individual rights and the exercise of freedoms; it sets limits to authoritarian forms of the State for Order. The third type of state, which actually is a complement of the second, is the state that seeks to guarantee social or collective rights under the purpose of achieving greater and fairer equality and adequate conditions of life for all its members.

Villoro considers the three types of states as having been unable to create a just, free, harmonious, and creative social life. This is because the nature of the state is to become a structure of domination on the social body, i.e., to abide by politics that always subordinates values to power, social life to the interests of class or group. In general, Villoro questions the various modern political ideologies. Neither liberalism nor socialism, neither nationalism nor social democratic approaches are attractive, not only in relation to the particular conditions of Mexico but also in terms of a universal conception of justice. Therefore, Villoro proposed to interpret and assume the perspective of indigenous groups in our country, particularly those of Chiapas indigenous groups organized around the EZLN and that came to the world’s attention in 1994.

The indigenous political philosophy (Zapatista) that Villoro reclaims is structured around the following principles or normative ideals: a) the construction of social life guided by ethical principles, where power is subjected to value; b) the practice of direct and participatory democracy, which monitors and prevents that political representation alienates itself from the community by positioning itself as a separate power “over” the community (this is the Zapatista principle of “govern by obeying”); c) the freely assumed priority (an area on which the critical spirit of Villoro is highlighted) of the community over the individual, namely, the questioning of the forms of egoistic and anti-social individualism that characterizes modernity, but also of authoritative and taxing forms of social integration; d)
the recognition of the values of cultural tradition as a source
of meaning for contemporary life, a respectful relationship
with nature, and a holistic and centered conception of
the sacred as a meaning for life in its totality, as universal
communion of all beings.\footnote{17}

Hence, Villoro finds in the indigenous world an alternative,
a political-cultural-ethical model, with which to address
orders and insufficiencies of modern society. We must
clarify two important points: 1) the Mexican philosopher
also argues that we should not abandon the valuable
achievements of modernity, as the scientific spirit when
it is well understood, that is, without dogmatism and
reductionism, the defense of freedom and the value of
Individual freedom (without the excesses of selfish, and
even nihilistic, individualism); 2) also Villoro is aware
that the ethical and political indigenous model cannot
be simplistic extrapolated to modern life: rather, it’s
about taking its principles as guidelines concerning social
and political transformation in our own time. In any event,
what we must change is our perception and appreciation
of indigenous cultures under a generously multicultural
perspective. Beyond the recognition of the rights of
indigenous communities, we must also, and perhaps
this is the most important point, be willing to learn from
indigenous thought and practice, to see what they can
Teach us.

3. THE METAPHYSICAL CONTRIBUTION
Along with the great philosophical issues to which we have
referred, i.e., the epistemological, ethical, and political,
Villoro was also interested in the ultimate questions about
the meaning of existence, the Self, the Holy, the Divine,
etc.\footnote{15} He expressed this interest in a somewhat lateral and
discreteway, which he framed within the broad outlines
of twentieth-century thought—analytic philosophy,
phenomenology, Marxism. Our author was aware that his
theological-philosophical, metaphysical, and ontological
interests had no place (and would not be well regarded)
under those theoretical paradigms, which all coincide
in rejecting metaphysics and assuming some form of
atheism. However, the recent crisis in the theoretical
paradigms noted above as well as the emergence of new
philosophical conceptions proposed so far in this century,
as the ontological turn of speculative realism, can retrieve
and assess the metaphysical intuitions of Villoro and allows
us to give them a fair and essential place in the whole of
his thought.

First, we must recall the ontological realism that Villoro
maintained as the ultimate thesis in his theory of
knowledge. Against epistemologies of a formalist pragmatic
kind, that is, against the assumption that the analysis of
the processes of knowledge exhausts any ontological
question or, in other words, against the assumption that
epistemology eliminates the need for Ontology, Villoro
points in Creer, saber, conocer that the assumption that
there is a reality independent of the subject and its
frameworks of knowledge is a condition for the possibility
of objectivity and the truth of knowledge. “The existence
of a reality independent of the subject,” explains Villoro,
“onto which judgments can be adapted, is the only rational
explanation, both of the coincidence of the objective
justifications of a plurality of subjects, as the progress of
knowledge itself.”\footnote{19}

However, hesitant to return to any metaphysical thought
in the classic mode (as dogmatic and unfounded),
Villoro cannot find the theoretical means to support his
assertion of the primacy of the reality and the possibility
of an ontology. In his last essay “On Truth,”\footnote{20} he stretches,
we believe fruitlessly, phenomenological conceptions
and linguistic pragmatics to seek to justify the classical
definition of truth as “correspondence” or a reference
to a trans-subjective reality. Regardless of the issues of
method, it is clear that our philosopher refuses to believe
any “idealistic” position, but at the same time never settles
on overly restrictive guidelines of analytic philosophy and
ideological scientism, so that his reflection in some way
points to speculative realism (which also opposes both the
idealism and the empiricist or positivist realism) which has
recently been proposed by various thinkers such as Quentin
Meillassoux, Graham Harman, and Markus Gabriel.\footnote{21}

Clearly, Villoro is aware that an ontological-realism stance
is needed in order to escape the skeptical and relativistic
implications of modern and postmodern thought. In the search
for this stance he found the mystical path as the possibility of
accessing a completely other reality, absolutely other, with
respect to the human subject and all its determinants and
relativities. Thus, in his writings on philosophy of religion,
Villoro advocates a holistic conception of the divine as
silent and irreducible to any conceptualization or religious-
ideological or intellectual fixation. Although he does not
take a definitive position on the issue, it is understood that
there is no rational way to the Divine, only a mystical way. We
believe this position can be problematized. Similarly to
Wittgenstein, the Mexican philosopher also finds a way to
talk about that which cannot be spoken.” His conception
of the Divine is grounded, in fact, in a phenomenological-
rational reflection rather than a purely emotional posture,
one that is simply irrational. In his beautiful text “The
Blue Mosque,”\footnote{22} Villoro presents more than a theoretical
discussion about God and the sacred but a description of a
mystical experience in the first person, that is, the experience
that Villoro himself says he had while visiting the famous
church in Istanbul. Now, this does not rule out the possibility
of a metaphysical discourse (ontological-rational) about the
Divine and, in general, on the existence of an absolute reality
beyond human determinations. This possibility of a critical-
rational discourse about God (or the idea of God) is what
new realism has proposed in this century, particularly in the
version of the French thinker Quentin Meillassoux. What this
author proposes is the possibility of a (logical-speculative)
rational demonstration of the existence of a reality-in-itself
independently of consciousness and human life, that is, one
that is absolute.\footnote{23} This route would not be inconsistent with
the defense of rationality Villoro assumes in his philosophy,
though it would certainly force the opening of the discussion
about the possibility of metaphysical, ontological, and
speculative thought in the sphere of Mexican philosophy
and Latin American philosophy in general.

In some ways, the epistemological position of analytic
philosophy or the ideological-political currents in Latin
American thought generally have demonstrated their
insufficiency and incapacity to respond to the real necessities of life and thought in our countries, where philosophy normally lies between the form of thought which is totally alien to our concrete realities or a form of thought strongly committed to these realities but grounded on strong ideological positions which are at times simplistic and merely schematic. The general lack of interest in Latin American philosophers, in their accounts of the basic philosophical questions of metaphysics or ontology, is revealed as an inability of our philosophies to rationally justify an understanding of reality and an orientation for reliable and effectively binding praxis in our communities.

We believe, finally, that while our philosophy does not come to deal directly with basic metaphysical questions, the project of an autonomous and creative Mexican and Latin American philosophy will remain pending, in regards to its effective implementation. The line opened by the rigorous, consistent, and systematic philosophical elaboration of Villoro can be taken up and developed, certainly, under new contexts and new provisions, and according to new theoretical and practical-social challenges.

NOTES

12. Ibid. See especially Ch. 9: “Conocer y saber,” 197–221.
13. Ibid., 226.

In Search of the Philosophical Impulse: Zea and the Greeks

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The preoccupation with identity in the philosophy of Leopoldo Zea is part of a greater set of concerns in Latin American philosophy in general. However, the issues that Zea raises and the emergence of Latin American philosophy give way to questions about philosophy as a whole. In this paper I will examine some of the issues that Zea opens up in relation to the larger philosophical project. One particular passage from Zea will instigate this investigation and serve as a call to go back to the origins of Western philosophy. Throughout what follows I will examine the very possibility of philosophy in light of Zea’s observations, and I will attempt to show how Zea is closer to the spirit of the original philosophical impulse that drove the Greeks and, from there, examine the possibilities and questions this raises for the future of philosophy based on Zea’s thought.

Philosophy begins with a question—the authentic philosophical question begins in wonderment; any theory or treatise will always be an extension of this initial questioning. And so we have reached an era where perhaps our new, authentic sense of wonderment will be in relation to this question, “What is philosophy?”—What are the key terms of this investigation?—wonderment, question, authenticity, and philosophy. The nature of this paper is such that the definition of these terms are preliminary and that we remember that we want them to remain preliminary—tools for opening what we search for, attempting to remain humble about hasty assertions.

So I begin in brief with these definitions, of which I acknowledge their malleability:

- Wonderment – The space that opens before the question, the sense of awe at one’s own ignorance.
- Question – The notion of a question is also tied to authenticity, but part of the question of the question is this: Do I remember to keep the question? That is, does the question remain pressing, urgent, or is it easily satisfied or clouded out by existing theories? Does the history of philosophy sometimes prevent the emergence of original questioning?
Authenticity – Here I define what is authentic, as that expression which is truly one’s own, with the understanding of all conditioning and circumstances that influence what is one’s own.

Philosophy – philosophy will be, for now, intimately related to these other terms; perhaps for now, we will say that it is a search for wisdom that begins from the knowledge of the lack of that wisdom.

With these terms loosely established, I hope to come to a deeper understanding of them through the investigation that follows.

In one of Zea’s earliest articles, he concerns himself with the identity of Latin American culture and Latin American philosophy. In a key passage in this article, Zea’s affirmation of Latin American philosophy reveals a unique insight into what drives the philosophical impulse. Zea says that for Latin American philosophy to exist, it needs a Latin American culture from which to derive its content. So, Latin American philosophy will exist if we can affirm Latin American culture. But he goes on to say, “the formulation and attempt to solve this problem, apart from the affirmative or negative character of the answer, are already Latin American philosophy, since they are an attempt to answer affirmatively or negatively a Latin American question.”

What is exciting about Zea’s idea is that in attempting to ground philosophy in culture, he is actually grounding philosophy first, and grounding it universally. He reveals that the very method of questioning brings philosophy into existence. Here it is not yet philosophy based on tradition; it is philosophy as an essential human concern. Zea does not go on to clarify this idea precisely, but it brings many questions about the nature of philosophy to the foreground.

First, there is a novelty to this expression; Zea writes as if he were the first person to discover himself doing philosophy. He can’t deny that it is philosophy because he is asking a philosophical question, a question about identity. It is the unique historical point in which Zea and Latin American philosophy exist that reveals a question that is fundamentally essential, that has an urgency and authenticity to it that at the same time stands to remind the larger philosophical enterprise of the importance of the question. In a sense, Zea is showing himself and his predecessors to be in the tradition of those pre-Socratics who reached an impasse in their inquiry that could not be addressed by myth alone. These first philosophers began on totally new ground, from a place of wonder, as Aristotle famously said of them, “It is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize. . . . And a man who is puzzled and wonders thinks himself ignorant . . . therefore since they philosophized in order to escape from ignorance, evidently they pursued science in order to know . . . .” (Arist. Met. 1.2, 982b10-20). Aristotle here says that “men both now begin and at first began to philosophize . . .”

What makes Zea unique in this regard? I argue that the spirit of Zea’s questioning is closer to that initial impulse of the pre-Socratics, that it has a similar urgency, spontaneity, and newness to it. While, obviously, the starting points of concern for the pre-Socratics and Latin American philosophy are different, the spirit of their beginnings have strong similarities. Although the Greeks already had a rich history, there was no written precedence for philosophy, for these questions that initially centered on cosmology.

For Latin American philosophy, as Zea portrays it, the crisis in European culture, to which Latin American culture had always been so entangled, now found itself in a completely new situation. This situation, of no longer being able to rely on European culture while at the same time not having a firm identity without it, made the task of philosophizing more authentically attached to the questions it was asking. So in this way the question itself, while not resolving the issue of identity nonetheless reveals an identity. In stopping to appreciate that the questioning is itself philosophy, Zea is giving a piece to Latin American identity: to be Latin American will be, at some level, to be intimately engaged with this question of identity. All of our key terms have come into play and been expanded by Zea’s thought.

For Aristotle, the pre-Socratics were able to be open to these new philosophical ideas, to this sense of wonder, because they were able to be at leisure. For Zea, the circumstance for wonderment arises from crisis. In both cases something of the old cultural guideposts begs to be shed so that the emerging questions can find light. In both cases the old is not destroyed but assimilated. This sense of wonderment seeks independence but must acknowledge the ground on which it stands—the circumstances of its arising. Thus, Xenophanes can now look to the existing cultural norms established by the mythological poets and say, “Homer and Hesiod have attributed to the gods all things that are blameworthy and disgraceful for men: stealing, committing adultery, deceiving each other [F 17],” and propose a new possibility, “One God, greatest among gods and men, not at all like to mortals in body nor in thought [F 35].” This new independent thought takes stock of the circumstances and yet boldly attempts a new and independent proposition. For Zea, a similar approach arises in dealing with the influence of Europe and the possibility of a Latin American identity, the cultural framework of Latin America is, for Zea, inherited from Europe, and he says,

To become disengaged from it would be to become disengaged from the heart of our personality. We can no more deny that culture than we can deny our parents. And just as we have a personality that makes us distinct from our parents without having to deny them, we should also be able to have a cultural personality without having to deny the culture of which we are children. To be aware of our true relations with European culture eliminates our sense of inferiority and gives us instead a sense of responsibility. This is the feeling that animates the Latin American man today. He feels that he has “come of age,” and, as any other man who reaches maturity, he acknowledges that he has a past that he does not need to deny, just as no one is ashamed of having a childhood. The Latin American man knows himself to be the heir of Western culture and now demands a place in it.
Thus, having seen the importance of assimilating European culture, Zea can assert his new proposition about Latin American philosophy in its particular circumstances and as part of the larger philosophical project. Latin American philosophy will contribute to the philosophical issues of its own culture while at the same time contributing to the universal issues of European philosophy the issues of “being, knowledge, space, time, God, life, death, etc.” So, just as the unique circumstances of the Pre-Socratics allowed for a plurality of contributions as to the workings of the Universe and was born out of this sense of wonder, so too do these remarkable ideas of Zea’s propose a future wherein a plurality of cultures that have at once assimilated and outgrown the dominant philosophies might renew philosophy itself and restore philosophy as an essentially universally human impulse. Before I pursue the implications for the future of philosophy based on Zea’s insights, I want to continue with this comparison to the Greek tradition and look at how Zea defines philosophy and how philosophy came to be defined in practice by Socrates.

In their respective approaches to philosophy, there are two ideas that link Zea with Socrates. These are the concepts of “lack” and of “search,” which I will return to after broadly laying out Zea’s conception of philosophy. In *Cultural Identity and Social Liberation in Latin American Thought*, Ofelia Schutte summarizes Zea’s conception of philosophy. Philosophy is, for Zea, the highest expression and the foundation for culture. Philosophy serves the purpose of supplying lasting meaning to the lives of human beings given the constantly changing circumstances of everyday life. Where the varied expressions of culture attempt to supply meaning in a given social situation, for Zea, Schutte says, “philosophy represents the highest level of this attempt because it tries to offer not only an enduring but a universal representation of the meaning of human existence. Through philosophy a culture acquires a type of self-consciousness, that is to say, philosophy is the most significant cultural instrument through which an individual or a people can acquire self-knowledge.” Philosophy will be that which gives meaning to the historical person who is always changing in the struggles of her own circumstances.

Philosophy, in short, pushes beyond the current moment to provide something lasting. Schutte continues: “Zea may be interpreted to mean that where there is a lack of ideals that give meaning to life beyond the mere ‘living for the day,’ the conditions for culture (as well as for philosophy) are lacking.” The ideas of the philosopher, no matter how abstract, are meant to serve everyday reality. With each ensuing crisis of cultural values, philosophy stands ready to fill the need for new values. Medieval philosophy yielded revelation to modernity and reason, and the crisis in Europe, Zea believes, will force reason to yield to new values also. But philosophy will always be grounded in the particular, and claims to universality will have to contend with this fact. But Zea believes that Western reason “has tried to affirm itself in abstraction from this cultural mark.” Universality will happen historically, it will be arrived at by a collective accounting of “particular perspectives.” What Schutte’s summary highlights is the problem of contemporary philosophy, a problem of hegemony.

What I argue, in contrasting Zea’s views with the Greeks, is that there was a greater plurality of views and of discourse in the Greek era than we tend to recognize and that in keeping with Zea’s conception we ought to remember that, as abstract as our Greek philosophers may have been, it was always with an eye to bringing those ideas back to a grounding of ethics and public life. As it has been said a million times over, for the Greeks, philosophy was first and foremost a way of life. Furthermore, I would suggest that it is not the Greeks who are responsible for the hegemony that philosophy finds itself in today; they were merely the source that was exploited.

The Greeks did exactly what Zea asks of philosophy: where there was a lack of ideas to supply the culture with enduring meaning, the philosophers came to the fore and gave rich ideas which, at least on the ethical level, we are still hard pressed to contend with today in an era that sees a rise in the study of Aristotelian virtue ethics and is only beginning to revamp the ethical theories of Stoicism. We can see Zea’s concept of creating new value when the cosmological views of the pre-Socratics would be found useful but lacking as Plato and Socrates give way to “the ethical turn,” and just when philosophy had begun to become too “theoretical,” the Roman era makes an even stronger turn in the practical direction with the Stoics and the Pyrrhonian Skeptics.

Returning to the theme of “lack” and “search,” what Zea has been showing us all along is that philosophy begins from this sense of lack. The crisis in European culture and the question of Latin America’s cultural and philosophical identity reveal a “lack,” an emptiness which creates the aforementioned wonderment, the conditions for seeking a solution. Philosophy, then, begins when this wonderment is addressed by a question, and this is the “search.” In Zea’s description it will be the continuing “search” for giving meaning to the human conditions and addressing the need for new values in times of social crisis. And what about Socrates?

Beginning with Socrates’ portrayal in the *Apology*, we come back to one of the most oft repeated stories in philosophy, Socrates’ search for the wisest man in Athens. Here we can see Zea’s conception of philosophy played out in the individual. Being told by Chaerephon that the Oracle at Delphi has proclaimed Socrates the wisest man in Athens, Socrates is brought to this wonderment we are investigating and searches the city only to find that all those who proclaim knowledge do not really know what they claim. Socrates is thrown back on himself and proclaims in relationship to his interlocutors, he thinks he knows something when he does not, whereas when I do not know, neither do I think I know; so I am likely to be wiser than he to this small extent, that I do not think I know what I do not know” (Plato, *Apology* 21d-e).”

Now, I know we have all heard this story a thousand times, but it bears repeating here as we try to discover both what is unique about the spirit of Zea’s questioning and in appreciating the very nature of an authentic
philosophical question. Here Socrates might help us in registering what can make this impulse authentic, and it is in his appreciation of his own “lack.” This “lack” is what will instigate him to harass his fellow citizens and engage them in philosophy. Part of the goal of this paper is to remove Greek philosophy from its assumed position as the source of our current hegemonic philosophical system. Part of doing that is to be reminded of the lucidity of Greek thought. The fact is that Plato’s dialogues do not typically end with concrete assertions but rather in aporia, where the very process of questioning is always highlighted above and beyond any proposed theory. This fits well with Zea’s notion of particular historical perspectives coming together to form agreed upon universality. Plato does not demand allegiance in his dialogues but rather searches for universals that might apply to human needs. Most of the Socratic dialogues pursue a particular virtue but never pin down a specific definition of that virtue. Instead, we are led to a greater appreciation of pursuing the “search.” Where Socrates gives us a universal, it is in a return to appreciating the question of which he seems to be the only one not to lose sight of—the question itself, that we should pursue it with vigor; this is universal for Socrates. Heidegger uses Socrates when declaring that our most thought-provoking thought is that “we are still not thinking,” and that what gives us food for thought is at the same time drawing away from us, which somehow makes it near to us, and he says,

Once we are so related to what withdraws, we are drawing into what withdraws, into the enigmatic and therefore mutable nearness of its appeal. Whenever man is properly drawing that way, he is thinking—even though he may still be far away from what withdraws, even though the withdrawal may remain as veiled as ever. All through his life and right into his death, Socrates did nothing else than place himself into this draft, this current, and maintain himself in it. This is why he is the purest thinker of the West. This is why he wrote nothing. For anyone who begins to write out of thoughtfulness must inevitably be like those people who run to seek refuge from any draft too strong for them. An as yet hidden history still keeps the secret why all great Western thinkers after Socrates, with all their greatness, had to be such fugitives.

Heidegger’s mysterious quote might here help in this exploration of an authentic philosophical question. If I read him correctly, I think Heidegger’s interpretation of Socrates shows a man who feels and appreciates this “lack” to such a degree that even resorting to the written word is a retreat, a refuge from the philosophical “search.” And in the search for cultural identity Zea, in relation to this question, has revealed both the difficulty and the necessity of staying with this question. It seems, for Zea, to be a call that cannot be ignored. The “lack” and the “search” are maintained all the way through. I have thus far examined Zea and the origins of the philosophical impulse, but what can we glean from him for the future of philosophy and the pressing question that faces us today: What is philosophy?

We have touched on the issue of hegemony in philosophy, and this issue becomes apparent when we look at the debate between Zea and the Peruvian philosopher Augusto Salazar Bondy. Bondy will draw some fundamentally opposed ideas about Latin American philosophy in contrast to Zea. Where Zea finds the use of poetry, maxims, aphorisms, etc., in the history of Western philosophy to be legitimate forms of philosophical discourse, Bondy, trained in the analytic tradition, believes that philosophy is a technical and specialized field which should not be confused with poetry or literature. Bondy does not believe that Latin America has produced a significant philosophy and that the cause of this is imperialism. For Bondy, philosophy should be “of a cultural product expressing the life of the community in a rational form.”

Culture is connected to communities, and a culture can be either genuinely authentic or defective. An underdeveloped culture will not completely respond to the needs of its community. What marks a culture as defective is when it wrongly appreciates inauthentic works as authentic philosophy.

He uses three criteria for authenticity: originality, authenticity, and peculiarity. In accord with this criteria, any work that is repetitive, imitative, or peculiar will be inauthentic. So, for Bondy, since the history of Latin American philosophy meets the criteria of inauthentic, it is defective. We see again the connection between cultural identity and the possibility of a Latin American philosophy: because Latin America is an alienated culture, it lacks identity; because it lacks an authentic cultural identity, it cannot produce a genuine philosophy.

Bondy proposes a “philosophy of liberation” as the way towards an authentic Latin American philosophy. In order for Latin American and Third World countries to produce their own philosophy, they have to break free from underdevelopment and domination. This new philosophy will begin from this place of liberation.

Bondy has added to the conversation of Latin American identity and philosophy and put forth some issues that cannot be ignored. What Zea has offered us is a new way of thinking about what philosophy can be from where we are standing. The question that seems hard to avoid with Bondy is this question of the hegemony of philosophy and his entrenchment within the hegemony. In all that came before this section, we have been searching for the authentic philosophical impulse. In bringing the Greeks into this picture, the aim has been to see if we can unearth what made this philosophy possible in the first place. The Greeks, like the Chinese and Indian philosophers of the ancient world, existed in a historical time and place, and in that place they felt a “lack”; this “lack” itself brought philosophy into being. Why should the contemporary philosopher or a philosopher such as Zea be deprived of philosophy when philosophy has never needed ideal circumstances for its existence but, rather, has always thrived precisely in the recognition of what it is lacking? The lack could be whatever is pertinent to the philosopher and his circumstances; for the pre-Socratics, it was the lack of understanding of the Universe, for Plato and Socrates it was the recognition of the lack of wisdom that lead to the
search for it, and for Zea, it is the lack of a coherent cultural identity that drives his "search."

The notion that philosophy must adhere to strict principles of a profession and skill that Bondy wants to push does several things: one, it removes philosophy from the public and keeps it locked in academia, which betrays the notion of the philosophical impulse; it delays and therefore denies human beings existing in the world—right here, today—the possibility of philosophy until some ideal state has been reached. The hegemony of philosophy begins when a history of philosophy becomes a doctrine of how philosophy ought to be applied and thereby denies fresh voices and new thought.

I did not return to the origins of philosophy in the spirit of nostalgia, but to see if we might unearth what made philosophy new, when it was new. By contrast, this might be exactly what is standing in the way of a future philosophy or even a "now" philosophy: the search for an authentic question is being drowned by an adherence to philosophical doctrine that rather demands interesting reactions to pre-existing ideas. This should not mean that we be rid of the past but that we assimilate it and build from our own unique perspective and questions.

The idea of contrasting Zea's philosophy with Greek philosophy comes from the following:

[Those who question whether there has been any philosophy in Latin America] forget that in the history of philosophy they want to turn into a model of philosophizing [. . .] one may find] not only the systems of Plato and Aristotle but the poems of Parmenides, the maxims of Marcus Aurelius, the thoughts of Epicurus, Pascal, and many others. In short, there are forms of philosophizing that are expressed just as much in ordered systems as in a maxim, a poem, an essay, a play, or a novel.15

It is interesting that but for Pascal, all of Zea's examples of the plurality of philosophical approaches come from the Greeks, from the very beginning of philosophy. In taking Zea's approach beyond Latin America, we can wonder if the hope it gives to this discipline is to prepare it for the inevitable loosening of the rigidity of the current hegemonic position. If it can prepare us to better appreciate philosophers from other nations, our own banished philosophers of the recent past, it might cause us to reflect on the possibility that the adherence to this hegemonic philosophy has colonized the colonizer. The notion of Western philosophy done in a particular manner has deprived philosophy of new insights, of its own independent identity, and of the value of other insights. What I hope to have added to this conversation is an appreciation of an authentic philosophical impulse and the need to retain that impulse in our philosophical thinking.

NOTES

3. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
8. Ibid., 92.
10. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., 104.

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Starting Differently

Agnes Curry
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This edition of the APA Newsletter on Indigenous Philosophy features some of the papers presented at the special panel, sponsored by the Committee on Indigenous Philosophers, on Listening to Ourselves: A Multilingual Anthology of African Philosophy, edited by Chike Jeffers, held January 6, 2017, at the APA Eastern Division meeting in Baltimore.

Four panelists spoke: Albert Mosley, Professor of Philosophy at Smith College; Joseph Osei, Professor of Philosophy and Religion at Fayetteville State University/UNC; Gail Presbey, Professor of Philosophy at University of Detroit Mercy; and Betty Wambui, Assistant Professor, Africana and Latino Studies and Women’s and Gender Studies, SUNY Oneonta. Two of the panelists’ papers, those by Osei and Presbey, are featured here, along with some remarks by Jeffers, looking back after the book’s publication. We hope to publish the remaining papers in a future edition of the newsletter.

While Jeffers’ groundbreaking anthology was published in 2013, the volume had its genesis back in 2005, the same year that Anne Waters and I proposed that SUNY Press start a series exploring the fact that indigenous philosophy, in the Americas and globally, remains a living enterprise. Anne and I remain most grateful to then-acquisitions editor Jane Bunker for her vision, and to Andrew Kenyon and SUNY Press for their continued support.

According to Jeffers, it was Professor Kwasi Wiredu who suggested that he contact Waters and myself, and my correspondence stretching at least as far back as August 2006 traverses countries, continents, challenges, dilemmas, and victories. The typographical challenges are perhaps just the tip of the iceberg; the list of participants and translators shifted through the years. And, of course, we lost contributor Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze himself midstream, a loss that also touched me personally as he had been my brilliant and kind classmate in graduate school at Fordham. But there were other challenges worth noting. I wish to focus on the fact that in his remarks included in this edition, Jeffers observes that some philosophers he approached to include as contributors declined or dropped out, not because they thought the project lacked worth, but because they were too daunted by the prospect of writing philosophy in their mother tongue.

Bridging the gaps—conceptual and existential—between the language of one’s academic training and professional identity, and one’s “home” language, seems formidable. I don’t know this personally; rather, I speak as a Xicana who never adequately learned her mother’s tongue of Spanish—but who was once told by one of my philosophy professors that nothing of philosophical merit had been written in Spanish. I was told that the language itself, while emotionally expressive, was not conducive to the articulation of rational thought. And that’s the European language! Let’s not even broach considering the forgotten great-great-great grandmother’s tongue, buried under a family history of baptism, shame, and a certain overcompensation. Obviously, so much of vital importance for living together in a more fully shared, less colonized world persists, and will continue to persist, within the gaps. In a time of perhaps unprecedented challenge to the profession as a whole, and to academia, the gaps I speak of also mean that for some of our students, philosophy presents itself as a difficult yet real path, while for others, it’s neither possible nor desirable. These gaps need to be excavated and built within, with bridges constructed within and without, for the sake of shared survival. This book continues this excavation/building project.

I hope it’s possible to deny credence to any perspective that denies rationality to entire languages while at the same time recognizing that languages, insofar as they are related to forms of life, can offer interestingly different possibilities for expressing voice and style—and thus agency and value. Jeffers notes in his remarks that one of his most interestingly satisfying experiences in the aftermath of the book is the reception of the stylistic differences as positive possibilities, for example, between Wiredu’s English prose versus his prose rendered in Akan. For the Akan readers Chike described, Wiredu’s sophistication and precision remain apparent, but in a different “key,” so to speak. Jeffers notes, of Wiredu writing in Akan: “This person, who has sometimes struck many as overly Westernized, especially in some of his critiques of tradition and of certain approaches to tradition in his early work, struck the readers I asked to read his essay as the consummate Akan elder” projecting an alternative philosophical image, “rooted completely in the non-Westernized context inhabited by the keepers of Akan tradition, rather than the British or Anglo-American form of philosophical sophistication that one might associate with Wiredu’s style, even in those times when what he is pursuing in English is conceptual decolonization.” This gap, between the sort of conceptual decolonization that is possible in English, which remains in the final analysis an abstract description, versus the enactment possible in the alternative language, seems to me the most important
and also, possibly, most dangerous gap.

To illustrate, I’ll talk about the fact that in one of the turns along its road to publication, Jeffers had to respond to concerns raised by one of his anonymous readers, about moments in the essays that can, from a dominant perspective, seem “insufficiently critical” of traditional inheritances, including social mores and religious ideas. On one hand, the critique was extended in all good spirit, and I think it made the volume better. But on the other, it perhaps missed the most important and most radical element of the volume. In his introduction to the volume, crafted in some response to the concern, Jeffers sketches how “deference” to tradition is not unthinking submission, but is rather a necessary first step of “deep respect that commits one to giving at least the first word to the object of deference, if not always the last word.” He continues: “This is entirely appropriate for an anthology motivated by the goal of demonstrating how philosophy looks and sounds when articulated in indigenous African languages, the tongues within which African traditions appear and gain shape most naturally not as caricatured barbarisms or exotic curiosities but as the necessary background and grounding for habitual forms of thought, expression, and action.” As the volume illustrates, the methodology proceeding from this starting point of deep respect then includes steps of sifting, with an aim to “praise and keep what’s best while criticizing and rejecting that which is unacceptable.”

This method is intertwined with what Russell Dale of Lehman College interprets in his January 2016 review as the overarching topic of the volume. Dale claims that “there is a clearly discernible topic in this collection which Europeans don’t really have a name for: how to dialectically process traditional life with foreign impositions from a dominating power and its culture. This process is not something that Europeans have a historical self-consciousness of; so there is no simple European-sounding term for this.” Because there’s no name in the master tongues, it falls into the gaps. Dale makes an attempt to name, and in the process hones in on the issue of critique and criticality: “Perhaps critical philosophy captures something of the idea: scrutinizing any alleged givenness.” But insofar as there are obvious “serious historical differences” between European and African experience (which Dale envelops under the term “domination by capital”) it bears repeating that what may be the most radical and critical step of all—the taking of Indigenous selves, languages, and forms of life seriously—can almost altogether drop from sight as insufficiently critical.

In that respect, I’ll recall a moment in the journey to publication. In a letter, Jeffers described some of the changes to the volume in response to the anonymous Reader’s critiques:

After discussions with my contributors, which confirmed their and my desire to keep the essays substantially the same, I have extended the introduction by adding a thorough discussion of the way that writing in an indigenous language has encouraged the philosophers in this anthology to take up a type of perspective that some may find jarring at first in its distance from the approach to religion, tradition, and racial difference generally found in European-language philosophy. I have emphasized that this distance does not amount to an abdication of the critical perspective that is integral to work in philosophy, but rather a different starting point.

To me, as both a philosopher and a teacher, a vast and possibly more humane and wisdom-bearing terrain becomes visible when proceeding from that different starting point. I want to thank Chike, the contributors and their translators, commentators and reviewers, SUNY Press, and everyone involved in this project for their work toward making that starting point a more viable place from which to stand. And now let us continue the journey.

NOTES
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., xviii.
5. Ibid., 136.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.

Submission Guidelines

We invite you to submit your work for consideration for publication in the fall 2017 newsletter. We welcome comments and responses to work published in this or past issues. We also welcome work that speaks to philosophical, professional, and community concerns regarding indigenous philosophers and philosophers of all global indigenous nations. Editors do not limit the format of what can be submitted; we accept a range of submission formats, including and not limited to papers, opinion editorials, transcribed dialogue interviews, book reviews, poetry, links to oral and video resources, cartoons, artwork, satire, parody, and other diverse formats.

In all cases, however, any references should follow the Chicago Manual of Style and include endnotes rather than in-text citations except for extensive reference to a single source. For further information, please see the Guidelines for Authors available on the APA website.

The submission deadline for the fall 2017 newsletter is June 15, 2017. Please submit copies electronically to Agnes Curry at acurry@usj.edu.
On Listening to Ourselves

Chike Jeffers
DALHOUISIE UNIVERSITY

The idea behind Listening to Ourselves: A Multilingual Anthology of African Philosophy can be described most simply as a matter of moving African philosophy from talk to action, although that is perhaps simple but misleading, because the action here is precisely a form of talk, that is, communicating in African languages. What I wanted to see was African philosophy move from talking about what it might mean to do philosophy in African languages to actually doing it. As someone who has always been fascinated by language, the debate about the importance of using African languages in African philosophy fascinated me as soon as I learned about it. I remember reading Samuel Imbo’s helpful discussion of the topic in his Introduction to African Philosophy (Rowman & Littlefield, 1998). I remember being very impressed by Kwasi Wiredu’s discussions of the relationship between the use of indigenous languages in philosophy and the accomplishment of decolonization at a conceptual level. I think, however, that it may have been an interview with Wiredu by Kai Kresse that really helped to crystallize the idea for the anthology in my mind.

In this interview, which I quote in the introduction to the anthology, Kresse says to Wiredu, “Ngugi, of course, concluded that he would, as a consequence of his critique of the colonized mentality, stop writing in English and write in Gikuyu only. This he does, and his works are translated into English and other languages. Now, if that is a sound conclusion, why are you not going a similar way and philosophizing in Akan?” What Kresse does here, I think, is point out how Ngugi, in his famous decision to stop writing at least his artistic work in English, moved from talk to action with regard to the question of using African languages. So what does Wiredu say in response to this question about why he had apparently not followed suit? Well, he begins by displaying what I took to be a very virtuous but nevertheless misguided humility: “I fear that I am not as important as Ngugi, so that if I wrote texts in Akan I do not think anybody would be going to translate them.”

I take it that the existence of this book and the great work of Joseph Osei in translating Wiredu’s essay is sufficient to have invalidated this worry. But he goes on to raise more substantial concerns: “Apart from that, Ghana alone has 46 languages. So, if I were to teach philosophy at the University of Ghana, Legon, in Akan, that would be a real problem. The idea is just not practicable at this point. Even if Ghana had only one language, what about Bodunrin in Nigeria and Odera Oruka... in Kenya? What would happen, between me and them? So, it is just not practicable now for us to work exclusively in our own languages.”

I believe what hit me all those years back reading that sentence is the question of what happens when we remove the term “exclusively.” I agreed with Wiredu that we need to avoid setting up, as I put it in the anthology’s introduction, “intellectual walls of division, forcing African philosophers to write only for the tiny audiences that would result from working exclusively in their own languages.”

But it seemed to me that if the move to exclusivity could be viewed as a kind of imprisonment, so too could we view as imprisonment or unfreedom the treatment of the pragmatic reasons for using European languages as a kind of standing negation of the imperative to write in African languages. A freer, better future, then, at least in my view, would be one in which it remains common that African philosophers use French and English and even other European languages like German and Italian, but in which it becomes equally common that they produce some of their work in languages like Wolof, Akan, Luo, Amharic, Gikuyu, and Igbo. The only way for such a future world to come into being, though, is for African philosophers now to begin showing that it can and should be normal and common to produce some of your work in your mother tongue or in an African lingua franca like Swahili. This was the motivation behind the anthology: to begin showing that it can be done, that it ought to be done, and that it ought to become normal.

In the book’s acknowledgments, I recount the story of encountering the late Emmanuel Eze at a conference while I was in my first year of graduate school, back in 2005, after I had first developed the idea for the anthology in my mind. I thought of how he had edited important anthologies of African philosophy in the past and was excited to tell him about my idea, because at that time, I had not given any thought whatsoever to the idea that I might bring this project to fruition myself. My hope was that Eze, as an actual active scholar, might like the idea and take on the task of making it a reality. He listened to me describe the project, told me he liked it, and then told me I should do it. It was one of those moments where someone unlocks potential in you didn’t know you had. I am forever grateful to him and it was, of course, without question that the anthology would be dedicated to his memory.

Now, between 2005 and 2013, when the book finally came out, is eight years, so clearly the project took a long time to complete. Besides being an initial inspiration for the project and participating in it, I have to acknowledge Kwasi Wiredu for having led me to pitch the project to the editors of the special series in which the book was published: SUNY Press’ Living Indigenous Philosophies series. It was important to me that a respected academic press publish the book because it shows that publishing work in African languages does not automatically mean avoiding the venues for publication that garner credit for tenure and other forms of academic review.

There were interesting challenges in bringing the anthology together, of course. The one I feel is most important to note is how many people declined, not because they were busy and certainly not because they didn’t find the project interesting but simply because of how extremely tough the prospect of writing in their mother tongue seemed to them. For those of us whose mother tongue is English or German or other such languages, the idea that writing in one’s mother tongue could present insurmountable difficulties is difficult to understand, but it is an important reality. To write philosophy in an African language, even for those who not only continue to speak but even read some material in the
African language they are familiar with, involves breaking with one’s entire philosophical training, as all professional African philosophers have been trained to read and write philosophy in European languages.

One of the fascinating discoveries that came out of the process of making the book for me was learning the significance of how one’s literary voice may change when writing in an African rather than European language. It is well known, for example, that Wiredu is one of the greatest living African philosophers and that part of his brilliance lies in his sophisticated yet always clear and precise prose, a style that has always led me, and many others, to assume, to think of his philosophical style as closely identified with the image of the ideal professional philosopher. One might wonder, then, how this image will come across in Akan. Well, from sharing his essay with Akan-speaking individuals, I have found that, while it remains the case that they perceive his writing as sophisticated and precise, it is a completely different kind of sophistication and precision. This person, who has sometimes struck many as overly Westernized, especially in some of his critiques of tradition and of certain approaches to tradition in his early work, struck the readers I asked to read his essay as the consummate Akan elder. Love Ghunney, a young woman who helped edit his essay in order to put in the special characters of Akan where they needed to be, told me how he sounded like her grandfather. Another friend told me it felt like listening to wise old people in the village. Wiredu therefore projected to them a philosophical image, but one rooted completely in the non-Westernized context inhabited by the keepers of Akan tradition, rather than the British or Anglo-American form of philosophical sophistication that one might associate with Wiredu’s style, even in those times when what he is pursuing in English is conceptual decolonization. These reactions, which I found deeply satisfying to encounter, remind us of the exciting possibilities of African-language work in philosophy and the way such work has, of course, always been the logical endpoint of the project of conceptual decolonization.

NOTES
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

The Philosophical Significance of Listening to Ourselves

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INTRODUCTION
My comments are aimed at stimulating discussion on why listening to ourselves is philosophically significant by focusing mostly on Wiredu’s contribution on “Good and Evil” and briefly on those of Professor Ochieng-Odhiambo, the philosophical significance of Naming in Luo, and the late Professor E. C. Eze’s contribution on “Word and Mind” from the Igbo worldview. The focus on Wiredu is not merely the result of our common Akan identity but primarily because of my familiarity with his argument, being his former student, as well as the translator of his ethics chapter, “Good and Evil” from English to Akan.

A. SUMMARY OF PROFESSOR KWASI WIREDU’S CONTRIBUTION, “PAPA NE BONE,” OR “GOOD AND EVIL”

By way of thought experiment, Professor Kwasi Wiredu defines “good” and “evil” in terms of the consequences and intentions of actions for self and others. Finding neither approach nor their synthesis adequate for defining morality, he makes a case for supplementing both of them with customary practices, using examples from the Akan traditional culture of Ghana.

While agreeing with J. S. Mill that maximizing consequences in terms of happiness or well-being is important for morality, Wiredu does not agree that it is (always) necessary or sufficient.1 As a case in point, he cites the Akan custom of mutual help labor or nnoboa, which is morally good for the Akan who understands and appreciates it as a form of moral reciprocity, but not wrong or evil on the part of an English car dealer in London who fails to use it for his business. To show that avoiding pain is not necessarily a good measure of right doing, he cites the case of a sick child who needs a painful injection to get well. As painful as it might be, the parent does a good thing in choosing the injection on the child’s behalf since it is necessary for the child’s well-being, under the given circumstance. Wiredu also shows that an action with a bad consequence is not necessarily judged as bad or evil if it has a good motive or intent behind it.2 He illustrates this in the case of a person who had the good intention of rescuing a child in distress, about to fall off a rock, but ended up killing the child by a terrible mistake.

Similarly, while agreeing with Kant that a good intention is important for morality, he does not think it is (always) necessary or sufficient. Despite this reservation, he maintains Kant’s maxim, which he terms “First Law,” should be used as the first test of every moral thought or action. By Kant’s principle in this context, he is referring to the principle of universalizability, which is often compared with the Golden Rule. An indigenous Akan version of
this is well known and frequently applied in dealing with injustice or kwasiabuo in Akan. To underscore his thesis that customs help in determining right and wrong, he cites several examples of customs that are right in some places but wrong in others, such as different patterns of marriage, including polyandry, polygamy, or monogamy.

In sum, an action that aims at maximizing the well-being of one's self as well as the well-being of others in a way that is consistent with the (Universal) First Law is more likely to be good than any others.

B: SIX REASONS WHY LISTENING TO OURSELVES IS PHILOSOPHICALLY SIGNIFICANT

Listening to ourselves as philosophers can begin as an inter-ethnic practice within a common linguistic community and expanded, eventually, to an intra-ethnic exercise among Africana philosophers as well as the inter-cultural or global level utilizing various contemporary means of translation and communication, including print and digital media. The benefits, when the initial dynamic circles are made maximally inclusive by gradual expansion, can be numerous and highly impactful in at least seven different ways:

1) By listening to ourselves, as Continental and Diaspora Africans and non-Africans, we sense awareness of concrete examples of authentic and indigenous African philosophers at work (including some of our illiterate wise elders and ancestors); and we thereby affirm the ontological proposition that the existence of African Philosophy as an intellectual discipline or discourse is real, and not an illusion.

2) Therefore, by listening to ourselves we challenge and refute the skeptical or rejectionist views associated with Aristotle, Hume, Kant, Hegel, and others who doubted or still doubt the intellectual ability or rationality of the African, or the so-called "Other" to philosophize by utilizing logic in reasoning and argumentation.²

3) By listening to ourselves, we demonstrate to those who believe that African philosophy does not constitute philosophy proper—because it is not analytic, critical, or reflective, or that it is the product of Western mental conditioning through colonization—that professional African philosophers are not only capable of independent and critical thinking, but are also actively engaged in philosophical decolonization and liberation while also contributing to the global philosophical discourse and problem-solving.

4) Listening to ourselves as African and Western philosophers, Eastern philosophers, Native American, or non-native Americans affirms not only the universality of philosophy as a discipline, but also our common rationality and, for that matter, our common humanity and ontological equality. While nothing can convince the dogmatic racist about his or her racist beliefs towards the African, including African Americans, the non-dogmatic racist might finally give up his or her opposition to racial equality after listening to these and other African philosophers doing philosophy in their native, non-Western tongues. He might finally come to appreciate Black Lives Matter, the new Civil Rights Movement born out of struggle at the beginning of the twenty-first century in response to police brutality against unarmed black youth or what the late Professor Akwasi Agyemang of the University of Ghana rightly termed "official lawlessness."⁴

5) By listening to ourselves we begin to appreciate the widespread similarities of our African beliefs and customs that affirm our common identity based on our common culture and worldview in terms of Wittgenstein's Family Resemblance Theory.

For example, there are four levels of Naming among Luos (of Kenya, East Africa) compared with Akan naming (in Ghana, West Africa), and we can compare their philosophical significance. The levels are as follows:

Level I: Naming at Birth, depending on day, time of day, season, war, peace, famine/harvest, place, for example, near a tree, river, etc.


Level III: Naming to reflect dreams and ancestors/kinship. Significant for genetic, historic, and nationalist identity/ideology

Level IV: Naming as reflecting praise by others and as boasting by self.⁵

6) By listening to ourselves, we discover more similarities in thought and linguistic devices or genres, as in considering "Word and Mind" by the late Professor Emmanuuel Chukwudi Eze. For example, we encounter a remarkable similarity about an Igbo fable and an Akan fable on the origin and spread of human knowledge and wisdom. The main character in the Igbo version is Tortoise, whereas in the Akan version it is Ananse, the Spider (featured in the forthcoming Oxford University Project on the philosophy of animals).

a) Common Source Theory and Aesop: Support for Osei's Black Hypothesis?⁶

b) Herodotus' Testimony on Fables (as Egyptian slave in Greece) and its implications

c) Plato's Testimony on Socrates' use of Aesop's fables while in prison.⁷
7) By listening to ourselves, we also realize that African philosophers born and bred within the same cultural worldview, such as Akan or Igbo, do not necessarily agree on key philosophical issues such as belief in God, taboos, and the role of religion in morality. Areas within religion and morality Wiredu and Osei (his former student and a fellow Akan) disagree include the following that seem to warrant further discussion in some detail.

C. DETAILED DISCUSSION: WIREDU AND OSEI ON RELIGION AND MORALITY

1. On Custom and Morality: Can custom be an ultimate determinant of right and wrong?

Professor Wiredu thinks that custom is the determinant of right and wrong in Akan ethics when it comes to marriage and nnoboa, etc.

My response is as follows. First, if this reference to custom is taken as an empirical observation from an anthropological standpoint, he is right. However, to avoid the is-ought fallacy, one has to ask whether custom ought to be the determinant and, especially, the ultimate determinant of right or wrong. For the Utilitarian philosopher, the answer would be “No,” since he would argue that the principle justifying the choice of these customs is utility. In other words, the preference for polygamy, monogamy, or polyandry in each of these cultures in question is premised on the belief that these patterns maximize utility or make most people happy in that inter-tribal relationships, especially in the past, or epidemics could distort the male-female ratio in given contexts. The nnoboa can likewise be justified as utility-maximizing for all or most of the stakeholders in the cocoa industry and similar endeavors requiring more hands on deck at a time.

Second, the temptation to justify cultural practices in the name of customs without asking for the moral justification for the customs should also be resisted because they lead us into the fallacy of Begging the Question. For philosophers would like to know why the Akans or any other society prefer custom X but not Y or Z.

Third, if we (as philosophers) tolerate justifying moral actions simply because they are part of traditional customs or cultures, we would be consciously or otherwise encouraging Nazis and Neo-Nazis, Al Qaeda, ISIS, Boko Haram, and other Islamic terrorists and ritual murderers into trying to justify or rationalize their horrible acts of genocide, terrorism, and mass murder, etc., in the name of custom or cultural ethical relativism.

2. Is Religion Necessary for Morality?

According to Wiredu, Akan religion is not a revealed religion; therefore, Akan ethics, while using religious language, cannot be said to be derived from religion. In other words, religion in Akan may be useful but not (logically) necessary for morality. For example, Akans use of Asase Yaa, the name of the earth goddess, in oaths to deter or induce fear against bush-rape. Evidently, such practical uses of the name can be effective whether or not Asase Yaa or God is real. Therefore, Wiredu argues, the use of religious language in Akan ethics does not constitute proof of belief in God’s existence in Akan worldview. Further, he argues that the use of religious language in ethics does not prove Akans believe in mmusuo or taboos since the elders in their wisdom offer rational explanations for the prohibitions in chambers after offering the ostensive spiritual or personal explanations to the (naïve) public.

My response is as follows. Granted that religion is not logically necessary for morality, Wiredu’s argument does prove that religion is not practically necessary for morality given the urgent need to provide as many resources as one can gather as grounds for moral objectivity, moral motivation, moral guidance, and moral transformation given the overwhelming moral evils in our world. To illustrate, while the presence of door B in addition to door A makes none of them logically necessary, they both become practically necessary in case of a fire emergency and the urgent need to get out of the burning room. The urgency for promoting morality today seems to render any talk of logical necessity idle talk, compared with practical necessity.

While use of religious language does not prove Akan belief in God as Wiredu maintains, neither does it prove their unbelief in God. The pervasive use of religious language in all their customs and practices as in the swearing of oaths to install chiefs, proclaim taboos, resolve conflict, and to commemorate the dead and ancestors, etc., rather make it more likely than not that most Akans believe in God as the Supreme Being among other supernatural beings. To be fair, this does not mean all Africans are religious or “incrably religious” as J. S. Mbiti observed in the 1970s. For there are such admonitions as Di asempa na mbisa woti. That is, if you want to succeed in life, it is better to pursue the virtues than divination, inquiring one’s fate by going from one god to another. By the same token, while some Akan elders might be religious skeptics, it does not imply that all or most of them are religious skeptics.

Error Theory: Professor Wiredu’s eagerness to deny the role of religion in Akan morality, their belief in God, appears to be more of a function of his prior commitment to metaphysical materialism than a function of his empirical observation of Akan traditions and customs.

3. Wiredu on Akan Taboos

Wiredu denies the existence of taboos in Akan worldview since all taboos (at least in principle) have rational (logical, moral, or scientific) explanations as opposed to supernatural or personal explanations. For example, the taboos or prohibitions against incest is not because the gods or ancestral spirits will bring death or epidemic on those who indulge in incest, but because the elders have observed that families that indulge in incest often acquire several ailments and genetic disorders such as hemophilia and infertility.

My response is that first, there are hundreds of taboos in Akan worldview. All or most of them are cast in religious
terms as having supernatural or personal (or intentional) explanations. One can agree with Wiredu that, at least in principle, they have rational explanations. But does that imply that taboos don’t exist? If that were true, we would have to say that the fact that clouds can be explained in terms of water vapor implies that clouds are not real or clouds don’t exist. Shortly after being made a chief in a town near Kumasi in Ashanti Region of Ghana, Nana Boakye-Boateng, a former professor of the African Studies Department, instituted taboos prohibiting the impregnation of teenagers so he could minimize the school dropout rate and increase retention and graduation rates among middle school girls in his traditional area. Instead of attempting to deny the obvious, our traditional societies would be better served if as indigenous philosophers we help to provide the rational explanations and appropriate moral guidance in the creation, modification, and application or interpretation of the taboos to ensure that they are deployed in ways that promote such desirable virtues as education, wisdom, peace, and development.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing seven inferences from Listening to Ourselves are by no means exhaustive. There is room for other inferences that could also reflect the philosophical significance of this reflexive practice. Hopefully, this brief reflection has inspired you to continue the discussion with other academics, students, and intellectuals. Meanwhile, join me in extending hearty congratulations to the author of this pioneer multilingual anthology in African philosophy, our colleague Chike Jeffers, by saying in the Akan language: Ayikoo! Ayikoo!

NOTES

2. Ibid.
5. Frederick Ochieng-Odhiambo, “What Is In a Name?” in Jeffers, Listening to Ourselves, 52–89.
10. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 175.
11. Ibid., 173.

REFERENCES


The Best of Both Worlds: Philosophy in African Languages and English Translation

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This book begins a daring exercise, novel in our current context, as it challenges a group of contemporary philosophy scholars originally from Africa (but who have in their years in academia become accustomed to reading and writing in English) to philosophize in their own African language, on a topic of their choice, to see what happens. I have already written and published a book review elsewhere that surveyed all the contributions to this book.1 For purposes of this paper, I want to focus in a more in-depth way on a few of the contributions. First, I want to look at the Jeffers, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, and Eze entries insofar as they are most reflective about the process and the goals of philosophizing in their own languages. Then I want to turn to the three Kenyan articles, by F. Ochieng’-Odhiambo, D. A. Masolo, and Betty Wambui, to follow their careful analysis of the meanings of words, names, proverbs, and concepts in their languages, and to begin to look at how their insights expressed here fit with philosophy books and essays that they have previously written in English. What do we, the readers, gain by reading the English translations of these articles that we would not find in articles by the same authors written originally in English? If I had more time and space, I would no doubt enjoy doing the same with the other three chapters I am neglecting here, but it is not possible to do all of the chapters to the depth that I propose, and I am more familiar with the works of the three Kenyans than the other scholars.

Chike Jeffers, the editor, explained that he was inspired by Ngugi wa Thiong’o who explained in Moving the Center that there was a dire need for creative and intellectual works in African languages to counter the colonizing of African
ideas and expressions. He worried that ideas expressed in European languages might be stuck in a Eurocentric worldview. Indeed, as Ngugi writes in the introduction to this book, he is pleased with this first effort. Ngugi goes as far as to call Africans philosophizing in English an “absurdity” and suggests that only by philosophizing in their own languages can Africans add something with originality to world knowledge and scholarship (ix). Chances are the book’s contributors and even its editor do not go that far, since each has since in other venues presented and/or published their ideas in English. Indeed, at our panel on this book at the American Philosophical Association’s 2017 Eastern Division meeting, contributors described the great effort it took to write in their mother tongues, and so it might be a challenge to do so all the time. But at least for the occasion of this book, it was done as an exercise. What were their reasons?

In a chapter in this book, Emmanuel Eze suggests that Igbo philosophers should begin to discuss philosophical issues with each other in the Igbo language, and that’s the kind of activity he imagines when he thinks of the phrase “listening to ourselves” (129). Eze also acknowledges the influence of Kwasi Wiredu’s “Conceptual Decolonization in African Philosophy” on his desire to begin this conversation in his language, Igbo (131). I don’t know whether the chapters in this book are the fruit of this personal conversation among those who speak the same language, as Eze describes. Perhaps the conversations Eze mentioned happened at home, among friends, as a background to each individual writing his or her chapter. Or, perhaps, instead this book will inspire future conversations, as in having a conversation via writing with an audience in the future, as is the case of most intellectual influence via publication. This might be the case if speakers of each African language represented in the book get ahold of the chapter that is written in their language. However, given the current distribution system of publications, this might not be easy. While the book has been added to 600 libraries internationally, it may be difficult to find each chapter in the local area in Africa where the language is spoken. Still, since the Igbos are spread out in academia all around the world, other Igbo scholars in England, South Africa, or Australia could get this book and read the essay in its Igbo version and think about the ideas there, and perhaps respond in kind. Who knows where the experiment might lead.

The chapter that most directly address the topic of the role of African languages in doing African philosophy is Emmanuel Eze’s. Eze is most self-reflective about his own experience of philosophizing in the Igbo language and how language impacts both the shape and content of thought as well as of identity. He also describes the experience of being multilingual and of philosophizing in more than one language. A reader might prefer to begin with Eze since he provides a context for the project realized by the contributions of the other authors. These articles plunge into their topics with just enough meta-philosophical discussion (in the introduction and in Eze’s article) to provide a context. Eze describes his project as follows. He clearly stipulates that he is interested in Igbo philosophy, by which he means the philosophy held by the Igbo people, based on a study of Igbo culture. But any person—ideally, a person familiar with the Igbo language—when they write down or share their insights into the Igbo philosophy, is writing their own philosophy as well, because interpretation is personal. In addition, they may be sharing their original analysis or judgments (129). By focusing on culture philosophy, Eze says, “philosophy can help culture listen to itself” (131).

By studying the Igbo language, Eze shows how Igbos have an idea of “core soul” or mind that is a spirit which unified thoughts. But multiplicity is important as well. The spirit of everyone, since each person has ideas, is both one and many (149). Philosophy involves dialogue with others, and love of culture does not only mean love of my own culture, but also of other cultures, countries, and traditions as well. Eze says, “There are many ways of being an igbo person and also many ways of knowing the Igbo (147, italics in the original): and hence the strategy of philosophizing in Igbo, and having it translated into other languages as well. Philosophizing in one’s own language is not an exercise in ethnic or national chauvinism. We can love exploring our own culture, learning more about it, creatively expanding it; while being in interaction with each other in a mutual exploration of perspectives.

Eze provided a glossary of terms at the end of his section, which is helpful in our learning a bit of philosophical Igbo terminology. Still, there is a challenge in understanding the fine points of another language, as we see in the glossary multiple terms with close meanings. For example, “isi” means mind, brain, or head; “Isi-Oma” means intelligence, analytical, or discerning mind; “obi” means soul; and “Mmuo” means spirit. Given these myriad terms, I find myself struggling to understand what Eze means by “core soul” or mind being a spirit which unifies. Perhaps this point is clearer to those who know the language well. The challenges of terminology are a reminder to thank the translators, who for the most part are also philosophy scholars from Africa who often write in English such as Oriare Nyarwath, Joseph Osei, and Stephen Omondi Owino (see 179–82). Surely, the philosophical conversations in African languages no doubt happened in the exchanges between author and translator in the making of this book.

While Jeffers himself admitted that the word “ethnosophical” had a bad connotation for decades in the history of African philosophy, he nevertheless unabashedly calls the articles in this collection ethnosophical. Insofar as basically all the authors address an aspect of the cultural beliefs and values of the community in Africa that speaks the language in which they are writing, then it is true that the essays are exploring the philosophy of an African ethnic group. But Paulin Hountondji had earlier charged ethnosophy with being an extraverted discourse, aimed at outsiders. Jeffers hopes that having African authors write first in their own languages better ensures that their primary audience is within Africa itself (xix). Of course, extraversion was not the only “sin” or fault of ethnosophy. Hountondji also said it engaged in mere description without rigorous evaluation. Of course, it is also important to note that Hountondji has explained that he was misunderstood to be against all explorations of a philosophy of culture, and he wants to clarify that he does, in fact, support such
studies. As he said in his book *The Struggle for Meaning*, he considered "unproductive" one of the results of his critique of ethnosophistry, insofar as it caused some researchers out of excess caution to refrain from "exercising on African culture and experience their talents as analysts and philosophers." Since then Hountondji himself has supported philosophical explorations of a philosophy of culture. Those who would rather not rehabilitate the word "ethnosophistory" could still appreciate this collection by calling it a philosophy of culture, or maybe even works in philosophy of language. Jeffers himself calls it a project of "excavating the philosophical content of [African] traditional cultures" (ix).

Do the essays included here address external audiences, or do they primarily address African audiences? And do they engage in critical evaluation? It is interesting to note that Ochieng'-Odhiambo's essay particularly notes that it is addressed to both a Luo and a non-Luo (which would mean extrapolated) audience. For example, he says he writes so that non-Luos can understand Luo traditions of naming (53). But he addresses his two audiences differently. He seems quite preachy toward the Luos, accusing them of going down the wrong path, adopting customs of white people. Ochieng'-Odhiambo is championing Luo values and traditions regarding naming children and suggesting that reigning practices among white communities are not as good. Clearly, he wants Luos to take new pride in their traditions and so continue them rather than capitulate to foreign practices (83, 85). But perhaps he addresses a foreign audience to encourage them to rethink their practices in light of the Luo example.

This project of becoming familiar with one’s own tradition is one that Ochieng'-Odhiambo long advocated. In publications written in English (we must note that in Kenya, as well as in Barbados where he has been teaching for many years, university education is taught in English) he promoted cultural literacy as well as skepticism toward imported practices and values. An advocate and practitioner of Odera Oruka’s project of interviewing rural Kenyan sages, called at times sage philosophy and at other times philosophic sagacity, Ochieng'-Odhiambo explained the rationale for the project in his 1997 and 2006 articles. As he said in 1997, part of the goal of the project is to educate Kenyan children, many of whom were now growing up in Nairobi (a cosmopolitan city) about the culture heritage that they all might have known better had they been raised back in Nyanza near the older generation of family members. Schools were not able, with the curriculum they had at the time, to fill this gap, and yet the need was great. In a 2006 article, "The Tripartite in Sagacity," he elaborates further. One of the goals of studying sages is to search for the philosophical ideas underlying cultural practices (and this can be done among the many ethnic groups of Kenya so that a comparative study could bring further insight). Additionally, a key aim of the project was to preserve and champion certain select practices of the past that were in danger of being discarded by the current generation. Here in 2006, he expresses his concern that the youth are discarding their own practices and unthinkingly embracing Western ideas as more popular when they might not be better. While in this book currently under study we are not engaging in interviewing sages, one can see why Ochieng'-Odhiambo would want to take up this kind of practice and address the topic as he did, since he has a longstanding interest in counteracting colonizing thought and practices in Kenya. And he may also agree to participate in a book purported by its editor to be ethnosophistry (rather than philosophic sagacity, understood earlier as a competitor to ethnosophistry), because back in 2003 Ochieng'-Odhiambo had reiterated that ethnosophistry is one of the branches of African philosophy and ought not to be excluded. Here we are treated to an extended analysis of the meaning of names from the perspective of the Luo community. However, there is the further question, does Ochieng'-Odhiambo understand "white" traditions? It’s a relevant question because he compares and contrasts Luo practices to white practices. My concern is this: maybe there are places where, currently, Euro-Americans have forgotten their ethnic traditions, but this does not mean that there were no traditions. Ochieng'-Odhiambo quotes Julia Stewart, who drew advice from Leonard Ashley’s book, “What’s in a Name?” that suggested that names should be short and easy to pronounce and write (83). Clearly, that’s not an accurate summary of all "white" naming practices (although I will admit that personally, such an aesthetic judgment played a role in my own parents naming me "Gail" rather than another close contender—"Penelope," according to my parents’ account). It’s a bit of a "straw man" argument to insist that there are no deeper traditions of choosing names by their deeper meanings in Europe or other countries populated by those who are racially white. Albert Mosley, in an earlier review of the book and this particular essay, noted that European names were not "mere indexicals" since names like "Carpenter" or "Smith" carried information about a family’s profession. Also, thinking of several white South African philosophers (and also Dutch philosophers) who have the prefix "van der" as part of their family names, it is clear that their names are a geographical marker of the family’s origin. For example, the name “van der Merwe” means from the region of the Merwede, the “wide water” of the Rhine-Meuse delta back in the Netherlands. This may bear some similarity to Luo practices of names reflecting a community’s “territory and where one’s kindred grew up,” for example, a man called “Jakondiek (a man from Kondeik)” or “wuod nam (son of or a man from the lake)” (75).

Still, we can learn much from studying how Luo names are chosen, by realizing that there is a system of value behind the choices of names. The book by Paul Mbuya Akoko, *Luo Kitgi gi Timbegi*, describes the circumstances, times, and places that influence a name choice, and Ochieng'-Odhiambo cites it at length (60-67). As far as I know (although I do not claim to be an expert), there is not a similarly circumstantial list of names in European communities connoting time of day of the birth, the position of the child when being born, the weather or season at the moment of birth, or the nearness of trees, roadsides, or other geographical markers at the time of birth. I would like to see Ochieng'-Odhiambo reflect at more length as to why the Luo people think these details of the circumstances of birth should be highlighted by use of a name that will always bring such circumstances
to mind again throughout life. For example, a child may be named Akoko (girl) or Okoko (boy) if they are born during conflict (63) or Ajwang’ (girl) or Ojwang’ (boy) if his or her parent dies while he or she is in the womb or an infant. Why do the Luo give a child a lifelong name based on this early tragedy?

Ochieng’-Odhiambo goes on to note other sources of names in Luo tradition. Dreams are also an important source of names, and they often intersect with ancestral names, since sometimes a person may dream that a deceased relative has asked for the child to be named after him or herself (69). Clearly, this practice of naming points to beliefs in the continued existence and agency of the dead after they pass from this world (the living-dead, as they are sometimes called). Some names connote relationships between people. Ochieng’-Odhiambo shows his keen sense of observation when he notices that “white people” use “Mrs.” differently than Luo people use the prefix “chi” (“wife of”). Luos more consistently use prefixes that explain the relationship between people. He takes that as evidence that Luos highly prize relationships and the value of community (75). Ochieng’-Odhiambo doesn’t only describe traditions, but he also shows how they are applied in contemporary Kenyan politics. For example, the process of praise naming was used recently by the practice of calling political leader Raila Odinga “Agwambo” meaning “mysterious.” It meant to draw attention to his wit and intelligence. Odinga left KANU and organized the opposition, starting a new party, ODM-Orange Democratic Movement. In a long footnote, Ochieng’-Odhiambo talks about Odinga’s role in politics. While nicknames of either praise or disparagement can be found among all races of people, we can learn about Luo values from reading Ochieng’-Odhiambo’s account of how Odinga received his praise name.

While Ochieng’-Odhiambo, Messay Kebede, and Emmanuel Eze wrote their articles using references to many published sources such as other philosophers’ texts and general reference material (as is common in scholarly articles), several of the authors (Daigne, Masolo, Wiredu, and Wambui) wrote their inclusions without references to other published works. Clearly, each of these authors has written many publications with many references (and sometimes even addressed the same topic in other works of theirs already in English), so the question is, why, when writing in their respective African languages, did they forego using outside sources? Why did they write afresh as if it were a new topic to them, without reference to their own earlier work? Did they think they had been tasked with such a project? Or was it somewhat akin to Jomo Kenyatta’s book, Facing Mount Kenya, which was written based on his experience of being “the grandson of a medicine man,” as the book’s back cover explains?

Take the case of D. A. Masolo’s chapter on Luo proverbs. What do we learn from reading Masolo’s account of proverbs written in Dhuulu (and then translated) that we do not learn from his several previously published works that contain this topic written in English? In Jeffers’ book we find Masolo saying that the meaning of proverbs is not meant to be literal; it should not be understood as a proposition, and therefore can’t be true or false. For example, a proverb that compares a person to a bird is not intended to state “a factual similarity between persons and birds” but nevertheless finds some worthwhile analogy between persons and birds (47). Masolo goes as far as to say that a proverb is not a truth, and can’t be a lie either, since it is an opinion (47). He does concede, however, that some proverbs can have “shades of truth” as accurate descriptions of persons or their deeds (49). After these brief methodological allusions, he puts forward an explanation of proverbs as sayings that help persons understand and guide human conduct (39). He lauds Luo elders for having a deep understanding of human psychology which shows in the proverbs (47). The majority of his article recounts Luo proverbs on moral behavior, as Masolo gives his understanding of the meaning or message of each one since, as he explains, proverbs are usually so short that they do not explain themselves (39).

While Masolo is to be commended for knowing so many Luo proverbs and their meanings, the methodological issues in studying proverbs do not do justice to Professor Masolo’s own treatments of the topic in his earlier publications in English. In his book African Philosophy in Search of Identity, he explained the debate over including proverb analysis as philosophy. Hountondji challenged written works that analyzed “cultural elements (stories, proverbs, poems, language structures, and institutions) that constitute Weltanshauungen or worldviews,” suggesting that these works do not deserve the title of African philosophy. Instead, they are ethnomethodology or philosophical pretensions, and he therefore coined the term “ethnophilosophy” to describe them, intending it to be pejorative and not a legitimate branch of philosophy since proverbs do not have a philosophical agenda and scientific rigor. But others, like A. B. C. Ochollo-Ayayo, used proverbs to try to describe “basic premises which control or guide his society’s thinking” (192). Masolo quoted six of Ocholla-Ayayo’s Dhuulu proverbs used to describe philosophical concepts, such as “Ok fimore nono; gнимorо ema nitie, pok noneye,” which means “All events are caused and interrelated; nothing happens by chance.” But Masolo complained that Ocholla-Ayayo did not explain the contexts in which the above proverbs were used or to whom they were addressed. Rather than general principles of knowledge, Masolo explained there that if proverbs were approached with a “situational analysis,” it would become apparent that they were used as means of social control or possibly social rebellion.

In another place in his earlier book, Masolo analyzed two Dhuulu proverbs to gain philosophical insight into Luo conceptions of time. The proverb “Oru wuudo aming’a” means “duration, the endless alternation between day and night, often brings about change even to the most stubborn situations.” Another proverb with a closely related meaning is “Aming’a piny nene ochiego apindi e thim,” meaning “the [endless] endurance of the world forces even the stubborn apindi (Vangueria acutiloba) to ripen.” The apindi fruit can take even ten years to mature, and so it is used as an example in the proverb. Masolo then follows these translations and interpretations with an account of how the proverbs are used in daily discourse. They are used, he explains, to counsel against complacency and
pride, since the prideful erroneously think they can know or control the future.19 Here, Masolo began discussion of these proverbs by suggesting they might reveal a Luo philosophy of time, but he concluded by focusing instead on the proverb's counsel for character traits and wise action. While I don’t doubt that the majority of proverbs are crafted to express moral guidance, nevertheless, many of them (for example, these two proverbs on time) can also have metaphysical or epistemological meanings.

In his review of Listening to Ourselves, Albert Mosley noted some frustration with Masolo’s treatments of proverbs. He thinks that Mosley has not paid attention to the epistemic role of proverbs. Mosley counsels: “I suggest we view proverbs and parables as analogical models establishing classes of similar situations, similar problems, and similar solutions, but encountered in different circumstances.”20 Similarly, Claude Sumner, in his large studies of Oromo proverbs of Ethiopia, explained that proverbs have what he calls figurative logic. Figurative reasoning, according to Sumner, starts with a known situation used as an example. The proverb, using figurative logic, conveys the insight that there is a new situation in which the insight or truth from the first examples also applies to it (the new situation) as well. A particular situation is capable of giving meaning to another situation, and that is what Sumner identifies as figurative logic. When there is a passage from a known truth to a disclosed truth, there is reasoning. Sumner contrasts figurative logic to what he calls conceptual logic, where known concepts or laws are a starting point from which reason then ascertains further concepts or laws. Additionally, Kwasi Wiredu referred to an Akan proverb which, in conversation, intended to function as a Principle of Non-contradiction.21

Both Mosley and Sumner, I suggest, would be uncomfortable referring to all proverbs as “opinion” rather than knowledge. They can contain real insight about our world based on sound reasoning. But there is one sense in which Sumner might agree with Masolo’s refraining from giving proverbs “truth” status, but it is a very nuanced point. Sumner gives the example of a proverb, and how the proverb could be treated through conceptual reasoning and deduction to be stating a universal truth. However, while the proverb might have much truth to it, there may always be some situation to which it does not apply. Sumner explains that the peasants who use proverbs know that stating their truths as proverbs rather than universal statements means that they can’t be falsified by one counter-example. They make their suggestion and then let it go, leaving it up to the hearer to decide to apply it or not. There is some humility to the proverb not found in other forms of logic, and Sumner thinks that’s epistemologically appropriate.22

Despite this possible slighting of all that could be said methodologically about the role of proverbs in expressing philosophy, is there not a benefit to discussing Luo proverbs in the Dhuluo language? Of course, even when writing in English for an English-speaking readership, most texts indulge in quoting the original proverb in Dhuluo. They would not presume that giving English translation alone, without the original, would be adequate, because they know that it is difficult to capture the proverb’s meaning easily in a translation. But is there a benefit to discussing the Luo proverb in Dhuluo rather than in English?

In his 2010 book, Self and Community in a Changing World, Masolo discussed the question of writing African philosophy in African languages at length. He noted that cultural nationalists such as Okot p’Bitek often dramatized how European colonizers made conceptual errors based on misunderstandings of African languages. But Masolo clarifies that p’Bitek was careful to sort out when misunderstandings were due to careless translations and when they were instead due to “the incongruency or incommensurability of the conception fields.”23 Masolo takes stock of p’Bitek, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, and Wiredu, and each’s version of counsel in favor of the use of African languages. For the first two, the motivation is primarily political, Masolo notes. For Wiredu, his emphasis is that language conveys concepts. Masolo then expresses some skepticism that concepts will be clearer if only they are expressed in one’s native tongue. He refers to many philosophical concepts which he shares with his students in English-speaking classrooms, using English words, and notices that the concepts (such as “phenomenology,” for example) need to be explained at length in order to be clarified, because concepts in general are difficult to convey because they are not as simple as objects. While he admits that some concepts do not have easy translations into another language, he thinks that meaning can still be conveyed from one language into another. Therefore, he is confident that African meanings can be conveyed in English or French. Whether or not one should continue to use European languages or not would be a political decision. He realizes that people worry about “Whether we can preserve the core of our cultural integrity, our conceptual or theoretical representations of the world—when we use other languages.”24 But he agrees with Wiredu’s optimistic assessment that “language is an elastic phenomenon that we can bend, twist, weave, and stretch in any direction and to any lengths in order to accommodate or to communicate the concepts we have in our minds.”25

Despite the possibility of translation, the use of some words in particular contexts make translation suddenly difficult, and Masolo’s book is filled with examples of contexts in which a Dhuluo word which would usually mean one thing would mean something else in a particular context.26 While Masolo concludes by saying that for practical reasons he is glad that works in African philosophy are translated into European languages (so that he can access them if they were originally written in a language he does not know), he nevertheless wants to encourage writing African philosophy in vernacular languages so that local debate about the meaning of indigenous concepts can continue, and so that scholars can “preserve these thought expressions in their original renditions.”27 One would therefore conclude that Masolo must be particularly happy to have Jeffers’ volume include the best of both worlds, that is, a collection of essays written in vernacular, while also including English translations of them all.

The question of tradition’s role in philosophy, particularly in the context of African philosophy, was addressed by Bruce Janz in his recent book, Philosophy in an African

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Place. While Janz’s book is not the immediate topic of this panel, let me introduce one theme of his and then turn back to Jeffers’ book and see how the theme is addressed in the works there. He identifies tradition as having to do with “meanings and value as coded in ritual and story.” Of course, Janz himself is surveying a range of African authors, such as Kwame Gyekye who, in his book *Tradition and Modernity*, notes that traditions change, just perhaps a bit slowly. So the tension between enduring practices and static practices is always felt in a culture. Are traditions upheld with gusto or repeated habitually and mechanically? Janz explores whether traditions in general are useful. Traditions can aid continuity, but they can also be conservative and be used to curb change when change is needed. If something is traditional, it means that for now, one (or a community) is not engaged in questioning it. However, traditions change, as we noted; transmission of traditions “is more like reenactment,” Janz says, which means that all we have is a “trading process” that is open to “ceaseless contestation.”

Some of the chapters read mostly like exposition of African traditions, giving the rationale behind certain practices or values. But certain authors deeply explore certain practices, both critiquing and defending various aspects of the traditions. It was an excellent idea to include an African woman philosopher, Betty Wambui, who directly studies questions of gender and power in African communities. Wambui introduces us to examples of gender role-bending among the Gikuyu and reflects on their implications for power. Her essay is called “Conversations: Women, Children, Goats, Land” and described family relations including raising children as were practiced among the Gikuyu of Kenya. Her focus was on how certain practices demonstrate and illustrate certain important values of the society. She argues that while boys and girls/men and women were given different roles in Agikuyu society, it would be superficially true but perhaps too hasty to conclude that men were valued more than women. She then engages in a delicate and two-sided analysis of the ways in which women were subservient to men, and yet had agency. She also points out the constraints that were on men that complicate the presumption that they were in charge and had to be obeyed.

She has a big challenge ahead of her because she admits that men’s roles included “presiding over wives and children at home” (99), and that men could marry more than one wife while the reverse is not true (101), which, she concedes, is used by others to critique the claim that women are treated equally. But she counters that, nevertheless, “marriage and childbearing were as important to young men and male elders as they were to their female counterparts” (99). In other words, a man would not have any status in his society if he could not succeed with his family. She goes as far as to say, “a man without children would be treated more harshly than a woman in a similar situation” (101).

Since Betty Wambui’s article is included in this collection, having been written first in the Gikuyu language and only secondarily translated, it is no wonder that she explores the meaning of certain words in the Gikuyu language. She herself notes that the word for a married woman was “atumia,” related to the word “tumia” which (along with words closely related to it) has the connotation of silence or not speaking one’s mind (even if one is offended) (101–03). Gikuyu society considers humility to be a virtue for women. The word for adult men is “Guthera,” which means “to select” and has the connotations of being a choice or decision-maker who exercises agency (103). She takes stock of this linguistic situation and notes that these words and associated values played a role in women’s diminishment. However, to counterbalance that assessment, she noted that both men and women would be judged by how well they did in marriage and parenting.

The article goes on to investigate certain practices and issues of sexual morality and how they impact the question of women’s equality. She even investigates practices such as in polygamy, the first wife has the right to shave her husband’s head. She notes that while contemporary feminists decry polygamy as male privilege, it must nevertheless be pointed out that a man’s choice in marriage is always limited. First, his first wife is chosen for him by his parents; secondly, any possible additional wives must first get the consent and approval of the first wife. She also notes that, since bearing a child was so important to women (in addition to the warmth and love of family life with children, there is also the role the child will take in the future of caring for the elderly parent, and being steward of their property, and of continuing life in the next generation with the possibility of rebirth into future children), that a barren woman could marry another woman who would bear children for her. Even if the woman who married another woman was already married to a husband, the new wife would be under the authority of the woman who married her, not her husband. While these practices are quite complex, Dr. Wambui explains them all with detail to the levels of power and powerlessness (or constraint) in any interaction. (Those interested further might want to read the Njambi and O’Brien essay on the topic. These scholars interview several woman-woman couples to get a sense of the reasons for their choosing such a marriage, and they find these couples to be happy together.)

I have to say that in this article Dr. Wambui shows her unique positioning, as a philosopher very familiar with Kikuyu practices, to be able to reflect upon these situations, and her skills in thinking and observation have helped her to describe the situation with insight and fair-mindedness.

In another article of Wambui’s published in English in a journal, “The Challenge of Provenance: Myth, Histories, and the Negotiation of Socio-Political Space,” she shares the myth of the Mumbi and Gikuyu, the ancestors of the Gikuyu people, which is often orally recited as an art form. Mogai, the divider of the universe, had a conversation with Gikuyu, the founder of the Gikuyu people who was, by the way, not created by Mogai. Mogai gave Gikuyu some land and provided him with a wife. Gikuyu named his wife Moombi, which means creator. With her, he had nine daughters. He worried about not having a male heir, but Mogai told him not to worry because there would be nine male suitors for his daughters. The nine men agreed to settle with Gikuyu’s daughter and create matriarchal families. However, over time the women ruled cruelly, practicing polyandry and
punishing men with death if they were adulterous. The men planned a revolt and decided that the only time they could successfully overthrow the women was if they were incapacitated by pregnancy. The men planned and impregnated their wives around the same time and then had their revolt. They established polygamy instead of polyandry and "changed the name of the social group which had until this time been known as Nyumba ya Mumbi to Mbari ya Gikuyu." When they threatened to change the names of the clans as well, women threatened to not have sex with them and to kill any offspring. With this serious threat, men backed off from changing the names of the clans. While women lost political power, they still had the power to create life.

Wambui argues that the story describes power as something very important, but that it needs a context of trust. Power is easily abused, and its abuse is open to censure and challenge. Humans are shown as impatient to change society’s rules. Additionally, this story portrays women as potentially destructive to society and in need of controlling. But it also portrays women as equal to men, for example, just as strong as men, so that their subordination is not natural but conventional. About this genre of expression, Wambui explains that these stories (nganos) "are not only mere reports or rationalizations of current order. They are also powerful interpretations of events and reinforcements of perspectives." A storyteller can tell the story because he or she has a certain agenda, or because he or she wants to make a particular critique of contemporary society. It seems to me that in either language, English or Kikuyu, Wambui is able to focus on power relations as conveyed in stories, in language choices, or in practices.

In general, many of the contributions of the book have helped deepen our understanding of African traditions, practices, and values. The authors are clearly able to express themselves philosophically both in English and in their own African languages. But in this volume we are treated to the best of both worlds. We have the accessibility of multiple languages carefully translated into English, and at the same time, we have the careful and purposeful work of African scholars engaging in philosophical thinking and writing in their own African languages, building upon and recording a tradition of conceptual exploration and expression of African philosophical ideas. Perhaps the main help of the book was to serve as an impetus to the authors to cover in depth a topic from a perspective that they had not considered before when writing straight into English. The book is therefore a valuable contribution to our field.

NOTES
15. Ibid., 193.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., 118.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
22. Sumner, Oromo Wisdom Literature, Volume 1, 378.
24. Ibid., 40.
25. Ibid., 41.
26. Ibid., 42–43.
27. Ibid., 44.
29. Ibid., 60.
30. Ibid., 55.
31. Ibid., 56.
34. Ibid., 7.

REFERENCES
BOOK REVIEW

Therapeutic Nations: Healing in an Age of Indigenous Human Rights


Reviewed by Shelbi Nahwilet Meissner

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Trauma and healing are commonly wielded concepts in conversations within and about Indigenous communities. In Therapeutic Nations, Dian Million complicates the pathologizing of Indigenous communities by tracking the ways in which trauma narratives are invoked and their relationship to Western neoliberal ideologies. In Million’s own words, her work in Therapeutic Nations weaves a cautionary tale and “suggests that witnessing truth to power is a convoluted undertaking” (3). Million illustrates the deep connection between violence against Indigenous women and self-determination, noting that self-determination is difficult for Indigenous communities to achieve without an analysis of gendered colonial violence against Indigenous women. Million also suggests that there is an affective, felt component of our knowledge about our experiences of colonial violence that must be acknowledged and engaged in the pursuit of self-determination and healing.

In “An Introduction to Healing in an Age of Indigenous Human Rights,” Million describes her Indigenous feminist methodological commitments. Of her methodology, Million writes,

I do not seek synthesis. I don’t force anything into agreement. . . . I have stopped thinking in terms of an internal struggle and now work relaxed into the sociality of working toward a more expansive idea of community that I see as an Indigenous feminist one articulated and emerging from struggle, where in love and honor we can hold in light open embrace difference and an expansive number of alliances with others whose goal is for generative life and not death. (30)

Million builds a bridge between herself and her research, noting that she is not positioning herself as an unattached, neutral observer; rather, she identifies herself as part of a community deeply entangled in the complicated story she is trying to tell. Million is up front about her privileging of an Indigenous agenda, noting that though she cannot speak for all Indigenous peoples, she speaks as an Indigenous woman with an investment in the future of her communities. Million practices an Indigenous feminist methodology in that she works toward expansion, building relations, and respect, rather than toward forced agreement and synthesis.

In addition to detailing her methodological commitments, Million introduces her core technical terminology: sociopolitical imaginaries, affective or felt knowledges, and logics of trauma. Sociopolitical imaginaries are “moralized discourse and embodied practices” that constitute what is known about a group, an event, an experience, etc. (6). These sociopolitical imaginaries are “moral spaces” that comprise the contemporary shaping or frameworks of presumptions pertaining to Indigenous peoples and imposed upon them (46). Sociopolitical imaginaries, according to Million, have propositional content like “racialized, sexualized, and gendered discourses,” as well as unspoken, affective content: felt knowledge, embodied practices (6). To illustrate how sociopolitical imaginaries pertaining to Indigenous peoples are both discursive as well as felt, Million describes observations offered to Richard King in his investigations of residential schools in the 1960s. In one observation, a residential school teacher says, “We’d see them often—maybe a drunken Indian asleep in the back of a bus—and you’d think, ‘Oh, Indian,’ like you think lamppost, or tree, or dog” (47, quoting a quote offered to Richard King). Million highlights the affective, felt component of this teacher’s statement, writing:

But in fact the speaker was not deeply ignorant. The Indian in the back of the bus was asleep—but that he was drunk was felt common knowledge, perhaps informed by disgust or boredom . . . while what nonhuman category the Indian is in may be
The presumption of the onlookers about the drunkenness of the Indian man in the example does not spring from mere ignorance; rather, it is felt common knowledge, something the speaker in the example feels to be true, based on a complex fabric of sociopolitical imaginaries she has inherited from the settler community around her. Felt knowledge informs an unspoken, commonly held, “affectively understood,” sociopolitical imaginary that imposes drunkenness onto Indigenous peoples, alongside other racialized, gendered, and sexualized presumptions (42-3). Felt knowledge is commonly unrecognized, Million argues, and dismissed by Western academics in favor of the discursive content of Rationality. The sociopolitical imaginaries imposed upon Indigenous peoples, render, through discursive and affective means, Indigenous peoples as drunk, violent, depraved, wounded, tragically un-assimilable, sexualized objects. Sociopolitical imaginaries, as Million conceives of them, function metaphorically like a normative “moral fabric,” woven from affective, felt knowledges and propositional racialized, gendered, and sexualized discursive content.

Million argues that Western, neoliberal arenas like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that focus on notions of human rights are constituted by logics of trauma that focus on “healing” Indigenous peoples instead of promoting self-determination. Logics of trauma require narratives that cast Indigenous peoples in the role of “the wounded,” informed by the gendered, moral discourses and embodied practices imposed on Indigenous peoples. As Million explains, trauma narratives are invoked by politicians, delegates, and wellness programming in arenas where Indigenous people are expected to articulate their wounds to oppressors. It is only when the oppressors already have a toolset full of psy-tools (psychology, psychotherapy, psychoanalysis) that they seek to examine our and our communities’ pain (149). Million writes:

In the same arena Indigenous peoples seek to define terms of self-determination, outcomes of prior colonization are measured and diagnosed as trauma. This creates a site for our healing, our reconstruction and its management. This is actually a dangerous position. . . . The space of our medicalized diagnosis as victims of trauma is not a site wherein self-determination is practiced or defined. (150)

The terms of the discussion in this arena are already set; in these pre-defined terms of trauma, self-determination cannot be practiced because Indigenous communities are preconceived as wounded bio-specimens to be healed by the state. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is an example of a neoliberal arena in which Indigenous peoples are expected to “witness their truth to power,” but only within the framework of a trauma narrative that undermines attempts at truth-sharing.

In the second chapter, “Gendered Racialized Sexuality: The Formation of States,” Million describes the affective, gendered heterosexuality that functions as a sociocultural imaginary and normative foundation of the Canadian nation-state. Million details the affective components of the boarding school era and of sexual violence against Indigenous women and sexual minorities. She argues that the gendered racialized violence against Indigenous women is constitutive of the nation-states of Canada and the United States. Indigenous women, Million notes, are centers of their communities with the power to speak to and bring about the future. The nation-state’s attempts to control Indigenous women’s bodies and sexualities through boarding schools, through the legal kidnapping of Indigenous children, through legislation, policing, and incarceration, is an attempt to render inert the futures of Indigenous communities. This controlling of life itself is the biopower of the settler nation-state. The settler nation-state exerts much of its control over Indigenous peoples through affective means, constructing the felt knowledge pertaining to Indigenous bodies, deeming Indigenous bodies as sexually deprived, drunk, and dependent. Violent state practices like residential schools are justified by the felt knowledge inherited by settlers, yet these detrimental felt knowledges are not the focus of investigation. Million argues that the felt knowledge is necessary for an analysis of politics of the nation-state because the gendered racialized violence constitutive thereof has powerful unspoken affective components.

In chapter three, “Felt Theory,” Million describes the effects of the narratives and testimonies of First Nations and Métis women offered in the reports from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In describing their abuse, boarding school experiences, and experiences of gendered colonial violence, Million writes, “First Nations women in Canada changed the actual conditions for what could be said about the poverty and discrimination that were their daily fare” (56). Here, Million also expands her account of felt knowledges. Felt knowledges, according to Million, are a limit to white academics. The felt aspects of Indigenous women’s testimonies are inaccessible to white male academics, who, Million suggests, are inundated with a competing felt knowledge pertaining to Indigenous women from the settler nation-state that leads them to act as gatekeepers against affect. White male academics are oblivious to their own unspoken affective attachments to empire, “development,” and capitalism. In this chapter, Million focuses largely on the prowess and desire-based navigation exhibited by the Indigenous women who told their stories, who changed “Canada’s idea of itself” (77).

In “Indian Problem”: Anomie and Its Discontents,” Million builds a genealogy, tracing the concepts of anomie and victimology of the 1960s through their transformation into the concept of trauma of the 1980s. According to Million, the human rights paradigm allows for this transformation. Though Million details the potential that trauma narratives contain for undermining self-determination, she consistently reminds readers that Indigenous activists, in the political acts of their testimony of residential school experiences, often inherit, navigate, and mobilize these trauma narratives into a public, international forum. Million writes, however, that these fora usually “become about health rather than justice” (78). In the 1960s, “anomie"
was used to describe the natural outcome of being Indian in a white world. Million writes, “anomie is a concept that allowed Canadians an analysis of Indian malady without attributing it specifically to their Indian policy . . . [Indigenous peoples’] anomie is a natural outcome, their racial inability or cultural inability to adapt to encroaching white society” (84). Anomie segues into victimhood and deviance in the late 70s, as the social sciences pick up the topic and “frame the revitalization of Canadian aboriginal cultures as therapeutic but not necessarily political” (84). Million tracks the transition of anomie into victimology into trauma, noting that nation-states like Canada ignored many recommendations about the self-determination and justice for Indigenous peoples and prioritized one: “to establish institutions and programs in the name of healing” (101). Million emphasizes that, like anomie and victimhood, trauma and healing leave the settler nation-state’s responsibility for and tendency to reiterate violence conveniently out of focus. The focus on healing sets up inevitable relationships of dependency with the settler nation-state and invisibilizes projects of justice.

In chapters five and six, “Therapeutic Nations” and “What Will Our Nations Be?,” respectively, Million contrasts two different approaches to constructing and healing self-determined nations. The first approach to building self-determined Indigenous governance, profiled in chapter five, relies on human development discourse and results inevitably in a diagnosis of intergenerational trauma. In chapter six, Million profiles the second approach to constructing self-determined Indigenous governance, which relies on Indigenous women’s critique of patriarchal Aboriginal Nationalism. Million describes that gendered components of the 1876 Indian Act, the central document pertaining to federal Indigenous law in Canada, imbued with Western heteropatriarchal values, subverted the gender equity of traditional Indigenous communities and gave substantial power over Indigenous women to Indigenous men. These heteropatriarchal impositions on Indigenous women resulted in the fracturing of Indigenous communities, or what Million calls a “split in vision that has not been reconciled,” because they subvert the non-patriarchal organization of traditional Indigenous communities (127). After describing the deep conflicts between Indigenous men’s visions of nation (visions seemingly loyal to human rights arguments, Canadian legal language, and the patriarchal order of the Indian Act), and Indigenous women’s visions of nation, (visions committed to community wellness) Million notes that Indigenous men’s platform prevailed, while the women’s position “has been more or less deferred to the now more medicalized realms of ‘healing’” (127). Million writes, “Women’s vision encapsulated nations in which integral reciprocal relations between persons regardless of gender, their families, and by extension all life forms informs a communal governance” (129). Women’s visions of a healing nation were forced into the language of Canadian legal rights, which undermined their vision. Million concludes chapter six emphasizing the importance of the question, “What will our nation be?” Importantly, the affective component of women’s role in governance is deeply contrasted in this chapter with that depicted by the settler nation-state; the powerful models of Indigenous polity according to

Indigenous women’s visions focuses on women in the affective role as the hearts of Indigenous communities.

In the final chapter, “(Un)Making the Biopolitical Citizen,” Million contrasts the modes of governance in a biopolitical state with the differently imagined, dreamt, and performed Indigenous nations that exist beyond the constraints of neoliberalism. Million argues here that the healing promoted by psy-tools (psychology, psychotherapy, psychoanalysis) are tools designed for the “self,” so “important to the development of a citizen-subject of neoliberalism” (145). Healing that exceeds neoliberalism exists in spite of neoliberalism, “utilizing” the interstices and cracks in neoliberalism’s biopolitical ‘great society’ (145). Million profiles several Indigenous healing projects she sees as self-determined and self-governed that exist in the in-betweens of neoliberalism. Million writes,

Indigenism contains seed for imagining what else our nations might be. And while that is a dark star to peer at, it is also exactly why many Indigenous have so tenaciously opted to continue to fight in belief and action that our lifeways may pose something other than illness and death. What would our governance be if they already assumed that all life, all life’s “vibrant matter,” rather than such an impossibly universal subject, formed their primary responsibility? (179)

Million concludes that it is crucial that Indigenous peoples continue their intense dreaming about what else our nations might be.

Million does not point to the tension between Indigenous self-determination and the avenues through which Indigenous communities attempt to define it for the sake of criticizing Indigenous-led programming. Rather, Million points to this tension in order to highlight the multifaceted dimensions of settler colonialism, to describe the felt, affective components of its existence, and to tell a cautionary tale about the way trauma narratives have the potential to undermine self-determination. Million enacts an Indigenous feminist methodology that subverts criticism-for-criticism’s-sake and instead focuses on relationship-building and generation. In this same spirit, I’m not interested here in synthesis or criticism; rather, I’m interested in expansion. Million gifts readers with several useful and philosophically interesting insights, two of which I will highlight below.

Million’s important work in Therapeutic Nations emphasizes that commonly wielded frameworks, like human rights discourse or biopoliticized narratives of trauma and healing, can seem neutral, while importing discursive and felt sociopolitical imaginaries that undermine the sovereignty and self-determination of Indigenous peoples. Million calls herself a genealogist, which seems fitting since much of her work is tracking the history, progeny, effects, and the often hidden or taken-for-granted affective facets of a particular conceptual framework.

I believe this important argument generates a profound lesson for theorists: the theoretical tools we inherit, when
taken for granted, may have the potential to undermine the social-justice projects we aim our loyalties toward. It is only with careful genealogical tracking that we can uncover the (often intentionally) hidden origins and affective components of our theoretical tools. It would be interesting to explore what other domains Million’s analyses can shed light on. For example, many Indigenous language revitalization programs, culture revitalization programs, sobriety and wellness projects, aid initiatives, and research utilizing intergenerational trauma as an explanatory tool seem to rely on similar conceptions of Indigenous peoples’ trauma that might be complicated by a Million-esque analysis. If, as Million suggests, the conception of trauma at the heart of many of these projects reiterates a narrative that creates inescapable dependency relationships between Indigenous communities and states, the projects may have the potential to undermine themselves.

Million’s epistemological project is also important. Million mentions the discursive, linguistic, articulable component of knowledge, but focuses on affective content: felt knowledge and embodied practices. Million notes that felt knowledge is feminized and dismissed by the Western obsession with Rationality, but shows how it is the affective component of knowledge that exerts much power over how Indigenous peoples are constructed and abused. In the aforementioned example about the Indian man in the back of the truck and his pre-supposed drunkenness, Million attributes the presupposition to the onlooker’s felt knowledge, not to ignorance. On Million’s account, raced, sexualized presuppositions about reality do not come from an individual’s ignorance or lack of knowledge; rather, they come from a deep and unaccounted-for type of knowledge that is constructed systemically through sociopolitical imaginaries. If racism and gender-based violence are rooted in affective or felt knowledges, analyses that circumvent or dismiss this component of knowledges are likely to miss part of the story.

As Million notes, Indigenous women have in some cases taken up the frameworks of human rights and trauma, despite their potential to undermine self-determination by reiterating neoliberal ideologies and creating relationships of dependency with the settler state. By calling our attention to felt affective knowledge, Million shows how the seemingly detrimental move of picking up human rights language and trauma narratives is actually a strategy on the part of Indigenous women. While the affective component of knowledge exerts power over how Indigenous peoples are constructed and abused, it is also the knowledge through which relationships and communities are built. Analyses that circumvent or dismiss felt knowledge have the potential to mischaracterize political acts like testimony, as Million shows occurs in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It would be interesting to see how Million’s conception of felt knowledge can complicate accounts of injustice that rely heavily on ignorance and ignorance-production.

My recommendation of this text is, of course, to all learners, though I believe this cautionary tale will be of particular importance to philosophers and public policy scholars who find themselves inundated with and prone to invoking the language of “trauma” and “healing” with regard to oppressed groups. I also believe Indigenous readers who, like myself, have found their own and their communities’ identities pre-constructed by outsiders as inescapably wounded and dependent will find *Therapeutic Nations* to be a wonderful tool in dreaming intensely of alternatives to the sociopolitical imaginaries imposed upon us by settler colonial nation-states.
FROM THE EDITOR

Peter Boltuc
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, SPRINGFIELD

We are pleased to feature the article by Bill Rapaport, which was his John Barwise Prize acceptance speech at the 2016 Eastern Division meeting. Bill is a long-term friend of the Committee on Philosophy and Computers, and of this newsletter. In the spring of 2007, when I edited my first issue here and we were in a bit of a time crunch, Bill took his important article, “Searle on Brains as Computers,” which I believe may have been invited for a different venue, and gave it to us, quite selflessly. The present article, titled “What Is Computer Science?,” does what’s promised in the title—it is a thorough discussion of the main issues in computer science today (and in the recent past). The paper is based on the essential chapters of Bill’s introductory work on philosophy of computer science, which has been taking shape on his website since at least 2004; yet, it goes beyond the introductory level and engages students and colleagues alike. The present article may serve as a model open source text to begin a class on any aspect of philosophical and general theoretical issues in computer science. (In the next issue of this newsletter we are going to have Bill’s vital article “Semantics as Syntax” and a conversation between Rapaport and Selmer Bringsjord.)

We follow up with a provocative article: “Why Think That the Brain Is Not a Computer?” Its author, Marcin Milkowski, is known as one of the main defenders—alongside Gualtiero Piccinini—of what I would call the modern-moderate version of computationalism. The current article provides an opportunity for Milkowski to zero in on the main objections to this view. The next paper is a heavy-metal presentation of “predictive coding” as a platform for testing competing hypotheses about functionalities of consciousness embodied in both biological and artificial systems. The article is based upon (and to some degree provides a follow-up on) Jun Tani’s important book Exploring Robotic Minds: Actions, Symbols, and Consciousness as Self-Organizing Dynamic Phenomena (Oxford University Press, 2016). Jun Tani, one of the leaders in synthetic neurorobotics, co-authored (with Jeff White) a more theoretical article on consciousness for the previous issue of this newsletter. Noteworthy is the fact that, for the current paper, the order of the authors has been reversed—here we learn firsthand some of the essential models in neuro-robotics. The article may be placed on the border, or maybe in a demarcation zone, between science and philosophy (and on the science side at that!). Yet, in its later sections it uses models based largely on Husserl to come up with a broad definition of consciousness. We look forward to reading the third and final part of this scientific trilogy in the following issue of the newsletter.

The remaining two articles are shorter and to a much larger degree belong to the realm of philosophy the way most departments of philosophy view it. While Tani and White related primarily to Husserl, Richard Evans focuses on Kant’s conception of Constituted Mental Activity. Evans argues that the “Kantian cognitive architecture is a rule-induction computational process.” Under certain constraints “the process’ internal activities count as cognitive activities.” This paper provides a philosophical background for a constructivist model of artificial cognitive architectures developed in Evans’ presentation “A Kantian Cognitive Architecture” at 2016 IACP (to appear in Philosophical Studies). Don Perlis, in his thought provoking paper, “I Am, Therefore I Think,” argues in favor of reflexive-self formulation of mind and consciousness that can be studied as an engineering problem. Some historical issues in computer science touched on in this article provide a nice way to come back to the topics discussed in Rapaport’s opening article.

I want to thank Marcello Guarini, the chair of this committee, and all committee members (who are listed in Marcello’s note, From the Chair) for their support. Special thanks go to Lucia Vazquez, Interim Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Illinois at Springfield, for continuing the tradition and making my work as the editor of this newsletter possible.

FROM THE CHAIR

Marcello Guarini
UNIVERSITY OF WINDSOR, WESTERN ONTARIO

The winner of the 2015 Barwise prize was Dr. William Rapaport, and we are fortunate to have the text of his acceptance talk—delivered at the 2016 American Philosophical Association Eastern Division meeting—in this issue of our newsletter.

We are also in position to announce the winner of the 2016 Barwise prize: Dr. Edward Zalta. Dr. Zalta is a Senior Research Scholar at the Center for the Study of Language and Information, Stanford University. Zalta has not only made a series of very high quality contributions to computational
metaphysics, but he is also one of the founders and the principal editor of the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. His contributions to philosophy and computing are ongoing, and the community of scholars in this area continues to benefit from his work. Dr. Zalta was very pleased to hear of the award. Unbeknownst to the APA Committee on Philosophy and Computers who selected Zalta for the award, Ed knew John Barwise personally and feels especially honored to be receiving this award. Dr. Zalta has agreed to accept the 2016 Barwise Prize at the 2018 APA Eastern meeting. We hope to announce details in the next issue of the newsletter.

Thanks go out to all members of the APA committee on Philosophy and Computers for their deliberations over the Barwise Prize. A special thanks goes to Susan Schneider, who has completed her term on the committee. My gratitude also goes out to the continuing members of the committee, Colin Allen, William Barry, Fritz J. McDonald, Gary Mar, Dylan E. Wittkower, and Piotr Boltuc. Finally, a special welcome to Guaitiero Piccinini, who has recently joined the committee.

Readers of the newsletter are encouraged to contact any member of the committee if they are interested in proposing or collaborating on a symposium at the APA that engages any of the wide range of issues associated with philosophy and computing. We are happy to continue facilitating the presentation of high quality research in this area.

FEATURED ARTICLE

What Is Computer Science?

William J. Rapaport
UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

ABSTRACT

A survey of various proposed definitions of “computer science,” arguing that it is a “portmanteau” scientific study of a family of topics surrounding both theoretical and practical computing. Its single most central question is What can be computed (and how)? Four other questions follow logically from that central one: What can be computed efficiently, and how? What can be computed practically, and how? What can be computed physically, and how? What should be computed, and how?

The Holy Grail of computer science is to capture the messy complexity of the natural world and express it algorithmically.

– Teresa Marrin Nakra

1 PHILOSOPHY OF COMPUTER SCIENCE

In 2004, I created a course on the philosophy of computer science; a draft of a textbook based on the course is available online. The book is intended for readers who might know some philosophy but no computer science, those who might know some computer science but no philosophy, and even those who know little or nothing about both. So, we begin by asking what philosophy is (primarily aimed at the computer-science audience), and, in particular: What is “the philosophy of X”? (where X = things like: science, psychology, history, and, of course, computer science).

I take the focal question of the philosophy of computer science to be: What is computer science? To answer this, we need to consider a series of questions, each of which leads to another: is computer science a science, a branch of engineering, some combination of them, or something else altogether? To answer these, we need to ask what science is and what engineering is.

Whether science or engineering, computer science is surely scientific, so we next ask what it is a (scientific) study of. Computers? If so, then what is a computer? Or is computer science a study of computation? If so, then what is computation? What is an algorithm? Algorithms are said to be procedures, or recipes, so what is a procedure? What is a recipe? What is the Church-Turing Computability Thesis (that our intuitive notion of computation is completely captured by the formal notion of Turing-machine computation)? What is “hypercomputation” (i.e., the claim that the intuitive notion of computation goes beyond Turing-machine computation)?

Computations are expressed in computer programs, which are executed by computers, so what is a computer program? Are computer programs “implementations” of algorithms? If so, then what is an implementation? What is the relation of programs and computation to the world? Are programs (scientific) theories? What is the difference between software and hardware? Are programs copyrightable texts, or are they patentable machines? Ontologically, they seem to be both texts and machines, yet legally they cannot be both copyrightable and patentable. Can computer programs be verified?

We then turn to issues in the philosophy of AI, focusing on the Turing Test and the Chinese Room Argument.

Finally, we consider two questions in computer ethics, which, when I created the course, were not much discussed, but are now at the forefront of computational ethical debates: (1) Should we trust decisions made by computers?—a question made urgent by the advent of automated vehicles. And (2) should we build “intelligent” computers? Do we have moral obligations towards robots? Can or should they have moral obligations towards us?

And, along the way, we look at how philosophers reason and evaluate logical arguments.

Although these questions arise naturally from our first question (What is computer science?), they do not exhaust the philosophy of computer science. Many topics are not covered: the nature of information, social and economic uses of computers, the Internet, etc. However, rather than aiming for universal coverage, I seek to provide a
foundation for further discussion: Neither the course nor the book is designed to answer all (or even any) of the philosophical questions that can be raised about the nature of computer science, computers, and computation. Rather, they provide background knowledge to “bring students up to speed” on the conversations about these issues, so that they can read the literature for themselves and perhaps become part of the conversations by contributing their own views. The present paper is a synopsis of Philosophy of Computer Science (Chapter 3), based on my Barwise Prize talk at the APA.12

2 PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS
However, before investigate what computer science is, it’s worth asking some preliminary questions.

2.1 WHAT IS THE NAME OF THIS DISCIPLINE?
Should we call the discipline “computer science” (which seems to assume that it is the science of a certain kind of machine), or “computer engineering” (which seems to assume that it is not a science, but a branch of engineering), or “computing science” (which seems to assume that it is the science of what those machines do), or “informatics” (which suggests that it is a mathematical discipline concerned with information)?

In this essay—but only for convenience—I call it “computer science.” However, by doing so, I do not presuppose that it is the science of computers. Think of the subject as being called by a 15-letter word “computerscience” that may have as little to do with computers or science as “cattle” has to do with cats. Or, to save space and suppress presuppositions, just think of it as “CS.”

2.2 WHY ASK WHAT CS IS?
There are both academic and philosophical motivations for trying to define CS.

2.2.1 ACADEMIC MOTIVATIONS
There is the political question of where to locate a CS department: In a college, faculty, or school of (arts and) science? Of engineering? Or in its own college, faculty, or school (perhaps of informatics, along with communications and library science)?

There is the pedagogical question of what to teach in an introductory course: Programming? Computer literacy? The mathematical theory of computation? Or an introduction to several different branches of CS, including, perhaps, some of its history?

And there is the publicity question: How should a CS department advertise itself so as to attract good students? How should the discipline advertise itself so as to encourage primary- or secondary-school students to consider it as something to study in college or to consider it as an occupation? How should it advertise itself so as to attract more women and minorities to the field? How should it advertise itself to the public at large, so that ordinary citizens might have a better understanding of what CS is?

Different motivations may yield different definitions.

2.2.2 PHILOSOPHICAL MOTIVATIONS
The philosophical question concerns what CS “really” is. Is it like some other academic discipline (mathematics, physics, engineering)? Or is it sui generis?

To illustrate this difference, consider two very different comments by two Turing-award–winning computer scientists:13 Marvin Minsky, a founder of artificial intelligence, once said:

Computer science has such intimate relations with so many other subjects that it is hard to see it as a thing in itself.14

On the other hand, Juris Hartmanis, a founder of computational complexity theory, has said:

Computer science differs from the known sciences so deeply that it has to be viewed as a new species among the sciences.15

3 TWO KINDS OF DEFINITIONS

3.1 AN EXTENSIONAL DEFINITION OF CS
As with most non-mathematical concepts, there are probably no necessary and sufficient conditions for being CS. At best, the various branches of the discipline share only a family resemblance. If no intensional definition can be given in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, perhaps an extensional one can: Perhaps CS is simply whatever computer scientists do: “Computing has no nature. It is what it is because people have made it so.”16

So, what do computer scientists do? Ordered from the most to the least abstract, this might range from the abstract mathematical theories of computation, computational complexity, and program development; through software engineering, operating systems, and AI; to computer architecture, chip design, networks, and social uses of computers. But this is less than satisfactory as a definition.

3.2 INTENSIONAL DEFINITIONS
In the absence of necessary and sufficient conditions or an extensional definition, we can ask what the methodology of CS is: Is it a methodology used elsewhere? Or is it a new methodology? And then we can ask what its object of study is: Does it study something that other disciplines also study? Or does it study something new? And is its object of study unique to CS?

As for methodology, CS has been said to be:

• an art form
  (Knuth has said that programs can be beautiful17),

• an art and science
  ("Science is knowledge which we understand so well that we can teach it to a computer; and if we don’t fully understand something, it is an art to deal with it. . . . [T]he process of going from an art to a science means that we learn how to automate something"18),
• a liberal art
  (along the lines of the classical liberal arts of logic, math, or astronomy).
• a branch of mathematics.
• a natural science.
• an empirical study of the artificial.
• a combination of science and engineering.
• just engineering.
• or—generically—a "study"

But a study of what? Here is an alphabetical list of some of the objects that it

"traffics" in (to use Barwise’s term): algorithms, automation, complexity, computers, information, intelligence, numbers (and other mathematical objects), problem solving, procedures, processes, programming, symbol strings.

It is now time to look at some answers to our title question in more detail.

4 CS IS THE SCIENCE OF COMPUTERS
Allen Newell, Alan Perlis, and Herbert Simon argued that CS is exactly what its name suggests:

Wherever there are phenomena, there can be a science to describe and explain those phenomena. ... There are computers. Ergo, computer science is the study of computers.

This argument is actually missing a premise to the effect that the science of computers (which the first two premises imply the existence of) is CS and not some other discipline.

Loui has objected to the first premise, noting that there are toasters, but no science of toasters. Another objection to the first premise, explicitly considered by Newell, Perlis, and Simon, is that science studies only natural phenomena, but that computers are non-natural artifacts. They replied that there are also sciences of artifacts. But one could respond in other ways: Where is the dividing line between nature and artifice, anyway? Are birds’ nests artificial? As Mahoney observes, not only are artifacts part of nature, we use them to study nature; indeed, nature itself might be computational in nature (so to speak).

Another objection that they consider is to the missing premise, that the science of computers is not CS but some other subject: electrical engineering, or math, or, perhaps, psychology. They reply that CS overlaps each of these, but that no single discipline subsumes all of CS. Of course, this reply assumes that CS itself is a cohesive whole, which the extensional characterization in §3.1 seems to belie.

One of my department’s deans once suggested that CS would eventually dissolve: The computer engineers would rejoin the EE department, the complexity theorists would join the math department, my AI colleagues might go into psychology, I would go back into philosophy, and so on. (In much the same way, microscopy dissolved into microbiology, optical engineering, etc.).

The most significant objection that they consider is that CS studies something besides computers, namely, algorithms. Their reply is also significant: They change their definition! They conclude that CS is the science of computers and surrounding phenomena, including algorithms.

5 CS STUDIES ALGORITHMS
Donald Knuth starts his definition, largely without any argument other than a recitation of its history, roughly where Newell, Perlis, and Simon end theirs: "[C]omputer science is . . . the study of algorithms." He cites, approvingly, a statement by the computer scientist George E. Forsythe that the central question of CS is: What can be automated? (On that question, see §14.1.1, below.)

Knuth goes on to point out, however, that you need computers in order to properly study algorithms, because “human beings are not precise enough nor fast enough to carry out any but the simplest procedures.” Are computers really necessary? Do you need a compass and straightedge to study geometry? (Hilbert probably didn’t think so.) Do you need a microscope to study biology? (Watson and Crick probably didn’t think so.) On the other hand, “deep learning” algorithms do seem to need computers in order to determine if they will really do what they are intended to do, and do so in real time.

(We’ll return to this in §11.)

So, just as Newell, Perlis, and Simon said that CS is the study of computers and related phenomena such as algorithms, Knuth says that it is the study of algorithms and related phenomena such as computers! Stated a bit more bluntly, Newell, Perlis, and Simon’s definition comes down to this: CS is the science of computers and algorithms. Knuth’s definition comes down to this: CS is the study of algorithms and computers. Ignoring for now the subtle difference between “science” and “study,” what we have here are extensionally equivalent, but intensionally distinct, definitions. Shades of the blind men and the elephant!

To be fair, however, some ten years later, Knuth backed off from the “related phenomena” definition, more emphatically defining CS as “primarily the study of algorithms,” because he “think[s] of algorithms as encompassing the whole range of concepts dealing with well-defined processes, including the structure of data that is being acted upon as well as the structure of the sequence of operations being performed,” preferring the name ‘algorithmics’ for the discipline. He also suggested that what computer scientists have in common (and that differentiates them from people in other disciplines) is that they are all “algorithmic thinkers.” (We’ll return to this notion in §13.4.)

6 CS STUDIES INFORMATION
Others say “A plague on both your houses”: CS is not the study of computers or of algorithms, but of information:
Forsythe said that CS is “the art and science of representing and processing information and, in particular, processing information with the logical engines called automatic digital computers.” Peter J. Denning defined it as “the body of knowledge dealing with the design, analysis, implementation, efficiency, and application of processes that transform information.” Jon Barwise said that computers are best thought of as “information processors,” rather than as numerical “calculators” or as “devices which traffic in formal strings . . . of meaningless symbols.” And Hartmanis and Lin define CS this way:

What is the object of study [of CS and engineering]? For the physicist, the object of study may be an atom or a star. For the biologist, it may be a cell or a plant. But computer scientists and engineers focus on information, on the ways of representing and processing information, and on the machines and systems that perform these tasks.

Presumably, those who study “the ways of representing and processing” are the scientists, and those who study “the machines and systems” are the engineers. And, of course, it is not just information that is studied; there are the usual “related phenomena”: Computer science studies how to represent and (algorithmically) process information, as well as the machines and systems that do this.

Simon takes an interesting position on the importance of computers as information processors. He discusses two “revolutions”: The first was the Industrial Revolution, which “substitut[ed] . . . mechanical energy for the energy of man [sic] and animal.” The second was (were?) the Information Revolution(s), beginning with “written language,” then “the printed book,” and now the computer. He then points out that “The computer is a device endowed with powers of utmost generality for processing symbols.” So, pace Barwise, the computer is an information processor because information is encoded in symbols.

But here the crucial question is: What is information? The term “information” as many people use it informally has many meanings: It could refer to Claude Shannon’s mathematical theory of information, or to Fred Dretske’s or Kenneth Sayre’s philosophical theories of information, or to several others.

As I noted in §1, the philosophy of information is really a separate (albeit closely related!) topic from the philosophy of computer science. But, if “information” isn’t intended to refer to some specific theory, then it seems to be merely a vague synonym for “data” (itself a vague term!). As Michael Rescorla observes, “Lacking clarification [of the term ‘information’], the description [of ‘computation as ‘information processing’ ”] is little more than an empty slogan.”

And Guaittiero Piccinini has made the stronger claim that computation is distinct from information processing in any sense of ‘information’. He argues, e.g., that semantic information requires representation, but computation does not; so, computation is distinct from semantic information processing.

### 7 CS IS A NATURAL SCIENCE (OF PROCEDURES)

Then there are those who agree that CS is a natural science, but not of computers, algorithms, or information: Stuart C. Shapiro agrees with Newell, Perlis, and Simon that CS is a science, but he differs on what it is a science of, siding more with Knuth, but not quite: “Computer Science is a natural science that studies procedures.” Procedures are not natural objects, but they are measurable natural phenomena, in the same way that events are not (natural) “objects” but are (natural) “phenomena.” On this point, Denning cites examples of the “discovery” of “information processes in the deep structures of many fields”: biology, quantum physics, economics, management science, and even the arts and humanities, concluding that “computing is now a natural science,” not (or no longer?) “a science of the artificial.” So, potential objections that sciences only study natural phenomena are avoided.

For Shapiro, procedures include, but are not limited to, algorithms. Whereas algorithms are typically considered to be precise, to halt, and to produce correct solutions, the more general notion allows for variations on these themes: (1) Procedures (as opposed to algorithms) may be imprecise, such as in a recipe. Does CS really study things like recipes? According to Shapiro (personal communication), the answer is “yes”. An education in CS should help you write a better cookbook, because it will help you understand the nature of procedures better! (2) Procedures need not halt: A procedure might go into an infinite loop either by accident or, more importantly, on purpose, as in an operating system or a program that computes the infinite decimal expansion of π. (3) Nor do they have to produce a correct solution: A chess procedure does not always play optimally.

And CS is a science, which, like any science, has both theoreticians (who study the limitations on, and kinds of, possible procedures) as well as experimentalists.

And, as Newell and Simon suggest in their discussion of empirical results (see §8, below), there are “fundamental principles” of CS as a science. Newell and Simon cite two: (1) The Physical Symbol System Hypothesis (a theory about the nature of symbols in the context of computers) and (2) Heuristic Search (a problem-solving method). Shapiro cites two others: (1) The Computability Thesis and (2) the Boehm-Jacopini Theorem that codifies “structured programming.”

Moreover, Shapiro says that computer science is not just concerned with algorithms and procedures that manipulate abstract information, but also with procedures that are linked to sensors and effectors that allow computers to operate in the real world. Procedures are, or could be, carried out in the real world by physical agents, which could be biological, mechanical, electronic, etc. Where do computers come in? According to Shapiro, a computer is simply “a general-purpose procedure-following machine.” (But does a computer “follow” a procedure, or merely “execute” it?)

Several pleas for elaboration can be urged on Shapiro: Does his view de-emphasize the role of computers in CS,
Most natural phenomena are things whose
Indeed, “The empirical; the not just
(We’ll return to
express them in a programming language—but
sitting there in someone’s mind waiting for someone to
machines sitting there waiting for someone to use them
that are actually running programs—
By “programmed, living machines,” they meant computers
be a static piece of text or the static way that a computer is
However, to study “programmed living machines,” we
certainly do need to study the algorithms that they are
i.e., it seems to be necessary to know what algorithm a
computer is executing. On the other hand, in order to study
an algorithm, it does not seem to be necessary to have
a computer around that can execute it or to study the
computer that is running it. It can be helpful and valuable
to study the computer and to study the algorithm actually
being run on the computer, but the mathematical study
of algorithms and their computational complexity doesn’t
need the computer. That is, the algorithm can be studied as
a mathematical object, using only mathematical techniques,
without necessarily executing it. It may be very much more
convenient, and even useful, to have a computer handy,
as Knuth notes, but it does not seem to be necessary.
If that’s so, then it would seem that algorithms are really
the essential object of study of CS: Both views require
algorithms, but only one requires computers. (We’ll see a
counterargument in §11.)

8 CS IS NOT A NATURAL SCIENCE
In 1967, Simon joined with Newell and Perlis to argue that
CS was the natural science of (the phenomena surrounding)
computers. Two years later, in his classic book The Sciences
of the Artificial, he said that it was a natural science of the artificial:
Natural science studies things in the world, but he
was careful not to say that the “things” must be “natural”!
“The central task of a natural science is . . . to show that
complexity, correctly viewed, is only a mask for simplicity;
to find pattern hidden in apparent chaos.” Indeed, “The
world we live in today is much more artificial than it is a natural world.
Almost every element in our environment shows evidence of human artifice.”
So, (natural) science can study artifacts; the “sciences of the artificial” are natural sciences.

And then, in a classic paper from 1976, Newell and Simon
updated their earlier characterization. Instead of saying that
CS is the science of (the phenomena surrounding)
computers, they now said that it is the “empirical” study
of those phenomena, “not just the hardware, but
the programmed, living machine.”

The reason that they say that CS is not a science (in
the classic sense) is that it doesn’t always strictly follow the
scientific (or “experimental”) method. E.g., often
one experiment will suffice to answer a question in CS,
whereas in other sciences, numerous experiments have to be run. However, CS, like science, is empirical—because
programs running on computers are experiments, though
not necessarily like experiments in other experimental sciences. In fact, one difference between CS and other experimental sciences is that, in CS, the chief objects of study (the computers and the programs) are not “black boxes.” Most natural phenomena are things whose
internal workings we cannot see directly but must infer
from experiments we perform on them. But we know exactly how and why computers and computer programs
behave as they do (they are “glass boxes,” so to speak),
because we (not nature) designed and built them. So, we
can understand them in a way that we cannot understand
more “natural” things. (However, although this is the case for “classical” computer programs, it is not the case for
artificial-neural-network programs: “A neural network,
however, was a black box”; see the comments about
Google Translate in §11, below.)

By “programmed, living machines,” they meant computers
that are actually running programs—not just the static
machines sitting there waiting for someone to use them
(computers without programs), nor the static programs just
sitting there on a piece of paper waiting for someone to
load them into the computer, nor the algorithms just
sitting there in someone’s mind waiting for someone to
express them in a programming language—but processes
that are actually running on a computer. A program might
be a static piece of text or the static way that a computer is
hardwired. A process is a dynamic entity—the program in
the “process” of actually being executed by the computer.

Here is his argument:

1. “[A] science is concerned with the discovery of facts and laws.”
2. “[T]he scientist builds in order to study; the engineer studies in order to build.
3. The purpose of engineering is to build things.
4. Computer scientists “are concerned with making things, be they computers, algorithms, or software systems.”
5. “the discipline we call ‘computer science’ is in fact not a science but a synthetic, an engineering, discipline.”

Let’s accept premise 1 for now; it seems reasonable enough.
The point of the second premise is this: If a scientist's goal is to discover facts and laws—i.e., to study rather than to build—then anything built by the scientist is only built for that ultimate purpose. But building is the ultimate goal of engineering, and any studying (or discovery of facts and laws) that an engineer does along the way to building something is merely done for that ultimate purpose. For science, building is a side-effect of studying; for engineering, studying is a side-effect of building. Both scientists and engineers, according to Brooks, build and study, but each focuses more on one than the other. (Does this remind you of the algorithms-vs.-computers dispute in §§4–5?)

The second premise supports the third, which defines engineering as a discipline whose goal is to build things, i.e., a "synthetic"—as opposed to an "analytic"—discipline. "We speak of engineering as concerned with 'synthesis', while science is concerned with 'analysis'."52 "Where physical science is commonly regarded as an analytic discipline that aims to find laws that generate or explain observed phenomena, CS is predominantly (though not exclusively) synthetic, in that formalisms and algorithms are created in order to support specific desired behaviors."53 As with his claim about the nature of science in the first premise, the accuracy of Brooks's notion of engineering is a topic for another day.54 So, let's also assume the truth of the second and third premises for the sake of the argument.

Clearly, if the fourth premise is true, then the conclusion will follow validly (or, at least, it will follow that computer scientists belong on the engineering side of the science—engineering, or studying—building, spectrum). But is it really the case that computer scientists are (only? principally?) concerned with building or "making things"? And, if so, what kind of things?

Moreover, computer scientists do discover and analyze facts and laws: Consider the theories of computation and of computational complexity, and the "fundamental principles" cited at the end of §7, above. Computer scientists devise theories about how to build things, and they try to understand what they build. All of this seems to be more science than engineering.

Interestingly, Brooks seems to suggest that computer scientists don't build computers, even if that's what he says in the conclusion of his argument! He says that "Even when we build a computer the computer scientist designs only the abstract properties—its architecture and implementation. Electrical, mechanical, and refrigeration engineers design the realization."55 I think this passage is a bit confused: Briefly, I think the "abstract properties" are the design for the realization; the engineers build the realization (they don't design it).56 But it makes an interesting point: Brooks seems to be saying that computer scientists only design abstractions, whereas other (real?) engineers implement them in reality. This is reminiscent of the distinction between the relatively abstract specifications for an algorithm (which typically lack detail) and its relatively concrete (and highly detailed) implementation in a computer program. Brooks (following Zemaneck) calls CS "the engineering of abstract objects": If engineering is a discipline that builds, then what computer-science-qua-engineering builds is implemented abstractions.

10 SCIENCE XOR ENGINEERING?
So, is CS a science of some kind (natural or otherwise), or is it not a science at all, but some kind of engineering? Here, we would be wise to listen to two skeptics about the exclusivity of this choice:

Let's remember that there is only one nature—the division into science and engineering, and subdivision into physics, chemistry, civil and electrical, is a human imposition, not a natural one. Indeed, the division is a human failure; it reflects our limited capacity to comprehend the whole. That failure impedes our progress; it builds walls just where the most interesting nuggets of knowledge may lie.56

Debates about whether [CS is] science or engineering can . . . be counterproductive, since we clearly are both, neither, and more. . . .57

11 CS AS “BOTH”
Could CS be both science and engineering—perhaps the science of computation and the engineering of computers—i.e., the study of the "programmed living machine"?

It certainly makes no sense to have a computer without a program. It doesn't matter whether the program is hardwired (in the way that a Turing machine is); i.e., it doesn't matter whether the computer is a special-purpose machine that can only do one task. The program is not separable from the machine; it is built into its structure. And it doesn't matter whether the program is a piece of software (like a program inscribed on a universal Turing machine's tape)—i.e., it doesn't matter whether the computer is a general-purpose machine that can be loaded with different "apps" allowing the same machine to do many different things. It is simply the case that, without a program, the computer wouldn't be able to do anything. So, insofar as CS is about computers and hence is engineering, it must also be about computation and hence a science (at least, a mathematical science).

But it also makes little sense to have a program without a computer to run it on. Yes, you can study the program mathematically (e.g., try to verify it) or study its computational complexity.58

The ascendancy of logical abstraction over concrete realization has ever since been a guiding principle in computer science, which has kept itself organizationally almost entirely separate from electrical engineering. The reason it has been able to do this is that computation is primarily a logical concept, and only secondarily an engineering one. To compute is to engage in formal reasoning, according to certain formal symbolic rules, and it makes no logical difference how the formulas are physically represented, or how the logical transformations of them are physically realized.59
But what good would it be (for that matter, what fun would it be!) to have, say, a program for passing the Turing test that never had an opportunity to pass it? Thus, *without a computer, the program wouldn’t be able to actually do anything*. So, *insofar as CS is about computation and hence is science, it should (must?) also be about computers and hence an engineering discipline.*

So, *computers require programs in order for the computer to do anything, and programs require computers in order for the program to actually be able to do anything*. This is reminiscent of Kant’s slogan that “Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind. . . . The understanding can intuit nothing, the senses can think nothing. Only through their union can knowledge arise.” Similarly, we can say, “Computers without programs are empty; programs without computers are blind. Only through the union of a computer with a program can computational processing arise.” A good example of this is the need for computers to test certain “deep learning” algorithms that Google used in their Translate software. Without enough computing power, there was no way to prove that their connectionist programs would work as advertised. So, CS must be both a science (that studies algorithms) and an engineering discipline (that builds computers).

But we need not be concerned with these two fighting words, because, fortunately, there are two very convenient terms that encompass both: ‘scientific’ and ‘STEM’. Surely, not only natural science, but also engineering, not to mention “artificial science,” *empirical studies,* and mathematics are all *scientific*. And, lately, NSF and the popular press have taken to referring to “STEM” disciplines—science, technology, engineering, and mathematics—precisely in order to have a single term to emphasize their similarities and interdependence, and to avoid having to try to spell out differences among them.

So let’s agree for the moment that CS might be *both* science and engineering. What about Freeman’s other two options: *neither* and *more*?

**12 CS AS “MORE”**

**12.1 CS IS A NEW KIND OF ENGINEERING**

Michael Loui defines CS as “the theory, design, and analysis of algorithms for processing [i.e., for storing, transforming, retrieving, and transmitting] information, and the implementation of these algorithms in hardware and in software.” He argues that CS is “a new species of engineering.” He first argues that CS is an engineering discipline on the grounds that engineering (1) is concerned with what can exist (as opposed to what does exist), (2) *has a scientific basis,* (3) is concerned with “design,” (4) analyzes “trade-offs,” and (5) *has heuristics and techniques.* “Computer science has all the significant attributes of engineering”; therefore, CS is a branch of engineering.

Let’s consider each of these “significant attributes”: First, his justification that CS is *not* “concerned with . . . what does exist” is related to the claim that CS is not a natural science, but a science of human-made artifacts. We have already considered two possible objections to this: First, *insofar as procedures are natural entities, CS—as the study of procedures—can be considered a natural science. Second, insofar as some artifacts—such as bird’s nests, beehives, etc.—are natural entities, studies of artifacts can be considered to be scientific.*

Next, according to Loui, the “scientific basis” of CS is mathematics. The scientific basis of “traditional engineering disciplines such as mechanical engineering and electrical engineering” is physics. This is what makes it “new”; we’ll come back to this.

According to Loui, engineers apply the principles of the scientific base of their engineering discipline to “design” a product: “[A] computer specialist applies the principles of computation to design a digital system or a program.” But not all computer scientists (or “specialists”) design systems or programs; some do purely theoretical work. And, in any case, if the scientific basis of CS is mathematics, then why does Loui say that computer “specialists” apply “the principles of computation”? I would have expected him to say that they apply the principles of mathematics. Perhaps he sees “computation” as being a branch of mathematics. Or perhaps he doesn’t think that the abstract mathematical theory of computation is part of CS, but that seems highly unlikely, especially in view of his definition of computer science as including the theory and analysis of algorithms. It’s almost as if he sees computer *engineering* as standing to computer science in the same way that mechanical or electrical engineering stand to physics. But then it is not computer science that is a branch of engineering.

Let’s turn briefly to trade-offs: “To implement algorithms efficiently, the designer of a computer system must continually evaluate trade-offs between resources” such as time vs. space, etc. This is true, but doesn’t support his argument as well as it might. For one thing, it is not only system designers who evaluate such trade-offs; so do theoretical computer scientists—witness the abstract mathematical theory of complexity. And, as noted above, not all computer scientists design such systems. So, at most, it is only those who do who are doing a kind of engineering.

Finally, as for heuristics, Loui seems to have in mind rough-and-ready “rules of thumb” rather than formally precise theories in the sense of Newell and Simon. (See §14.1.3, below, for more on this kind of heuristics.) Insofar as engineers rely on such heuristics, and insofar as some computer scientists also rely on them, then those computer scientists are doing something that engineers also do. But so do many other people: Writers surely rely on rule-of-thumb heuristics (“write simply and clearly”); does that make them engineers? This is probably his weakest premise.

The second part of Loui’s argument is to show how CS is a “new” kind of engineering:

1. “[E]ngineering disciplines have a scientific basis.”
2. “The scientific fundamentals of computer science . . . are rooted . . . in mathematics.”
3. “Computer science is therefore a new kind of engineering.” (italics added) This argument can be made valid by adding two missing premises:

A. Mathematics is a branch of science.

B. No other branch of engineering has mathematics as its basis.

We can assume from his first argument that CS is a kind of engineering. So, from that and 1, we can infer that CS (as an engineering discipline) must have a scientific basis. We need premise A so that we can infer that the basis of CS (which, by 2, is mathematics) is indeed a scientific one. Then, from B, we can infer that CS must differ from all other branches of engineering. It is, thus, mathematical engineering.

However, despite these arguments, Loui also says this: “It is impossible to define a reasonable boundary between the disciplines of computer science and computer engineering. They are the same discipline.” But doesn’t that contradict the title of his essay (“Computer Science Is an Engineering Discipline”)?

12.2 CS IS A NEW KIND OF SCIENCE

Recall that Hartmanis said that “computer science differs from the known sciences so deeply that it has to be viewed as a new species among the sciences.” First, Hartmanis comes down on the side of a being science: It is a “new species among the sciences.” A chimpanzee is a different species from a tiger “among the animals,” but they are both animals.

But what does it mean to be “a new species” of science? Both chimps and tigers are species of animals, and both lions and tigers are species within the genus Panthera. Is the relation of computer science to other sciences more like the relation of chimps to tigers (relatively distant) or lions to tigers (relatively close)? A clue comes in Hartmanis’s next sentence:

This view is justified by observing that theory and experiments in computer science play a different role and do not follow the classic pattern in physical sciences.

This strongly suggests that CS is not a physical science (such as physics or biology), and Hartmanis confirms this suggestion on page 5: “computer science, though not a physical science, is indeed a science.” The non-physical sciences are typically taken to include at least the social sciences (such as psychology) and mathematics. So, it would seem that the relation of CS to other sciences is more like that of chimps to tigers: distantly related species of the same, high-level genus. And, moreover, it would seem to put computer science either in the same camp as (either) the social sciences or mathematics, or else in a brand-new camp of its own, i.e., sui generis.

Hartmanis offers this definition of CS: At the same time, it is clear that the objects of study in computer science are information and the machines and systems which process and transmit information. From this alone, we can see that CS is concerned with the abstract subject of information, which gains reality only when it has a physical representation, and the man-made devices which process the representations of information. The goal of computer science is to endow these information processing devices with as much intelligent behavior as possible.

Although it may be “clear” to Hartmanis that information (an “abstract subject”) is (one of) the “objects of study in computer science,” he does not share his reasons for that clarity. Since, as we have seen, others seem to disagree that CS is the study of information (e.g., it could be the study of computers or the study of algorithms), it seems a bit unfair for Hartmanis not to defend his view. But he cashes out this promissory note when he says that “what sets [CS] apart from the other sciences” is that it studies “processes [such as information processing] that are not directly governed by physical laws.” And why are they not so governed? Because “information and its transmission” are "abstract entities." This makes computer science sound very much like mathematics. That is not unreasonable, given that it was this aspect of CS that led Hartmanis to his ground-breaking work on computational complexity, an almost purely mathematical area of CS.

But it’s not just information that is the object of study; it’s also information-processing machines, i.e., computers. Computers, however, don’t deal directly with information, because information is abstract, i.e., non-physical. For one thing, this suggests that, insofar as CS is a new species of non-physical science, it is not a species of social science: Despite its name, the “social” sciences deal with pretty physical things: societies, people, speech, etc.

Hartmanis explicitly says that CS is a science and is not engineering, but his comments imply that it is both. I don’t think he can have it both ways. This is reminiscent of the dialogue between Newell, Perlis, and Simon on the one hand, and Knuth on the other. Both Loui and Hartmanis agree that computer science is a new kind of something or other; each claims that the scientific and mathematical aspects of it are central; and each claims that the engineering and machinery aspects of it are also central. But one calls it “science,” while the other calls it “engineering.” Again, it seems to be a matter of point of view.

A very similar argument (that does not give credit to Hartmanis!) that CS is a new kind of science can be found in Denning and Rosenbloom. We’ll look at some of what they have to say in §13.1.

13 CS AS “NEITHER”

And now for some things completely different . . .

13.1 CS HAS ITS OWN PARADIGM

Hartmanis argued that CS was sui generis among the sciences. Denning and Peter A. Freeman offer a slightly stronger argument to the effect that CS is neither
science, engineering, nor math; rather CS has a “unique paradigm.”

But their position is somewhat muddied by their claim that “computing is a fourth great domain of science alongside the physical, life, and social sciences.” That implies that CS is a science, though of a different kind, as Hartmanis suggested.

It also leaves mathematics out of science! In a related article published three months earlier in the same journal, Denning and Paul S. Rosenboom assert without argument that “mathematics … has traditionally not been considered a science.” Denying that math is a science allows them to avoid considering CS as a mathematical science.

In any case, to justify their conclusion that CS is truly sui generis, Denning and Freeman need to show that it is not a physical, life, or social science. Denning and Rosenbloom say that “none [of these] studies computation per se.” This is only half of what needs to be shown; it also needs to be shown that CS doesn’t study physical, biological, or social entities. Obviously, it does study such things, though that is not its focus. As they admit, CS is “used extensively in all the domains”, i.e., computation is used by scientists in these domains as a tool.

So, what makes CS different? Denning and Freeman give a partial answer:

The central focus of the computing paradigm can be summarized as information processes—natural or constructed processes that transform information. . . . [T]he computing paradigm . . . is distinctively different because of its central focus on information processes.

This is only a partial answer, because it only discusses the object of study (which, as we saw in §6, is somewhat vague).

The rest of their answer is provided in a table showing the methodology of CS (Table 2, p. 29), which comes down to their version of “computational thinking.” We’ll explore what that is in §13.4.

Denning and Freeman’s version of it is close to what I will present as “synthetic” computational thinking in §14.1.1.1.

13.2 CS IS THE STUDY OF COMPLEXITY

It has been suggested that CS is the study of complexity—not just the mathematical subject of “computational complexity,” but complexity in general and in all of nature. Ceruzzi ascribes this to Jerome Wiesner. But all Wiesner says is that “information processing systems are but one facet of . . . communication sciences . . . that is, the study of . . . the problems of organized complexity.” But even if computer science is part of a larger discipline (“communication sciences”) that studies complexity, it doesn’t follow that CS itself is the study of complexity.

According to Ceruzzi, Edsger Dijkstra also held this view: “programming, when stripped of all its circumstantial irrelevancies, boils down to no more and no less than very effective thinking so as to avoid unmastered complexity.” It is hierarchical structure that “offers a standard way to handle complexity.”

The idea that a complex program is “just” a construction from simpler things, each of which—recursively—can be analyzed down to the primitive operations and data structures of one’s programming system (for a Turing machine, these would be the operations of printing and moving, and data structures constructed from ‘0’s and ‘1’s) is, first, the underlying way in which complexity can be dealt with and, second, where engineering (considered as a form of construction) comes into the picture.

But, again, at most this makes the claim that part of computer science is the study of complexity. CS certainly offers many techniques for handling complexity: structured programming, abstraction, modularity, hierarchy, top-down design, stepwise refinement, object-oriented programming, recursion, etc. So, yes, CS is one way—perhaps even the best way—to manage (or avoid) complexity, not that it is the study of it. What’s missing from Dijkstra’s argument, in any case, is a premise to the effect that computer science is the study of programming, but Dijkstra doesn’t say that, either in “EWD 512: Comments at a Symposium” (1975) or in “EWD 611: On the Fact that the Atlantic Ocean has Two Sides” (1976), the document that Ceruzzi says contains that premise.

But Denning et al. point out that viewing “computer science [as] the study of abstraction and the mastering of complexity’ . . . also applies to physics, mathematics, or philosophy”, no doubt many other disciplines also study complexity. So defining CS the study of complexity doesn’t seem to be right.

13.3 CS IS THE PHILOSOPHY(I) OF PROCEDURES

Could CS be the study of procedures, yet be a branch of philosophy instead of science? One major introductory CS text claims that CS is neither a science nor the study of computers. Rather, it is what they call “procedural epistemology,” which they define (italics added) as:

the study of the structure of knowledge from an imperative point of view, as opposed to the more declarative point of view taken by classical mathematical subjects. Mathematics provides a framework for dealing precisely with notions of “what is.” Computation provides a framework for dealing precisely with notions of “how to.”
And, of course, epistemology is, after all, a branch of philosophy.

"How to" is certainly important, and interestingly distinct from "what is." But this distinction is hard to make precise. Many imperative statements can be converted to declarative ones; e.g., each "p :- q" rule of a Prolog program can be interpreted either procedurally ("to achieve p, execute q") or declaratively ("p if q").

Or consider Euclid's *Elements*; it was originally written in "how to" form: To construct an equilateral triangle using only compass and straightedge, follow this algorithm. (Compare: To compute the value of this function using only the operations of a Turing-machine, follow this algorithm.) But today it is expressed in "what is" form: The triangle that is constructed (using only compass and straightedge) by following that algorithm is equilateral. "When Hilbert gave a modern axiomatization of geometry at the beginning of the present century, he asserted the bald existence of the line. Euclid, however, also asserted that it can be constructed." Note that the declarative version of a geometry theorem can be considered to be a formal proof of the correctness of the procedural version. This is closely related to the notion of program verification.

But even if procedural language can be intertranslated with declarative language, the two are distinct. And surely CS is concerned with procedures! There is a related issue in philosophy concerning the difference between knowing *that* something is the case (knowing that a declarative proposition is true) and knowing *how* to do something (knowing a procedure for doing it). This, in turn, may be related to Knuth's view of programming as teaching a computer (perhaps a form of knowing-that), to be contrasted with the view of a machine-learning algorithm that allows a computer to learn on its own by being trained. The former can easily gain declarative "knowledge" of what it is doing so that it can be programmed to explain what it is doing; the latter not so easily.

### 13.4 CS IS COMPUTATIONAL THINKING

A popular way to describe CS is as a "way of thinking," that "algorithmic thinking" (about anything!) is what makes CS unique:

CS is the new "new math," and people are beginning to realize that CS, like math, is unique in the sense that many other disciplines will have to adopt that way of thinking. It offers a sort of conceptual framework for other disciplines, and that's fairly new. . . . Any student interested in science and technology needs to learn to think algorithmically. That's the next big thing.

— Bernard Chazelle

Jeannette Wing's notion of "computational thinking" is thinking in such a way that a problem's solution "can effectively be carried out by an information-processing agent." Here, it is important not to limit such "agents" to computers, but to include humans! It may offer compromises on several controversies: It avoids the procedural-declarative controversy, by including both concepts, as well as others. Her definition of CS as "the study of computation—what can be computed and how to compute it" is nice, too, because the first conjunct clearly includes the theory of computation and complexity theory ("can" include "can in principle" as well as "can efficiently"), and the second conjunct can be interpreted to include both software programming as well as hardware engineering. "Study" is nice, too: It avoids the science-engineering controversy.

"To think computationally [is] to use abstraction, modularity, hierarchy, and so forth in understanding and solving problems"—indeed, computational thinking involves all of those methods cited in §13.2 for handling complexity! Five years before Perlis defined CS as the science of computers, he emphasized what is now called computational thinking:

> The purpose of . . . [a] first course in programming . . . is not to teach people how to program a specific computer, nor is it to teach some new languages. The purpose of a course in programming is to teach people how to construct and analyze processes. . . .

This, to me, is the whole importance of a course in programming. It is a simulation. The point is not to teach the students how to use ALGOL, or how to program the 704. These are of little direct value. The point is to make the students construct complex processes out of simpler ones (and this is always present in programming) in the hope that the basic concepts and abilities will rub off. A properly designed programming course will develop these abilities better than any other course.

Here is another characterization of CS, one that also characterizes computational thinking:

Computer science is in significant measure all about analyzing problems, breaking them down into manageable parts, finding solutions, and integrating the results. The skills needed for this kind of thinking apply to more than computer programming. They offer a kind of disciplined mind-set that is applicable to a broad range of design and implementation problems. These skills are helpful in engineering, scientific research, business, and even politics! Even if a student does not go on to a career in computer science or a related subject, these skills are likely to prove useful in any endeavor in which analytical thinking is valuable.

But Denning finds fault with the notion of "computational thinking," primarily on the grounds that it is too narrow:
Computation is present in nature even when scientists are not observing it or thinking about it. Computation is more fundamental than computational thinking. For this reason alone, computational thinking seems like an inadequate characterization of computer science.\textsuperscript{113}

Note that, by “computation,” Denning means Turing-machine computation. For his arguments about why it is “present in nature,” see the discussion in §7, above.\textsuperscript{118}

13.5 CS IS AI

[Computer science] is the science of how machines can be made to carry out intellectual processes.\textsuperscript{117}

The goal of computer science is to endow these information processing devices with as much intelligent behavior as possible.\textsuperscript{118}

Computational intelligence is the manifest destiny of computer science, the goal, the destination, the final frontier.\textsuperscript{119}

These aren’t exactly definitions of CS, but they could be turned into ones: CS is the study of (choose one): (a) how to get computers to do what humans can do; (b) how to make computers (at least) as “intelligent” as humans; (c) how to understand (human) cognition computationally.

The history of computers supports this: It is a history that began with how to get machines to do some human thinking (certain mathematical calculations, in particular), then more and more. Indeed, the Turing machine, as a model of computation, was motivated by how humans compute: Turing analyzes how humans compute, and then designs a computer program that does the same thing.\textsuperscript{120} But the branch of CS that analyzes how humans perform a task and then designs computer programs to do the same thing is AI. So, the Turing machine was the first AI program!

But, as I will suggest in §14.1, defining CS as AI is probably best understood as a special case of its fundamental task: determining what tasks are computable.

13.6 CS IS MAGIC

Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.

– Arthur C. Clarke\textsuperscript{121}

Could it be that the advanced technology of CS is not only indistinguishable from magic, but really is magic? Not magic as in tricks, but magic as in Merlin or Harry Potter? As one CS student put it,

Computer science is very empowering. It’s kind of like knowing magic: you learn the right stuff and how to say it, and out comes an answer that solves a real problem. That’s so cool.

– Euakarn (Som) Liengtiraphan\textsuperscript{122}

Brooks makes an even stronger claim than Clarke:

The programmer, like the poet, works only slightly removed from pure thought-stuff. He [sic] builds castles in the air, creating by the exertion of the imagination. . . . Yet the program construct, unlike the poet’s words [or the magician’s spells?], is real in the sense that it moves and works, producing visible outputs separate from the construct itself. . . . The magic of myth and legend has come true in our time. One types the correct incantation on a keyboard, and a display screen comes to life, showing things that never were nor could be.\textsuperscript{113}

Of course, the main difference between “the magic of myth and legend” and how computers work is that the former lacks (or at least fails to specify) any causal connection between incantation and result, whereas computation is quite clear about the connection: Recall our emphasis on algorithms (and see the discussion in §14.1.1.2, below).

What is “magic”? One anthropologist defines magic as the human “use of symbols to control forces in nature.”\textsuperscript{124} Clearly, programming involves exactly that kind of use of symbols.\textsuperscript{125}

How is magic supposed to work? The anthropologist James G. Frazer “had suggested that primitive people imagine magical impulses traveling over distance through ‘a kind of invisible ether’.\textsuperscript{126} That sounds like a description of electromagnetic waves: Think of electrical currents running from a keyboard to a CPU, information traveling across the Internet, or text messaging.

According to another anthropologist, Bronisław Malinowski,

The magical act involves three components: the formula, the rite, and the condition of the performer. The rite consists of three essential features: the dramatic expression of emotion through gesture and physical attitude, the use of objects and substances that are imbued with power by spoken words, and, most important, the words themselves.\textsuperscript{127}

A “wizard,” gesturing with a “wand,” performs a “spell” consisting of a formula expressed in the words of an arcane language; the spell has real-world effects, imbuing objects with power.

Abstracting away from “the dramatic expression of emotion,” use of a computer involves gestures, perhaps not with a wand, but with a mouse, a trackpad, or a touchscreen: The computer itself can be thought of as “imbued with power” when we issue, perhaps not a spell, but a command, either spoken or typed. And the words (of a programming language, or even English; think: Siri) used by the programmer or user are surely important, so the “rite” criterion is satisfied. Computer programs can be thought of as formulas, and only those programmers who know how to use appropriate programming languages, or those users who have accounts on a computer, might be considered to be in the right “condition.”
We see this happening in computers when we treat icons on a desktop (such icons are symbols) or the screen output of a WYSIWYG word processor (such as a page of a Microsoft Word document) as if they were the very things they represent. Perhaps more significantly, we see this in the case of those computer simulations in which the simulation of something really is that (kind of) thing: In online banking, the computational simulation of transferring funds between accounts is the transferring of funds; (simulated) signatures on online Word or PDF documents carry legal weight; in AI, computationally simulated cognition (arguably) is cognition. And an NRC report talks about user interfaces as "illusions".

Unlike physical objects, the virtual objects created in software are not constrained to obey the laws of physics... In the desktop metaphor, for example, the electronic version of file folders can expand, contract, or reorganize their contents on demand, quite unlike their physical counterparts.

So, perhaps computers are not just metaphorically magic (as Arthur C. Clarke might have said); they are magic!

But, of course, the main difference between "the magic of myth and legend" and how computers work is that the former lacks (or at least fails to specify) any causal connection between incantation and result, whereas computation is quite clear about the connection: Recall our emphasis on algorithms (and see the discussion in §14.1.1.2, below).

14 SO, WHAT IS COMPUTER SCIENCE?

Our exploration of the various answers suggests that there is no simple, one-sentence answer to our question. Any attempt at one is no better than the celebrated descriptions of an elephant by the blind men: Many, if not most or all, such attempts wind up describing the entire subject, but focusing on only one aspect of it. Recall Newell, Perlis, and Simon's and Knuth's distinct but logically equivalent definitions.

CS is the scientific study of a family of topics surrounding both abstract (or theoretical) and concrete (or practical computing)—a "portmanteau" discipline.

Charles Darwin said that "all true classification . . . [is] genealogical," CS's genealogy involves two historical traditions: (1) the study of algorithms and the foundations of mathematics (from ancient Babylonian mathematics, through Euclid's geometry, to inquiries into the nature of logic, leading ultimately to the Turing machine) and (2) the attempts to design and construct a calculating machine (from the Antikythera Mechanism of ancient Greece; through Pascal's and Leibniz's calculators and Babbage's machines; to the ENIAC, iPhone, and beyond). So, modern CS is the result of a marriage between (or merger of) the engineering problem of building better and better automatic calculating devices with the mathematical (hence, scientific) problem of understanding the nature of algorithmic computation. And that implies that modern CS, to the extent that it is a single discipline, has both engineering and science in its DNA. Hence its portmanteau nature.

The topics studied in contemporary CS roughly align along a spectrum ranging from the mathematical theory of computing, at one end, to the engineering of physical computers, at the other, as we saw in §3.2. Newell, Perlis, and Simon were looking at this spectrum from one end; Knuth was looking at it from the other end. The topics share a family resemblance (and perhaps nothing more than that, except for their underlying DNA), not only to each other, but also to other disciplines (including mathematics, electrical engineering, information theory, communication, etc.), and they overlap with issues discussed in the cognitive sciences, philosophy (including ethics), sociology, education, the arts, and business.

14.1 FIVE CENTRAL QUESTIONS OF CS

In this section, I want to suggest that there are five central questions of CS. The single most central question is:

1. A. What can be computed?

But to answer that, we also need to ask:

1. B. How can it be computed?

Several other questions follow logically from that central one:

2. What can be computed efficiently, and how?

3. What can be computed practically, and how?

4. What can be computed physically, and how?

5. What should be computed, and how?

Let's consider each of these in a bit more detail.

14.1.1 COMPUTABILITY

14.1.1.1 What Is Computable? "What can be computed?" (or: "What is computable?") is the central question, because all other questions presuppose it. The fundamental task of any computer scientist—whether at the purely mathematical or theoretical end of the spectrum, or at the purely practical or engineering end—is to determine whether there is a computational solution to a given problem, and, if so, how to implement it. But those implementation questions are covered by the rest of the questions on our list, and only make sense after the first question has been answered. (Alternatively, they facilitate answering that first question; in any case, they serve the goal of answering it.)

Question 1 includes the question of computability vs. non-computability. It is the question that Church, Turing, Gödel, and others were originally concerned with—Which
mathematical functions are computable?—and whose answer has been given as the Church-Turing Computability Thesis: A function is computable if and only if it is computable by a Turing machine (or any formalism logically equivalent to a Turing machine, such as Church’s lambda calculus or Gödel’s general recursive functions). It is important to note that not all functions are computable. If they were, then computability would not be an interesting notion. (A standard example of a non-computable function is the Halting Problem.)

Various branches of CS are concerned with identifying which problems can be expressed by computable functions. So, a corollary of the Computability Thesis is that a task is computable if and only if it can be expressed as a computable function.

Here are some examples:

- Is cognition computable? The central question of AI is whether the functions that describe cognitive processes are computable. (This is one reason why I prefer to call AI “computational cognition.”) Given the advances that have been made in AI to date, it seems clear that at least some aspects of cognition are computable, so a slightly more precise question is: How much of cognition is computable? 

- Consider Shannon’s 1950 paper on chess: The principal question is: Can we mathematically analyze chess? In particular, can we computationally analyze it (suggesting that computational analysis is a branch or kind of mathematical analysis)—i.e., can we analyze it procedurally? I.e., can we play chess rationally?

- Is the weather computable?

- Is fingerprint identification computable?

- Is final-exam-scheduling computable? Faculty members in my department recently debated whether it was possible to write a computer program that would schedule final exams with no time conflicts and in rooms that were of the proper size for the class. Some thought that this was a trivial problem; others thought that there was no such algorithm (on the (perhaps dubious!) grounds that no one in the university administration had ever been able to produce such a schedule); in fact, this problem is NP-complete.

This aspect of question 1 is close to Forsythe’s famous one:

The question “What can be automated?” is one of the most inspiring philosophical and practical questions of contemporary civilization.

Although similar in intent, Forsythe’s question can be understood in a slightly different way. Presumably, a process can be automated—i.e., done automatically, by a machine, without human intervention—if it can be expressed as an algorithm. That is, computable implies automatable. But automatable does not imply computable: Witness the invention of the direct dialing system in telephony, which automated the task of the human operator. Yes, direct dialing is computable, but it wasn’t a computer that did this automation.

14.1.1.2 How Is It Computable? The “how” question is also important: CS cannot be satisfied with a mere existence statement to the effect that a problem is computable; it also requires a constructive answer in the form of an algorithm that explicitly shows how it is computable.

In a Calvin and Hobbes cartoon, Calvin discovers that if you input one thing (bread) into a toaster, a different thing (toast) is output. Hobbes wonders what happened to the input. It didn’t disappear, of course, nor did it “magically” turn into the output:

Everything going on in the software [of a computer] has to be physically supported by something going on in the hardware. Otherwise the computer couldn’t do what it does from the software perspective—it doesn’t work by magic. But usually we don’t have to know how the hardware works—only the engineer and the repairman do. We can act as though the computer just carries out the software instructions, period. For all we care, as long as it works, it might as well be magic.

Rather, the toaster did something to the bread (heated it). That intervening process is the analogue of an algorithm for the bread-to-toast function. Finding “intervening processes” requires algorithmic thinking, and results in algorithms that specify the transformational relations between input and output. (Where behaviorism focused only on inputs and outputs, cognitive psychology focused on the intervening algorithms.)

So, just as, for any x, there can be a philosophy of x, so we can ask, given some x, whether there is a computational theory of x. Finding a computational solution to a problem requires “computational thinking,” i.e., algorithmic (or procedural) thinking (see §13.4, above).

Computational thinking includes what I call the four Great Insights of CS:

1. The representational insight: Only 2 nouns are needed to represent information (‘0’, ‘1’).
2. The processing insight: Only 3 verbs are needed to process information (move(left or right), print(0 or 1), halt)
3. The structural insight: Only 3 grammar rules are needed to combine actions (sequence, selection, repetition)
4. The “closure” insight: Nothing else is needed. (This is the import of the Church-Turing Computability Thesis.)
Computational thinking involves both synthesis and analysis:

**Synthesis:** Given a problem \( P \),

1. express \( P \) as a mathematical function \( FP \) (or a collection of interacting functions; i.e., give an input-output specification of \( P \));
2. try to find an algorithm \( AF_P \) for computing \( FP \) (i.e., for transforming the input to the output; then try to find an efficient and practical version of \( AF_P \));
3. implement \( AF_P \) on a physical computer.

Note the similarity of synthetic computational thinking to David Marr’s analysis of information processing.¹⁴⁷

**Analysis:**

Given a real-world process \( P \) (physical, biological, psychological, social, economic, etc.), try to find a computational process \( AP \) that models (describes, simulates, explains, etc.) \( P \).

Note that, once found, \( AP \) can be re-implemented; this is why computers can (be said to) think!¹⁴⁸

### 14.1.2 EFFICIENT COMPUTABILITY

**Question 2** is the question studied by the branch of computer science known as computational complexity theory. Given an algorithm, one question is how much time it will take to be executed and how much space (memory) it will need. A more general question is this: Given the set of computable functions, which of them can be computed in, so to speak, less time than the age of the universe or less space than the size of the universe. The principal distinction is whether a function is in the class called \( P \) (in which case, it is “efficiently” computable) or in the class \( NP \) (in which case it is not efficiently computable but it is efficiently “verifiable”):¹⁴⁹

Even children can multiply two primes, but the reverse operation—splitting a large number into two primes—taxes even the most powerful computers. The numbers used in symmetric encryption are typically hundreds of digits long. Finding the prime factors of such a large number is like trying to unmix the colors in a can of paint, . . . “Mixing paint is trivial. Separating paint isn’t.”¹⁵⁰

Almost all practical algorithms are in \( P \). By contrast, one important algorithm that is in \( NP \) is the Boolean Satisfiability problem: Given a molecular proposition of propositional logic with \( n \) atomic propositions, under what assignment of truth-values to those atomic propositions is the molecular proposition true (or “satisfied”)? Whether \( P = NP \) is one of the major open questions in mathematics and CS; most computer scientists both hope and believe that \( P = NP \).¹⁵¹

### 14.1.3 PRACTICAL COMPUTABILITY

**Question 3** is considered both by complexity theorists as well as by more practically-oriented software engineers. Given a computable function in \( P \) (or, for that matter, in \( NP \)) what are some practically efficient methods of actually computing it? E.g., under certain circumstances, some sorting algorithms are more efficient in a practical sense (e.g., faster) than others. Even a computable function that is in \( NP \) might be practically computable in special cases. And some functions might only be practically computable “indirectly” via a “heuristic”: A heuristic for problem \( p \) can be defined as an algorithm for some problem \( p' \), where the solution to \( p' \) is “good enough” as a solution to \( p \).¹⁵² Being “good enough” is, of course, a subjective notion; Oomen and Rueda call the “good enough” solution “a sub-optimal solution that, hopefully, is arbitrarily close to the optimal.”¹⁵³ The idea is related to Simon’s notion of bounded rationality: We might not be able to solve a problem \( p \) because of limitations in space, time, or knowledge, but we might be able to solve a different problem \( p' \) algorithmically within the required spatio-temporal-epistemic limits. And if the algorithmic solution to \( p' \) gets us closer to a solution to \( p \), then it is a heuristic solution to \( p \). But it is still an algorithm.¹⁵⁴ A classic case of this is the Traveling Salesperson Problem, an \( NP \)-problem for which software like Google Maps solves special cases for us every day (even if their solutions are only “satisficing” ones).¹⁵⁵

### 14.1.4 PHYSICAL COMPUTABILITY

But since the only (or the best) way to decide whether a computable function really does what it claims to do is to execute it on a computer, computers become an integral part of CS. Question 4 brings in both empirical (hence scientific) and engineering considerations. Even a practically efficient algorithm for computing some function might run up against physical limitations. Here is one example: Even if, eventually, computational linguists devise practically efficient algorithms for natural-language “competence” (understanding and generation)¹⁵⁶ it remains the case that humans have a finite life span, so the infinite capabilities of natural-language competence are not really required (a Turing machine isn’t needed; a push-down automaton might suffice). This is also the question that issues in the design and construction of real computers (“computer engineering”) are concerned with. And it is where investigations into alternative physical implementations of computing (quantum, optical, DNA, etc.) come in.

### 14.1.5 ETHICAL COMPUTABILITY

Bruce Arden, elaborating Forsythe’s question, said that “the basic question [is] . . . what can and should be automated.”¹⁵⁷ Question 5 brings in ethical considerations.¹⁵⁸ Actually, the question is slightly ambiguous. It could simply refer to questions of practical efficiency: Given a sorting problem, which sorting algorithm should be used; i.e., which one is the “best” or “most practical” or “most efficient” in the actual circumstances? But this sense of “should” does not really differentiate this question from question 3.

It is the ethical interpretation that makes this question interesting: Suppose that there is a practical and efficient algorithm for making certain decisions (e.g., as in the
It is interesting and important to note that none of Wing’s questions correspond to the ethical question 5.

15 CONCLUSION
To sum up, computer science is the (scientific, or STEM) study of:

- what problems can be solved,
- what tasks can be accomplished, and
- what features of the world can be understood . . .

... computationally, i.e., using a language with only:

- 2 nouns (‘0’, ‘1’),
- 3 verbs (‘move’, ‘print’, ‘halt’),
- 3 grammar rules (sequence, selection, repetition; or just recursion), and
- nothing else,

and then to provide algorithms to show how this can be done:

- efficiently,
- practically,
- physically, and
- ethically.

I said that our survey suggests that there is no simple, one-sentence answer to the question: What is computer science? My definition above is hardly a simple sentence. But our opening quotation—from an interview with a computational musician—comes closer, so I will end where I began:

The Holy Grail of computer science is to capture the messy complexity of the natural world and express it algorithmically.

– Teresa Marrin Nakra

NOTES

case of autonomous vehicles). There is still the question of whether we should use those algorithms to actually make decisions for us. Or let us suppose that the goal of AI—a computational theory of cognition—is practically and efficiently computable by physically plausible computers. One can and should still raise the question whether such “artificial intelligences” should be created, and whether we (their creators) have any ethical or moral obligations towards them, and vice versa! And there is the question of implicit biases that might be (intentionally or unintentionally) built into some machine-learning algorithms.

14.2 WING’S FIVE QUESTIONS
It may prove useful to compare my five questions with Wing’s “Five Deep Questions in Computing”:

1. \( P = NP \)?
2. What is computable?
3. What is intelligence?
4. What is information?
5. (How) can we build complex systems simply?

All but the last, it seems to me, concern scientific (abstract, mathematical) issues: If we consider Wing’s second question to be the same as our central one, then her first question can be rephrased as our “What is efficiently computable?,” and her third can be rephrased as “How much of (human) cognition is computable?” (a special case of our central question). Her fourth question can then be seen as asking an ontological question about the nature of what it is that is computed (an aspect of our central question): numbers (0s and 1s)? symbols (‘0’s and ‘1’s)? information in some sense (and, if so, in which sense)?

Wing’s last question is ambiguous between two readings of “build”: On a software reading, it can be viewed in an abstract (scientific, mathematical) way as asking a question about the structural nature of software (the issues concerning the proper use of the “goto” statement [Dijkstra, 1968] and structural programming would fall under this category). As such, it concerns the grammar rules; it is then an aspect of our central question. But it can also be viewed on a hardware reading as asking an engineering question: How should we—literally—build computers?

Interpreted in this way, Wing’s five questions can be boiled down to two:

- What is computation such that only some things can be computed? (And what can be computed (efficiently), and how?)
- (How) can we build physical devices to perform these computations?

The first is equivalent to our questions 1–3, the second to our question 4. And, in this case, we see once again the two parts of the discipline: the scientific (or mathematical, or abstract) and the engineering (or concrete).
12. I am grateful to Thomas M. Powers and Richard M. Rubin for comments and discussion at the 2017 APA Eastern Division session where I presented the material in the present essay. And I am especially grateful to the American Philosophical Association Committee on Philosophy and Computers for this distinct honor, which recognizes “contributions to areas relevant to philosophy and computing” (http://www.apaonline.org/?barwise). Because of my philosophy interests in philosophy of mind, I was inspired by Hofstadter’s review of Aaron Sloman, The Computer Revolution in Philosophy (1978), which quoted Sloman (p. 5) to the effect that a philosopher of mind who knew no AI was like a physicist of physics who knew no quantum mechanics—to study AI at SUNY Buffalo with Stuart C. Shapiro. This eventually led to a faculty appointment in computer science at Buffalo. Along the way, my philosophy colleagues and I at SUNY Fredonia published one of the first introductory logic textbooks to use computational approaches (Schagrin et al., Logic: A Computer Approach, 1985). At Buffalo, I was amazed to discover that my relatively arcane philosophy dissertation on Meinong was directly relevant to Shapiro’s work in AI, providing an intensional semantics for his SNePS semantic-network processing system (Shapiro and Rapaport, “SNePS Considered as a Fully Intensional Propositional Semantic Network,” 1987, Shapiro and Rapaport, “Models and Minds: Knowledge Representation for Natural-Language Competence,” 1991). And then I realized that the discovery of quasi-indexicals (“he himself,” “she herself,” etc.) by my dissertation advisor, Hector-Neri Castillo (“He: A Study in the Logic of Self-Consciousness,” 1966), could repair a “bug” in a knowledge-representation theory that Shapiro had developed with another convert to computer science (from psychology), Anthony S. Maida (Maida and Shapiro, “Intensional Concepts in Propositional Semantic Networks,” 1982). This work was itself debugged with the help of yet another convert (from English), my doctoral student Janyce M. Wiebe (Rapaport et al., “Quasi-indexicals and Knowledge Reports,” 1997). My work with Shapiro and our SNePS Research Group at Buffalo enabled me to reboot Searle (“Minds, Brains, and Programs”), using “syntactic semantics” (Rapaport, “Philosophy, Artificial Intelligence, and the Chinese Room Argument,” 1986, Rapaport, “Syntactic Semantics: Foundations of Computational Natural-Language Understanding,” 1988; Rapaport, “Understanding Understanding: Syntactic Semantics and Computational Cognition,” 1995, Rapaport, “How to Pass a Turing Test: Syntactic Semantics, Natural-Language Understanding, and First-Person Cognition,” 2000; Rapaport, “Semiotic Systems, Computers, and the Mind: How Cognition Could Be Computing,” 2012). Both of these projects, as well as one of my early Meinong papers (Rapaport, “How to Make the World Fit Our Language: An Essay in Meinongian Semantics,” 1981), led me, together with another doctoral student (Karen Ehrlich) and (later) a colleague from Buffalo’s Department of Learning and Instruction (Michael W. Kibbey), to develop a computational and pedagogical theory of vocabulary acquisition from context (Rapaport and Kibbey, “Contextual Vocabulary Acquisition as Computational Philosophy and as Philosophical Computation,” 2007; Rapaport and Kibbey, “Contextual Vocabulary Acquisition: From Algorithm to Curriculum,” 2014).


18. Ibid., 668.


31. Ibid.

34. Ibid., 172.
44. Piccinini, Physical Computation, Ch. 14, §3.
50. Knowing Shapiro, I strongly suspect that it is the latter.
51. Rapaport, Philosophy of Computer Science, Ch. 11.
52. Simon, The Sciences of the Artificial, 1.
53. Ibid., 2.
55. Ibid., 114.
57. Brooks, "The Computer Scientist as Toolsmith II."
58. Ibid., 61–62.
59. I discuss this issue in more detail in Rapaport, Philosophy of Computer Science, Ch. 4.
60. Simon, The Sciences of the Artificial, 4.
62. Covered in Rapaport, Philosophy of Computer Science, Ch. 5.
70. I. Kant, Critique of Pure Reason (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1781/1787), 93 (A51/B75).
72. Nothing should be read into the ordering of the terms in the acronym: The original acronym was the less mellifluous "SMET"! And educators, perhaps with a nod to Knuth’s views, have been adding the arts, to create “STEAM” (http://stemtosteam.org/).
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid., 177.
78. Newell and Simon, "Computer Science as Empirical Inquiry Symbols and Search."
83. Ibid.
87. Ibid., 8.
90. Ibid., 29. My italics.
92. An option that we explore in Rapaport, Philosophy of Computer Science, Ch. 3, §3.10.2.
94. Ibid.
96. Ibid., 30.
106. For further discussion of "to accomplish goal G, do procedure P," see Rapaport, "On the Relation of Computing to the World.
114. For more on computational thinking, see the homepage for the Center for Computational Thinking, http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~CompThink/
116. For more on computational thinking, see the homepage for the Center for Computational Thinking, http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~CompThink/
128. Ibid., 724. My italics.
130. Cited by Samuelson et al., "A Manifesto Concerning the Legal Protection of Computer Programs," 2324, notes 44 and 46; 2325, note 47.
131. Ibid. 2334.
132. L. Carroll, Through the Looking-Glass, available at http://www.gutenberg.org/files/12/12-h/12-h.htm


146. The exact number of nouns, verbs, or grammar rules depends on the formalism. E.g., some presentations add “read” or “erase” as verbs, or use recursion as the single rule of grammar, etc. The point is that there is a very minimal set and that nothing else is needed. Of course, more nouns, verbs, or grammar rules allow for greater ease of expression.


149. Technically, P is the class of functions computable in “Polynomial time,” and NP is the class of functions computable in “Non-deterministic Polynomial time.”


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———. “Why Think That the Brain Is Not a Computer?”

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**ABSTRACT**

In this paper, I review the objections against the claim that brains are computers, or, to be precise, information-processing mechanisms. By showing that practically all the popular objections are either based on uncharitable interpretation of the claim, or simply wrong, I argue that the claim is likely to be true, relevant to contemporary cognitive (neuro)science, and non-trivial.

Computationalism is here to stay. To see why, I will review the reasons why one could think that the brain is not a computer. Although more reasons can be brought to bear...
on the issue, my contention is that it’s less than likely that they would make any difference. The claim that the brain is a specific kind of an information-processing mechanism, and that information-processing is necessary (even if not sufficient) for cognition, is non-trivial and generally accepted in cognitive (neuro)science. I will not develop the positive view here, however, as it was already stated sufficiently clearly to my tastes in book-length accounts. Instead, I will go through the objections, and show that they all fail just because they make computationalism a straw man.

SOFTWARE AND NUMBER CRUNCHING
One fairly popular objection against computationalism is that there is no simple way to understand the notions of software and hardware as applied to biological brains. But the software/hardware distinction, popular as the slogan “the mind to the brain is like the software to hardware,” need not be applicable to brains at all for computationalism to be true. There are computers that are not program-controllable: they do not load programs from external memory to internal memory to execute them. The most mundane example of such a computer is a logical gate whose operation corresponds to a logical connective, e.g., disjunction or conjunction. In other words, while it may be interesting to inquire whether there is software in the brain, there may as well be none, and computationalism could still be true. Hence, the objection fails, even if it is repeatedly cited in popular press.

Another intuitive objection, already stated (and defeated) in the 1950s, is that brains are not engaged in number-crunching, while computers, well, compute over numbers. But if this is all computers do, then they don’t control missiles, send documents to printers, or display pictures on computer monitors. After all, printing is not just number crunching. The objection rests therefore on a mistaken assumption that computers can only compute numerical functions. Computer functions can be defined not only on integer numbers but also on arbitrary symbols, and as physical mechanisms, computers can also control other physical processes.

SYMBOLS AND MEANING
The notion of a symbol is sometimes interpreted to say that symbols in computers are, in some sense, abstract and formal, which would make computers strangely dis-embodied. In other words, the opponents of computationalism claim that it implies some kind of dualism. However, computers are physical mechanisms, and they can be broken, put on fire, and thrown out of the window. These things may be difficult to accomplish with a collection of abstract entities; the last time I tried, I was caught red-handed while committing a simple category mistake. Surely enough, computers are not just symbol-manipulators. They do things, and some of the things computers do are not computational. In this sense, computers are physically embodied, not unlike mammal brains. It is, however, a completely different matter whether the symbols in computers mean anything.

One of the most powerful objections formulated against the possibility of Artificial intelligence is associated with John Searle’s Chinese Room thought experiment. Searle claimed to show that running of a computer program is not sufficient for semantic properties to arise, and this was in clear contradiction to what was advanced by proponents of Artificial Intelligence who assumed that it was sufficient to simulate the syntactic structure of representations for the semantic properties to appear; as John Haugeland quipped: “if you take care of syntax, the semantics will take care of itself.” But Searle replied: one can easily imagine a person with a special set of instructions in English who could manipulate Chinese symbols and answer questions in Chinese without understanding it at all. Hence, understanding is not reducible to syntactic manipulation. While the discussion around this thought experiment is hardly conclusive, the problem was soon reformulated by Stevan Harnad as “symbol grounding problem.” How can symbols in computational machines mean anything?

If symbol grounding problem makes any sense, then one cannot simply assume that symbols in computers mean something just by being parts of computers, or at least they cannot mean anything outside the computer so easily (even if they contain instructional information). This is an assumption made also by proponents of causal-mechanistic analyses of physical computation: representational properties are not assumed to necessarily exist in physical computational mechanisms. So, even if Searle is right and there is no semantics in computers, the brain might still be a computer, as computers need no semantics to be computers. Maybe something additional to computation is required for semantics.

Let us make the record straight here. There is an important connection between the computational theory of mind and the representational account of cognition: they are more attractive when both are embraced. Cognitive science frequently explains cognitive phenomena by referring to semantic properties of mechanisms capable of information-processing. Brains are assumed to model reality, and these models can be computed over. While this seems plausible to many, it’s important to remember than one can remain computationalist without assuming representationalism, or the claim that cognition requires cognitive representation. At the same time, a plausible account of cognitive representation cannot be couched merely in computational terms as long as one assumes that the symbol grounding problem makes sense at least for some computers. To make the account plausible, most theorists appeal to notions of teleological function and semantic information, which are not technical terms of computability theory nor can be reduced to such. So, computers need something special to operate on inherently meaningful symbols.

What made computationalism so strongly connected to cognitive representations was the fact that it offered a solution to the problem of what makes meaning causally relevant. Many theorists claim that just because the syntax in computer programs is causally relevant (or efficacious), so is the meaning. While the wholesale reduction of meaning to syntax is implausible, the computational theory of mind makes it clear that the answer to the question includes the causal role of the syntax of computational vehicles. Still, it is not an objection to computationalism itself that it does.
not offer a naturalistic account of meaning. That would be indeed too much.

The debate over the meaning in computers and animals abounds in red herrings, however. One recent example is Robert Epstein’s essay. While the essay is ridden with confusion, the most striking mistake is the assumption that computers always represent everything with arbitrary accuracy. Epstein cites the example of how people remember a dollar bill, and assumes that computers would represent it in a photographic manner with all available detail. This is an obvious mistake: representation is useful mostly when it does not convey information about all properties of the represented target (remember that the map of the empire is useful only when it is not exact?). If Epstein is correct, then there are no JPEG files in computers, as they are not accurate, and they are based on lossy compression. And there are no MP3 files. And so on. No assumption of the computational theory of mind says that memory should be understood in terms of the von Neumann architecture, and only some controversial theories suggest that it should.

Epstein also presses the point that people are organisms. Yes, I would also add that water is (mostly) \( \text{H}_2\text{O} \). It’s true but just as irrelevant as Epstein’s claim: physical computers are, well, physical, and they may be built in various ways. It’s essential that they are physical.

A related objection may be phrased in terms of James J. Gibson’s ecological psychology. Ecological psychologists stress that people do not process information, they just pick it up from the environment. This is an interesting idea. But one should make it more explicit what is meant by information processing in the computational theory of mind. What kind of information is processed? It should be clear enough that the information need not be semantic, as not all symbols in computers are about something. The minimal notion that should suffice for our purposes is the notion of structural information: a vehicle can bear structural information just in case it has at least one degree of freedom, that is, may vary its state. The number of degrees of freedom, or yes-no questions required to exactly describe its current state, is the amount of structural information. As long as there are vehicles with multiple degrees of freedom and they are part of causal processes that cause some other vehicles just like some model of computation describes these processes, there is information processing. This is a very broad notion, as all physical causation implies information transfer and processing in this sense.

Right now it’s important to note that the Gibsonian notion of information pickup, interesting as it is, requires vehicles of structural information as well. There needs to be some information out there to be picked up, and organisms have to be so structured to be able to change their state in response to information. Gibsonians could, however, claim that the information is not processed. Frankly, I do not know what is meant by this: for example, Chemero seems to imply that processing amounts to adding more and more layers of additional information, like in Marr’s account of vision. Why information processing should require multiple stages of adding more information is beyond me.

Even uses of Gibsonian information in, say, simple robots, are clearly computational, and insisting otherwise seems to imply that the dispute is purely verbal. To sum up: the Gibsonian account does not invalidate computationalism at all.

**CONSCIOUSNESS**

Some people find (some kinds of) consciousness to be utterly incompatible with computationalism, or at least, unexplainable in purely computational terms. The argument is probably due to Leibniz with his thought experiment in *Monadology*. Imagine a brain as huge as a mill, and enter it. Nowhere in the interplay of gears could you find perceptions, or qualitative consciousness. Hence, you cannot explain perception mechanically. Of course, this Leibnizian argument appeals only to some physical features of mechanisms, but some still seem to think that causation has nothing to do with qualitative consciousness. Notice also that the argument, if cogent, is applicable more broadly, not just to computationalism; it is supposed to defeat reductive physicalism or materialism.

For example, David Chalmers claims that while awareness, or the contentful cognitive states and processes, can be explained reductively by appealing to physical processes, there is some qualitative, phenomenal consciousness that escapes all such attempts. But his own positive account (or one of his accounts) is panpsychism, and it states that whenever there is physical information, there is consciousness. Qualitative consciousness. So how is this incompatible with computationalism, again? According to Chalmers, qualitative consciousness supervenes on information with physical necessity (not conceptual one). So be it, but it does not invalidate computationalism, of course.

Notice also that virtually all current theories of consciousness are computational, even the ones that appeal to quantum processes. For example, Bernard Baars offers a computational account in terms of the global workspace theory, David Rosenthal an account in terms of higher-level states, and Giulio Tononi in terms of minimal information integration. Is there any theory of consciousness that is not already computational?

Let us turn to Searle. After all, he suggests that only a non-computational theory of consciousness can succeed. His claim is that consciousness is utterly biological. Fine, but how does this exactly contradict computationalism? You may build a computer of DNA strands, so why claim that it’s metaphysically impossible to have a biological computer? Moreover, Searle fails to state which biological powers of brains specifically make them conscious. He just passes the buck to neuroscience. And neuroscience offers computational accounts. Maybe there’s a revolution behind the corner, but as things stand, I would not hold my breath for a non-computational account of qualitative consciousness.

**TIME AND ANALOG PROCESSING**

Proponents of dynamical accounts of cognition stress that Turing machines do not operate in real time. This means that this classical model of computation does not appeal
to real time; instead, it operates with the abstract notion of the computation step. There is no continuous time flow, just discrete clock ticks in a Turing Machine. This is true. But is this an objection against computationalism?

First, there are models of computation that appeal to real time. So one could use such a formalism. Second, the objection seems to confuse the formal model of computation with its physical realization. Physical computers operate in real time, and not all models of computation are made equal; some will be relevant to explaining cognition, and some may be only useful for computability theory. What is required for explanatory purposes is a mechanically-adequate model of computation that describes all relevant causal processes in the mechanism.

Universal Turing machines are crucial to computability theory. But one could also appeal to models of analog computation if required. These are still understood as computational in computability theory, and some theorists indeed claim that the brain is an analog computer, which is supposed to allow them to compute Turing-incomputable functions. While this is controversial (others claim that brains compute in a more complex fashion), it shows that one cannot dismiss computationalism by saying that the brain is not a digital computer, as Gerald Edelman did.

There are analog computers, and an early model of a neural network, Perceptron, was analog. The contention that computers have to be digital is just dogmatic.

**ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE**

There are a number of arguments with a form:

1. People $\psi$.
2. Computers will never $\psi$.

So, artificial intelligence is impossible (or computationalism is false).

This argument is enthymematic, but the conclusion follows with a third assumption: if artificial intelligence is possible, then computers will $\psi$. The plausibility of the argument varies from case to case, depending on what you fill for $\psi$. For years, people thought that winning in chess is $\psi$, but it turned out to be false, which makes the argument instance unsound. So, unless there is a formal proof, it’s difficult to treat premise 2 seriously.

So what could be plausibly substituted for $\psi$? Obviously, not sexual reproduction, even if it is humanly possible. There are many properties of biological organisms that simply seem irrelevant to this argument, including exactly the same energy consumption, having proper names, spatiotemporal location, and so on. The plausible candidate for substitution is some capacity for information-processing. If there is such capacity that humans have but computers cannot, then the argument is indeed cogent.

So what could be the candidate capacity? The classical argument pointed to the human ability to recognize the truth of logical statements that cannot be proven by a computer. It is based on the alleged ability of human beings to understand that some statements are true, which is purportedly impossible only for machines (this argument is based on the Gödel proof of incompleteness of the first-order predicate calculus with basic arithmetic).

The problem is that this human understanding has to be non-contradictory and certain. But Gödel has shown that it’s undecidable in general whether a given system is contradictory or not; so either the argument states that it’s mathematically certain that human understanding of mathematics is non-contradictory, which makes the argument inconsistent (it cannot be mathematically certain because it’s undecidable); or it just dogmatically assumes consistency, which means that the argument is implausible, and even unsound because we know that people commit contradictions unknowingly.

Another argument points to common sense. Common sense is a particularly difficult capacity, and the trouble with implementing common sense on machines is sometimes called (somewhat misleadingly) the frame problem. Inferential capacities of standard AI programs do not seem to follow the practices known to humans, and that was supposed to hinder progress in such fields as high-quality machine translation, speech recognition (held to be immoral to fund by Weizenbaum9), and so on. Even if IBM Watson wins in Jeopardy!, one may still think it’s not enough. Admittedly, common sense is a plausible candidate in this argument. Notice that even if the proponent of the computational theory of cognition could reject the necessity of building genuine AI that is not based on a computer simulation of human cognitive processes, he or she still has the burden of showing that human common sense can be simulated on a computer. Whether it can or not is still a matter of debate.

**COMPUTERS ARE EVERYWHERE (OR DON’T REALLY EXIST)**

Still another argument against computationalism brings pretty heavy artillery. The argument has two versions. The first version is the following: at least some plausible theories of physical implementation of computation lead to the conclusion that all physical entities are computational. This stance is called *pancomputationalism*. If this is the case, then the computational theory of mind is indeed trivial, as not only brains are computational, but also cows, black holes, cheese sandwiches, and what not, are computers. However, a pancomputationalist may reply by saying that there are various kinds (and levels) of computation, and brains do not execute all kinds of computation at the same time. So it’s not just computation that is specific to brains, but there is some non-trivial kind of computation specific to brains. Only the kind of pancomputationalism that assumes that everything computes all kinds of functions at the same time is catastrophic, as it makes physical computation indeed trivial. But this is what Hilary Putnam claims—he even offered a proof that one can ascribe arbitrary kinds of computation to any open physical system.

Another move is to say that computers do not really exist; they are just in the eyes of beholder. John Searle has made both moves: the beholder decides whether a given physical system is computational, and therefore may make this decision for virtually everything. But the body of work...
on physical computation in the last decade or so has been focused on showing why Putnam and Searle were wrong.\(^4\) The contemporary consensus is that computational models can adequately describe causal connections in physical systems, and that these models can be also ascribed wrongly. In other words, computational models are not different in kind from any mathematical model used in science. If they are mere subjective metaphors and don’t describe reality, then mathematical models in physics are subjective as well.\(^4\)

Intuitively, arguments presented by Searle and Putnam are wrong for a very simple reason: nobody would buy a new computer if it was just easier to think that an old computer simply implemented new software. I could stare at my old laptop and think that it’s a brand new smartphone. It’s obvious that it doesn’t work this way. Therefore, there must be a flaw in these arguments somewhere, and even if the technicalities involved are indeed interesting, they fail to establish the conclusion.

A popular strategy to defeat triviality arguments is to show that it is \textit{ad hoc}: the ascriptions of computational states to physical systems wouldn’t support relevant counterfactuals.\(^4\) In other words, they couldn’t, for example, accurately predict what kind of computation would run on a physical system, were things slightly different. While this is intuitive, I have argued that one can strengthen the triviality strategies to deal with counterfactuals.\(^4\) As long as one is poised to predict the evolution of a physical process, one can invent a computational ascription. Thus, instead, one should look for a systematic solution that presupposes that computational models are not different in kind from other causal models in science. This is the move recommended by David Chalmers, who has stressed that computational models should be understood causally.\(^9\) However, his strategy requires all computational models to be rephrased to use his favorite mathematical model of computation, combinatorially structured finite-state machine (CFSA), and then matched to a causal structure of a physical system. But rephrasing has an important disadvantage: the states of an original model of computation may turn out to be causally inefficacious. This is why, in reply to Chalmers, I suggested that computation should be modeled \textit{directly} in a mechanistically-adequate model of computation whose causal organization matches the organization of a physical mechanism, and appeal to standard explanatory norms.\(^9\) The norms of mechanistic explanation, which should be followed when explaining a computational system causally, are sufficient to block triviality arguments. (For example, ascriptions will turn out to be extremely non-parsimonious, and will not offer any new predictions except the ones already known from a physical description of a system, which suggests that the model is based on so-called over-fitting.)

All in all, triviality arguments required theorists to spell out the account of physical computation much more clearly but are not a real danger to computationalism. This is not to say that more often than not, empirical evidence is insufficient to decide between vastly different hypotheses about the computational organization of a given mechanism. But again, this is not in any way special for computational hypotheses, since theories are generally underdetermined by evidence.

\textbf{CONCLUSION}

Let me wrap up. In this paper, I have listed and summarized a number of arguments against computationalism. The only objection that does not seem to be implausible at the first glance is the one that states that common sense is impossible or extremely difficult to implement on a machine. However, more and more commonsensical capacities are being implemented on machines. For example, in the 1990s and early 2000s, I used to work as a technical translator for software companies. We used to laugh at machine translation, and nobody would use it professionally. But it’s the machine that translates the Microsoft Knowledge Base, which was extremely difficult for professionals to deal with. While the quality of machine translation is still behind the best human beings for complex literary translations, it is no longer something that translators laugh at. We use machine translation at work and merely post-edit it.

The point is that there’s no good reason to think that the brain is not a computer. But it’s not just a computer. It is, of course, physically embedded in its environment and interacts physically with it with its body, and for that, it also needs a peripheral nervous system\(^1\) and cognitive representations. But there’s nothing that denies computationalism here. Most criticisms of computationalism therefore fail, and sticking to them is probably a matter of ideology rather than rational debate.

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From Biological to Synthetic Neurorobotics Approaches to Understanding the Structure Essential to Consciousness (Part 2)

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews research in “predictive coding” that ultimately provides a platform for testing competing theses about specific dynamics inherent in consciousness embodied in both biological and artificial systems.

1 INTRODUCTION

We have been left with a big challenge, to articulate consciousness and also to prove it in an artificial agent against a biological standard. After introducing Boltuc’s h-consciousness in the last paper, we briefly reviewed some salient neurology in order to sketch less of a standard than a series of targets for artificial consciousness, “most-consciousness” and “myth-consciousness.” With these targets on the horizon, we began reviewing the research program pursued by Jun Tani and colleagues in the isolation of the formal dynamics essential to either. In this paper, we describe in detail Tani’s research program, in order to make the clearest case for artificial consciousness in these systems. In the next paper, the third in the series, we will return to Boltuc’s naturalistic non-reductionism in light of the neurorobotics models introduced (alongside some others), and evaluate them more completely.

1.1 PREDICTIVE CODING

In this section, we will review a research program into artificial consciousness that demonstrates the potential for computational experiments to isolate the formal dynamics of consciousness including the sense of time. Our focus is on the capacity for agents like human beings to project and to act towards possible futures by reflecting on the past. Studies in biological cognition have set out this capacity in terms of “predictive coding.” With predictive coding, the results of actions—common “experience”—are integrated into an agent in terms of “prediction error.”

Prediction error informs the agent about how far from an intended target a prior action has led it, with the agent’s implicit aim being the minimization of this error signal. That said, minimization of error is not absolute. Optimizing for long-term ends may result in a relative detachment from the immediate perceptual reality, and conversely overt attention on immediate rewards may result in mounting error over the long run. Because predictive coding makes this form of future-oriented proactive agency based on effortful past regression possible within a mathematically embodied agent, it offers a promising formal framework within which the relationship between the subjective mind and the objective world may be instantiated in an artificial agent.

Predictive coding is an important development in artificial consciousness research in two important ways. One, it provides a direct way to model subjective intention within the objective world. And two, it provides an equally direct way to project back the reality of the objective world as perceived by and as consequent on the actions of embodied and embedded cognitive agents. The result is a fully accessible dynamical mirror into the operations essential to consciousness in more complex systems, a promise that merely biological approaches to the study of consciousness cannot match. Tani was the first to successfully instantiate predictive coding in artificial agents, e.g., robots, in a deterministic domain, i.e., where intended outcomes are stable attractors. Alternatively, Friston explored predictive coding in a probabilistic domain and generalized it under the name of the “free energy minimization principle” (FEMP).

In the next section, we will briefly review a dynamic neural network model, the recurrent neural network (RNN), because it is a basic component of contemporary intelligent systems, and central to Tani’s deterministic dynamics which is the subject of the subsequent section. This review should serve as a primer on the dynamic system’s approach to embodied cognition. After reviewing Tani and colleagues’ formulation using RNN models, we will examine Bayesian predictive coding as formulated by Friston and colleagues.

2. PREDICTIVE CODING IN DYNAMIC NEURAL NETWORK MODELS

2.1 THE RNN MODEL

The essential characteristic of the RNN is that it can generate temporal sequence patterns as targets embedded in its internal dynamic structure. It “learns” to imitate exemplar sequence patterns, and when properly organized even to creatively compose its own by extracting underlying regularity. An example of an RNN is shown in Figure 1. This figure shows an RNN used in the predictive learning scheme to be described later (section 2.2).

![RNN model of predictive learning with teaching target. The dotted line represents a closed-loop copy from the output to the input.](image)

An RNN consists of a set of neural units including input units representing the input state, internal (context) units representing the internal state and output units representing the output state. These are variously interconnected by synaptic connectivity weights. These connections can be unidirectional, bidirectional, or recurrent. The time
development of each neural unit output activation in discrete time can be written as:

\[ u_i^{t+1} = \sum_j w_{ij} u_j^t + b_i \]  
\[ a_i^t = f(u_i^t) \]  

Where \( u_i \) is the internal state of the \( i \)th neural unit at time step \( t \), \( a_i \) is its output activation, \( w_{ij} \) is synaptic connection weight from the \( j \)th unit to the \( i \)th unit, \( b_i \) is the bias of the \( i \)th unit. \( f() \) is a sigmoid function. Over time, the neural activation of the whole network can generate different types of dynamic attractor patterns depending on the synaptic weights adopted in the network. Figure 2 shows typical attractors including a fixed point attractor, a limit cycle attractor, a limit torus, and chaotic attractor.

![Figure 2. Four different types of attractors (a) fixed point attractor, (b) limit cycle attractor, (c) limit torus characterized by two periodicities \( P1 \) and \( P2 \) which form an irrational fraction, and (d) chaotic attractor.](image)

The simplest attractor is a fixed point attractor in which all dynamic states converge to a point (Fig. 2 (a)). The second one is a limit cycle attractor (Fig. 2 (b)) in which the trajectory converges to a cyclic oscillation pattern with constant periodicity. The third one is a limit torus that appears when there is more than one frequency involved in the periodic trajectory of the system and two of these frequencies form an irrational fraction. In this case, the trajectory is no longer closed and it exhibits quasi-periodicity (Fig. 2(c)). The fourth one is a chaotic attractor in which the trajectory exhibits infinite periodicity and thereby forms fractal structures (Fig. 2 (d)).

These different types of attractor dynamics can account for the autonomous generation of different types of agent action patterns. For example, fixed point attractor dynamics account for a hand reaching movement, from an arbitrary hand posture to its end point, while limit cycle attractor dynamics account for a rhythmical hand waiving pattern with a certain periodicity, and chaotic attractor dynamics account for non-periodic, seemingly random movement.

RNNs can learn to generate such attractor dynamics through predictive learning. Each specific attractor pattern can be developed in an RNN by optimizing the synaptic weights and biases through a process of error minimization. In predictive learning, the network receives current time step perceptual input and outputs a prediction of the next time step (see Fig.1). Error is computed between the predicted output and the target (e.g., teaching exemplar), and synaptic weights and biases are updated in the direction of minimizing this error using error back-propagation through time (BPTT). After learning, the RNNs internal dynamics converge on a stable pattern, and the learned attractor can be generated from a given initial state through “closed-loop” (off-line) operation in which the predicted output of the current time step is copied to the input of the next time step in a closed-loop (see the dotted line in Fig.1). This closed-loop operation corresponds to mental simulation, as will be described later sections.

An RNN can be regarded as a dynamical system with adaptive parameters including synaptic weights and biases which can be described in the following generalized form

\[ x_{i+1} = F(x_i, w) \]  
\[ y_{i+1} = G(x_{i+1}, W) \]

In these expressions, \( x_i \) and \( y_i \) represent the current internal state and the output state, respectively, and \( w \) stands for the adaptive parameter. The internal state \( x_i \) is important, because it represents the current context or situation for the system as a whole and develops by means of an iterative learning process. The system can exhibit contextual information processing through which the output of the system reflects not merely the immediately perceived inputs but the context accumulated over past experiences of inputs. Formally speaking, this system embodies temporality, entrained according to patterns that extend beyond the immediate context and, as we shall see, reaches—even creatively, and inferentially—toward goal states.

The conventional RNN model can learn to generate only a single attractor pattern except special cases of developing multiple attractors. So, a natural question arises: How can the model be advanced such that it can learn to generate multiple attractor patterns, each specific to a different context? This question motivated an investigation into the possibility of applying the framework of predictive coding in the advancement of RNN models, as described next.

### 2.2 MixRNNs and RNNPB

Tani and colleagues investigated how a network model can retrieve and generate a particular sequential pattern from long-term memory of multiple patterns. Two versions of RNN models resulted, namely a mixture of RNN experts (MixRNNs) and a recurrent neural network with parametric bias (RNNPB). MixRNNs use a local representation scheme, and RNNPBs use a distributed representation scheme, in order to learn to generate and to recognize sequences of primitive action patterns. Moreover, these movement patterns are temporal patterns requiring active self-entrainment through online information by another’s live and more-or-less similarly embodied example, recalling the mechanism of “mirror neurons.” In this section, we look more closely at how the MixRNN and the RNNPB capture aspects of consciousness typically associated with more complex biological systems.

MixRNNs consist of sets of local RNNs internally associated through gates where the global output of the whole network model is computed as the weighted sum of the gate opening ratio for all local RNN outputs (see Figure 3).

During learning, local RNNs compete to predict the next perceptual state as the gate opens most for the local RNN with the least prediction error. Because the learning rate of
The basic idea is that through a competitive opening states represent the inferred intention. The target pattern of the current perception can be recognized by means of reconstructing it in a particular case). When error is minimal, a gate opens in a winner-take-all manner, and the target pattern with the least error by inferring appropriate gate openings should accompany momentary consciousness. Next, we look at a further advance on RNNs in this direction, the recurrent neural network with parametric bias, or RNNPB.

The RNNPB is a single RNN model employing parametric bias (PB) units (see Figure 4).

PB represents the current intention as it projects a particular perceptual sequential pattern onto the external world, analogous to the gate dynamics in MixRNNs. PB does this job by playing the role of bifurcation parameter modulating the dynamical structure of the RNN.

In simple terms, an RNNPB learns to predict or generate a set of perceptual sequence patterns associated with corresponding PB vector values. During learning, the optimal synaptic weights for all different sequence patterns as well as the optimal PB vector value for each sequence pattern can be obtained. After learning, an RNNPB can generate a learned perceptual sequence pattern by adopting the PB with the corresponding vector value (Fig. 4(a)). It can also recognize a perceptual sequence pattern given as a target by inferring the optimal PB vector by way of which the target sequence can be reconstructed and output with the minimum error (Fig. 4(b)). Fig. 4(c) shows how the continuous perceptual stream can be segmented into a sequence of prior-learned patterns in terms of attractor dynamics by tracking modulations in PB vector bifurcation parameters at each time step.

In the end, switching between chunks in the RNNPB is analogous to the segmentation mechanism employed in MixRNNs which use gates between local RNNs to recruit the appropriate expert or combination of experts given immediate perceptual reality. One limitation common to both is that each consists of a single level. But, when they are organized into a hierarchy, they can exhibit higher-order cognitive competencies such as creative compositionality.

Such an extension is the subject of the next section.

2.3 FUNCTIONAL HIERARCHY IN THE MTRNN

Both MixRNNs and the RNNPB have been developed into multiple-level architectures. The basic idea is that higher levels attempt to control lower levels by projecting control parameters (such as gate openings or PB vector modulations) onto lower levels based on current higher

![Figure 3. Description of MixRNNs. (a) Generation mode (b) recognition mode, and (c) segmentation of perceptual flow into a sequence of chunked sub-patterns by inferencing gate openings.](image)

![Figure 4. Description of RNNPB. (a) Generation mode, (b) recognition mode, and (c) segmentation of perceptual flow by PB vector into chunked patterns.](image)
order intention. And in turn, during normal operation the prediction error generated against the perceptual reality in the lower level is back-propagated to the higher level, where the control parameters for the lower level as well as the intention state in the higher level is adjusted in the direction of minimizing the error, i.e., by conforming to that state which would have resulted in least error.18

Tani and Nolfi demonstrate that hierarchically organized MixRNNs can learn to generate and recognize a set of sequential combinations of movement primitives in a simulated indoor robot navigation space.19 The analysis showed that a set of chunks related to movement primitives such as turning to the right/left at a corner, going straight along a corridor, and passing through a T-branch developed in local lower level RNNs, while different sequential combinations of these primitives developed in the higher-level RNNs, e.g., traveling through different rooms. When the simulated robot, for example, turns left at a corner from a straight corridor in a particular room, the continuous perceptual flow of its range sensor is segmented into the corresponding two movement primitives in the lower level. On the other hand, when it travels from a familiar room to another, segmentation related to the room transition can take a place in the higher level.

Tani achieved similar results in a real robotic arm with a similarly hierarchically organized RNNPB, which was able to deal with primitives and their sequential combinations during a simple object manipulation task. It is important to note that what begins as raw experience of the environment becomes a manipulable object for the higher level after segmentation into chunks. Thus, the hierarchical structure adopted by Tani enables the objectification of perceptual experience, as will be described in greater detail later.20

Building on this work in hierarchically organized RNNs, Yamashita and Tani21 demonstrated the learning of compositional action generation by a humanoid robot employing a novel multiple timescale RNN (MTRNN) (Figure 5). This MTRNN model uses multiple timescale constraints, with higher-level activity constrained by slower timescale dynamics, and with lower level activity proceeding according to faster timescale dynamics. The basic idea is that higher-level information processing becomes more abstract as constrained by its slower dynamics, whereas lower level information processing is more sensitive to immediate details as constrained by faster dynamics.

The MTRNN shown in Fig. 5(a) consists of 3 subnetworks (slow, intermediate, fast dynamics networks; note that the numbers of levels can vary depending on application) each consisting of leaky integrator neural units that are assigned different time constants. The activation dynamics of a leaky integrator neuron can be described as a differential equation:

\[ \tau \frac{dx}{dt} = -x + \sum a_i w_{ij} \]  
\[ x = \frac{1}{1+e^{-x}} \]

where \( \tau \) represents the time constant of the neuron. When \( \tau \) is set with a larger value, the time development of the neural activation becomes slower. With a smaller value, it becomes faster. Eq 3 is integrated over time using the difference method. The fast dynamics network in the lower level consists of two modular RNNs, one for predicting the proprioceptive state in the next step from current joint angle information, and the other for predicting low dimensional visual features in the next time step from current visual information.

During these humanoid robot learning experiments, the MTRNN was trained to generate a set of different visuo-proprioceptive trajectories corresponding to supervised targets by optimizing connectivity weights as well as the intention state corresponding to each trajectory. The intention state here is analogous to the PB value in the RNNPB, and corresponds with the initial states of neural units in the slow dynamics network of the MTRNN (see Fig. 5(a)). When learning begins, for each training sequence the initial state of the intention units is set to a small random value. The forward top-down dynamics initiated with this temporarily set initial state generates a predictive sequence. The error generated between the training sequence and the output sequence is back-propagated along the bottom-up path through the subnetworks with fast and moderate dynamics to the subnetwork with slow dynamics. This back-propagation is iterated backward through time steps via recurrent connections, whereby the connection weights within and between these subnetworks are modified in the direction of minimizing the error signal (at each time step). The error signal is also back-propagated through time steps to the initial state of the intention units, where these initial state values are modified.

Here, we see that learning proceeds through dense interactions between the top-down regeneration of training sequences and the bottom-up regression through these sequences by way of error signals, just as in the RNNPB. And as a result of this interaction, the robot learns a set of behavior primitive patterns such as reaching for an object, lifting the object up and down, or moving it left and right. These develop as distributed activation patterns in fast and intermediate dynamics networks while various control sequences for manipulating these primitive constructs

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Figure 5. MTRNN model. (a) MTRNN architecture consisting of 3 levels, and (b) its top-down compositional generation of different intended actions.
Further experiments
Friston’s main idea is to predict the energy can be computed by the addition of Gibbs energy from the principle of free energy maximization. Variance, on the other hand, is a measure of the amount best when deviations from the average are minimal. Average is a value arrived at according to prior instances, that these are strictly deterministic features of the system. In the other direction, this development is subject to causation in terms of collective neural activity, both in network topology, and environmental interaction. Note A functional hierarchy develops by means of upward causation in terms of collective neural activity, both in forward activation dynamics and in error back-propagation. In the other direction, this development is subject to downward causation in terms of timescale difference, network topology, and environmental interaction. Note that these are strictly deterministic features of the system. Target conditions are determined. Current states are determined, and thereby optimal sequences of action are inferred. Next, we will look at an effort to articulate these temporal dynamics nondeterministically, in Friston’s Bayesian predictive coding scheme formulated according to the free energy minimization principle.

3. THE FREE ENERGY MINIMIZATION PRINCIPLE
From the subjective perspective of an agent in the world, phenomena may be better described probabilistically than deterministically. Where upcoming anticipated optimal conditions are not pre-determined or perhaps even predeterminable, the aforementioned models by Tani and colleagues can be extended into the probabilistic domain, as Friston has done. A functional hierarchy develops by means of upward causation in terms of collective neural activity, both in forward activation dynamics and in error back-propagation. In the other direction, this development is subject to downward causation in terms of timescale difference, network topology, and environmental interaction. Note that these are strictly deterministic features of the system. Target conditions are determined. Current states are determined, and thereby optimal sequences of action are inferred. Next, we will look at an effort to articulate these temporal dynamics nondeterministically, in Friston’s Bayesian predictive coding scheme formulated according to the free energy minimization principle.

The development of functional hierarchies is captured in a well-known concept central to the study of complex adaptive systems, “downward causation,” the causal relationship from global to local parts of a system. A functional hierarchy develops by means of upward causation in terms of collective neural activity, both in forward activation dynamics and in error back-propagation. In the other direction, this development is subject to downward causation in terms of timescale difference, network topology, and environmental interaction. Note that these are strictly deterministic features of the system. Target conditions are determined. Current states are determined, and thereby optimal sequences of action are inferred. Next, we will look at an effort to articulate these temporal dynamics nondeterministically, in Friston’s Bayesian predictive coding scheme formulated according to the free energy minimization principle.

Then, F can be written in the following form.

\[ F = \int q(z)h\theta x z dz - \int q(x)lq(z)dz \]

Where \( q(z) \) represents the prior distribution of the intention state, \( P_x(x, z) \) represents joint probability distribution of observation \( x \) and the intention state \( Z \) parameterized by parameter \( \theta \). Then, free energy \( F \) can be transformed as:

\[ F = \int q(z)h\theta x z dz - \int q(x)lq(z)dz \]

Then, F can be written in the following form.

\[ L = \sum_i \sum \sum -1/2(ln(v_{ij}) + \frac{(o_{ij} - \theta_{ij})^2}{v_{ij}}) + \sum_i \sum -1/2(ln(v_{i}) + \frac{(o_{i} - \theta_{i})^2}{\delta_i^2}) \]

where \( o_{ij} \) is the \( i \)th dimension of the prediction output at time step \( t \) in the \( j \)th sequence, \( \theta_{ij} \) is its teaching target, and \( v_{ij} \) is its estimated variance, \( \delta_i^2 \) is the \( i \)th dimension of the intention state for the \( j \)th sequence, and \( \delta_i \) is its predefined deviation.

The generation, recognition, and learning of complex action sequences are possible through the maximization of free energy in the probabilistic domain just as the minimization of error performs similarly in the deterministic domain. According to the first term on the right-hand side of equation (4-c), the likelihood part can be maximized if variance is taken to be large even if the prediction square error is large. In this case, the agent has no reliable guide to anticipated oncoming events. This would correspond with a reactive posture in a biological consciousness, for example. On the other hand, the likelihood might be small even though the prediction square error is small if the estimated variance is smaller than reality. In this case, an agent acts from intentions as if ends are predetermined, e.g., as if he has plotted all the necessary dimensions and their internal deviations so that action is facilitated and success presumed guaranteed. But, the agent ends up wrong about this, and suffers the correction. In human experience, having failed to adequately account for the world while having proceeded with laid plans in confidence is called “surprise.” Similarly, according to Friston’s free energy maximization principle (FEMP), the prediction square error divided by estimated variance represents the degree of surprise with interesting implications for inquiry into consciousness. For one thing, the measure of surprise may correlate with a measure of consciousness as the top-down accommodation of perceptual inputs at each time step.
According to the second term on the right-hand side of Eq. (4-c), the distance from the prior to the posterior can be minimized when the intention state of each sequence is distributed by following the Gaussian distribution with the predefined deviation $\delta^2$. The recognition of the intention in FEMP is to infer the optimal probabilistic distribution of the intention state for a given target sequence, maximizing free energy rather than infer a single optimal value minimizing the prediction error as in the RNNPB. Instantiating such a process in a model dynamic system is subject of the next section.

3.1 THE STOCHASTIC MTRNN MODEL
Because the original FEMP by Friston was not implemented in any trainable neural network models, it was not clear how maximizing free energy in Eq.(4-a) might lead to successful learning of internal predictive models extracted from perceptual sequence data experienced in reality. For this reason, Murata and colleagues proposed a novel dynamic neural network, referred to as the stochastic-MTRNN (S-MTRNN) model. This model incorporates Friston’s (2010) FEMP into the deterministic learning model described in the last section, the MTRNN. The S- extends the original as it earns to predict subsequent inputs taking into account not only their means but also their “variances,” or range of anticipated values. This means that if some segments of input sequences are more variable than others, then the time-dependent variances over these periods become larger. On the other hand, if some parts are less fluctuated, their variances are smaller. In effect, then, the S-MTRNN predicts the predictability of its own prediction for each dimension of the input sequences in a time-dependent manner. When variances are estimated as zero, then the S-MTRNN becomes a deterministic dynamic system like the original MTRNN, i.e., it anticipates zero variance. Therefore, it can be said that—depending on context—S-MTRNNs can develop either deterministic or stochastic dynamics, at which point arises the notion of probability and so some valuation of possible future states accordingly.

The model operates by means of maximizing the free energy described in Eq. (4) in all phases of learning, recognizing, and generating perceptual sequence patterns. An important development in the current model is that $v_{s,i}$ as estimated variance in the likelihood part of Eq. (4-c) is changed to a time variable valuable $v_{s,i}(t)$ because its estimate can change at each time step of a perceptual sequence. The likelihood part exists to minimize the square error divided by estimated variance at each step. This means that the prediction error at a particular time point is pressured to be minimized more strongly when its estimated variance is smaller. Otherwise, the pressure to minimize prediction error is less.

Another development is that the intention state $IS^2$ in the part of KL divergence between the prior probability distribution of the intention state and the posterior distribution in Eq. (4-c) is now represented by the initial states of context units in all levels. The KL divergence part of Eq. (4-c) puts specific probabilistic distribution constraints on optimal initial states for all sequences with the parameter $\delta^2$. If $\delta^2$ is set with a large value, the distribution of initial states becomes wide. Otherwise, it becomes tight. By maximizing the free energy during the learning process, optimal connectivity weights for all teaching sequences, the probability distribution of the initial state for each teaching target sequence, and the estimates of time-dependent variance for each sequence are obtained.

Figure 6 (a) shows the architecture of the S-MTRNN. The difference from the original MTRNN is that the S-MTRNN contains output units for predicting variances for all sensory dimensions at each time step.

The next section reviews how the S-MTRNN performs in a particular robot task in the probabilistic domain.

3.2 LEARNING TO COOPERATE WITH OTHERS
A robotic experiment was conducted utilizing the S-MTRNN described in the preceding section (see Fig. 6). The objective of this robot experiment was to examine how one robot can generate “cooperative” behavior by adapting to another robot’s behavior, even though its predictions occasionally fail. The experiment used two “NAO” humanoid robots. One NAO robot, the “self-robot,” attempted to generate cooperative behaviors with the “other-robot.” The other-robot’s behavior was pre-programmed. The self-robot was controlled by the S-MTRNN model.

During the experiment, the other-robot repeated movement patterns and the self-robot was tutored to generate corresponding “cooperative” behaviors as it perceived the other’s object movements. In order to do this, the self-robot needed to proactively initiate its own arm movement before sensing the actual movement initiated by the other-robot. The self-robot acquired this cooperative behavior skill through direct tutoring from the experimenter. The self-robot observed the other-robot perform sequences of five movements, moving a colored object either to the left or to the right in all possible combinations (25 sequences). Then, the self-robot was required to generate cooperative behaviors by simultaneously moving its arm in the same direction as the other-robot. As it generated movements and adjusted to the other-robot’s movements, differences emerged in the dynamics involved in predicting as well as...
generating behavior between the two conditions of the wide and narrow initial states. The following explains how we tested these results in greater detail.

During the test phase of the experiment, the S-MTRNN was trained with 2\textsuperscript{5} visuo-proprionicceptive (VP) sequences during the tutoring process. This training was repeated twice, once with a small value for \( \sigma^2 \) and then again with a large value in order to generate a narrow initial state distribution (Narrow-IS) and a wide initial state distribution (Wide-IS), respectively. Other-robot object movement (either to the left or to the right) was randomly determined from amongst the same 2\textsuperscript{5} sequences so that the self-robot (S-MTRNN) would be unable to predict next movements reliably.

After training, closed-loop generation of “mental” imagery was performed for both wide and narrow training cases (i.e., offline rehearsal). During closed-loop operation, Gaussian noise corresponding to the estimated variance at each step was applied to the feedback from the previous step prediction output, and was input to the current step (see Figure 7 (a)).

In this way, mental imagery increasingly fluctuates as uncertainty of a prediction, i.e., the estimated variance, increases. In the example pictured in Fig. 7, the initial states were set with the values obtained upon learning the “RRLLR” trial sequence as performed by the other-robot. Fig. 7 (b) and (c) illustrate mental imagery in terms of prediction of VP sequences associated with estimated variance and internal neural activities in the fast and the slow subnetworks as generated by the S-MTRNNs trained under both Narrow-IS or Wide-IS conditions. In the Narrow-IS case, diverse decision sequences were generated even though all trials began from the same initial state. As the figure shows, estimated variance sharply peaks at decision points, but remains almost zero at other time steps. This implies that during training the S-MTRNN develops action primitives for moving left or right as two distinct chunks, and employs a probabilistic switching mechanism at decision points.

On the other hand in the Wide-IS case, the same decision sequence was repeatedly generated for the same given initial state. Fig. 7 (c) shows that the VP sequence for “RRLLR” was generated which seemed to be mostly the same as the target VP sequence. Here, it is important to note that the variance is estimated as almost zero for all steps including at decision points. This implies that mental imagery is generated as a deterministic predictive dynamics in the Wide-IS condition. Interestingly, for more than 20 branching instances before finally converging to cyclic branching, the robots’ “mental imagery” (predictive dynamics) of next-movements was generated pseudo-randomly by means of transient chaos that developed in the slow dynamics part in the model network. This result is analogous to that of Namikawa et al., where complete chaos (with a positive Lyapunov exponent) instead of transient chaos appeared in the neural dynamics of an MTRNN.

In the end, neural activity internal to the Narrow-IS and Wide-IS systems was quite different. In the Narrow-IS case, the neural activities in both the slow and the fast subnetworks showed the same values at all decision points. In the Wide-IS case, slow and fast neurons exhibited different activation patterns at each decision point through which the system was able to attempt to predict the subsequent move, left or right. There appears to be no such bias in activity at decision points in the Narrow-IS case, whereas there are top-down predictive biases imposed by specific top-level neural activation patterns at decision points in the Wide-IS case.

Let’s look more closely at how the self-robot interacted with the other robot using the network trained in these two conditions, Wide-IS and Narrow-IS. Starting with arbitrary initial states, S-MTRNN generated one-step predictions for subsequent VP states upon perceiving current visual states via open-loop generation, while the other robot randomly moved a colored object sequences of five (see Figure 8 (a)).

Fig. 8 (b) and (c) show the results of open loop processing with the self-robot reacting to the other-robot as it generated the “RRRLR” sequence for the Narrow-IS and the Wide-IS cases, respectively. Here, we observe that one-step prediction of VP states in the Narrow-IS case is quite successful, generating only a small error at each decision point. In contrast, one-step prediction in the Wide-IS case is much worse. In fact, the prediction error is significantly large at many decision points. Interestingly, at this juncture of the trials, the movement of the self-robot became erratic.
For example, in the fourth decision as illustrated in Fig. 8 (c), the self-robot moved its arm in the direction opposite to that of the other robot. And, although the self-robot seemed to try to follow the movements of the other-robot, its movements were significantly delayed.

The difference observed between the Wide-IS and Narrow-IS cases is best understood in terms of the different neural dynamic structures developed in these cases. In the case of the probabilistic dynamic structure developed in the Narrow-IS case, the behavior of moving either to the left or to the right is determined simply by following the other-robot by means of sensory reflex without any top-down bias.\(^7\) In contrast, in the Wide-IS case, the top-down bias of internal neural activity at decision points is too strong to be modified by sensory input and incorrect movements are initiated and carried through.

### 3.3 INTRODUCING BOTTOM-UP ERROR REGRESSION

Next, consider an experiment that examines the effects of introducing an additional mechanism of bottom-up error regression into the learned neural dynamics during the course of behavior generation. This is a modified model which maximizes the likelihood L\(_{\text{Reg}}\) for the time window of the immediate past by modifying the neural activation profile in this past window while fixing the connectivity weights (Fig. 9 (a)) as shown in Eq. (5).

\[
L_{\text{Reg}} = \sum_{i=0}^{T-1} \left( \frac{1}{2} \ln \left( \frac{1}{\sqrt{2\pi \sigma_i^2}} \right) + \frac{(y_{i} - \hat{y}_{i} - \mu_i)^2}{\sigma_i^2} \right)
\]

where the time window is defined from t-W to t at the current time step and the activation states of the slow units at time step t-W (which is the onset of the window) are updated by back propagating the error signal generated. This error regression in terms of updating the activation state at the onset of the window and forward through the window is iterated multiple epochs during each time step in behavior generation. Again, as shown in Eq. 5, error back-propagates more strongly when the estimated variance (as the square error divided by the variance) is smaller.\(^8\) An intuitive explanation is that in this scheme the internal representation in the immediate past window is rewritten for the sake of maximizing the likelihood for the on-going perception.

Fig. 9 (b) shows an example of developments during on-line behavior generation in the trained Wide-IS network using the present error regression scheme.

Clearly, neural activity in the gray area changes in a discontinuous manner with the generation of a sharp peak in prediction error only upon encountering unpredicted action by the other even though this error was rapidly reduced. Note that this sharp peak in prediction error is larger than that generated during on-line prediction in the case of the Narrow-IS as shown in Fig. 8 (b). In short, modulating higher-level neural activity by using error regression caused drastic changes in lower-level network activity including sensory predictions, and in this way prediction errors were rapidly minimized. Ultimately thus, the self-robot was able to re-situate its behavioral context immediately after encountering unpredictable events through dense interactions between top-down intentional prediction and bottom-up recognition of actual results.

How can we interpret these experimental results? First, let us summarize what we have just seen. In the Narrow-IS condition, probabilistic network dynamics develop generating actions in a sensory reflex manner. In contrast, proactive behaviors pursuant from deterministic predictions of next actions develop from the Wide-IS condition. It can be said that the Narrow-IS condition develops only weak top-down prior states while the Wide-IS condition develops strong top-down prior states. During the interaction of the self robot with the other robot, the self robot trained under the Narrow-IS condition could easily follow the action sequences arbitrarily determined by the other robot because it simply reacted to sensory inputs, with neural activity at decision points. On the other hand in the Wide-IS condition, the self-robot could not follow the action sequences of the other robot according to sensory inputs, because the top-down bias originating from the initial state was too strong. However, when the error regression scheme was applied utilizing the prediction error generated, the actions of the Wide-IS self robot were modified immediately by means of rapid changes in internal neural states. This bottom-up modulation can be quite strong because the variance is estimated as small in the case of the Wide-IS. This is due to the development of a deterministic dynamic structure, one that plans its next action, and that can be said to “have” a future toward which it has effectively committed itself through proactive cognitive agency given strong top-down prior states. On the other hand, the same force is not so strong in the probabilistic (Narrow-IS) case because the estimated variance at decision points is large. This is to say that the Narrow-IS has plotted no future condition beyond immediate reaction, and has thus cannot be said to “have” a future in this same way.

Consider these Wide and Narrow conditions from the Bayesian viewpoint. In the Bayesian framework, the S-MTRNN represents a likelihood function which maps intention state to a probability distribution of up-coming perceptual states. In these experiments, the distribution of intention states (initial states) was constrained by either the Wide distribution or the Narrow distribution, and the experiments show that the Wide distribution of intention states develops a deterministic dynamics with strong top-down prior states, whereas the Narrow distribution develops a probabilistic process which is a purely reactive process.
3.4 TIME PERCEPTION BY “EMBODIED” RNNS

Now, we come back the main issue of consciousness. This section briefly looks at the problem of time perception in light of Francisco Varela’s “present-time consciousness.”

Tani and Nolfi postulated that “consciousness” arises at the very moment of segmenting the perceptual flow by means of error regression. Varela’s “present-time consciousness” arises similarly. First, Varela considered that the immediate past does not belong to a representational conscious memory, but just to an impression consistent with Husserl’s idea of retention. So, his question was how the immediate past, experienced just as an impression, could slip into a distant past which can be retrieved through a conscious memory operation later on. And, in response, he proposed that nonlinear dynamics theory could be used as the formal descriptive tool for this phenomenon. By using the phenomenon of the spontaneous flipping of a Necker cube as an example, he explained that the dynamic properties of intermittent chaos characterized by its spontaneous shifts between static and rapid transition modes could explain the paradox of continuous, yet also segmented, time perception.

On his consideration, we may still ask how such spontaneous shifts as those realized by intermittent chaos can be linked to conscious experience. Although Thompson and Varela explain that such shifts are accompanied by shifts in neuronal bias, what is the formal mechanism of this process? Tani proposes that consciousness arises in the correction and modification of dynamic structures which, in biological cognition, are generated in higher cortical areas. The following attempts to account for the development of levels of conscious experience in terms of the development of the predictive RNN models described so far in the current paper.

In subjective terms, firstly an agent experiences a continuous perceptual flow without this flow being articulated in any way, that is without this flow representing any discernible thing or event. However, there should be retention and protention in this primordial level, as explained by Husserl (see the last footnote). Retention and protention are used to designate the experienced sense of the immediate past and the immediate future. They are part of automatic processes and cannot be controlled consciously. Husserl believed that the subjective experience of “nowness” is extended to include fringes both in the experienced sense of the past and the future in terms of retention and protention. This description of retention and protention at the so-called “pre-empirical” level by Husserl seems to directly correspond to what the basic RNN (as illustrated in Fig. 1 in the earlier section) is performing. The RNN predicts its next state by retaining the past flow in a context dependent way as has been described. This self-organized contextual flow in the forward dynamics of RNNS could account for the phenomenon of retention, whereas prediction based on this contextual flow naturally corresponds to protention.

With Husserl’s idea of “nowness” in terms of retention and protention, the following question arises. Where is the “nowness” bounded? Husserl and Varela believe that the immediate past does not belong to a representational conscious memory but just to an impression, as suggested above. This led Varela to wonder what kind of mechanism qualitatively changes an experience from just an impression to an episodic consciously retrievable event. Husserl’s goal was to explain the emergence of objective time from the pre-empirical level of retention and protention, and he seems to think that the sense of objective time should emerge as a natural consequence of organizing experience into one consistent linear sequence. Still, the question remains: What is the underlying mechanism for this?

One way of approaching this question is to consider first that “nowness” can be bounded where the flow of experience is segmented. Imagine that “Re Fa La” and “Do Mi So” are frequently heard phrases. The sequential notes of “Do Mi So” constitute a chunk within the sound stimulus flow, because the sequence can be predicted perfectly by developing coherence between the predictive neural dynamics and the perceptual flow. Within the chunk, everything proceeds smoothly, automatically, and unconsciously. However, when we hear a next phrase of “Re Fa La” after “Do Mi So” (considering that this second phrase is not necessarily predictable from the first one) a temporal incoherence emerges as prediction error is generated in the transition between the two phrases. The central thesis here is that consciousness arises as the agent attempts to deal with the uncertainty or open possibility between the two.

In Tani and colleagues’ RNN models, the winner module is switched from one to another in MixRNNs or PB is shifted in RNNPB by means of error regression when the external perceptual flow does not match with the internal flow of the prediction. This matching is primarily occurring in the window of the immediate past, as described above. When the prediction is betrayed, the perceptual flow is segmented into chunks associated with shifts of gates or PBs, minimizing prediction error. Those segmented chunks are no longer just parts of the flow, but events that are identified by an activated local module or a PB vector value, e.g., as one of the NAO robot’s behavior primitives. Because of delays in the error minimization process for optimizing gate openings or PB vector, this identification process can be time consuming. This might explain the phenomenological observation that the flow of the immediate past is experienced only as an impression, which later becomes a consciously retrievable object after being segmented. This may correspond to an observation of postdiction evidenced in neuroscience. See Figure 10 for an illustration of the idea.

The higher level RNN in MixRNNs, RNNPBs, or MRNNs learns the sequences of the identified events and becomes able to regenerate them as a narrative.

During memory retrieval however, the perceptual flow can be reconstructed only in an indirect way since the flow is now represented by combining a set of commonly used behavior primitives. Although such reconstructions provide for compositionality as well as generalization in representing perceptual flow, they might lose subtle differences or uniqueness in each instance of experience depending on the capacities to retain perceptual dynamics.
Consequently, we presume that the sense of objective time appears when experience of the perceptual flow is reconstructed as a narrative in a compositional form, while losing its peculiarity.

From the Bayesian perspective of Friston’s FEMP, the agent becomes able to reflect on the episodic sequence with self-estimated certainty when the Narrow-IS condition is applied to S-MTRNN, as shown in the aforementioned experiments by Murata and colleagues. At this stage, the agent finally becomes able to represent its own episodic sequence in terms of a probabilistic model by inferring that each chunk (moving left or right) simply arises with a certain probability. This is a crucial transition from first reflecting on its own experience as a deterministic “one time only” episodic sequence occurring only in that way, to viewing it as a probability which could have taken place in other ways. From the latter point of view, the agent is successful in ultimately objectifying its own experience by reconstructing it into a generalized model accounting for possible interactions between its self and others. However, it is interesting to note that the agent in this stage does not maintain anymore the subjectivity of naively intending for an uncertain future, because all it maintains is ultimately objectified models of probable futures. Together, these stages of development should begin to account for the process of an agent attaining a reflective self which is only then potentially maintained, for example through inner discourse and conscious narration and which only then results in truly direct subjective experience, the characteristic “mineness” of h-consciousness as revealed in our last paper.

3.5 DISCUSSION

With the composition of intentional sequences, we may understand surprise as their unexpected correction resulting in consciousness. To this end, one may object that one becomes conscious of many things without surprise, but this objection is easily answered. Let us consider that intentional processes drive the whole neural network dynamics including the peripheral subnetworks by means of chaos or transient chaos developed in the higher cognitive brain area in order to act on the world in achieving some end of agency such as in Murata’s robot experiment and in Namikawa et al. At this moment of acting, some prediction errors may be generated at the very least because the world is inevitably unpredictable due to its openness relative for instance human cognitive agency. Then, at the very moment when the intention state is modulated by those errors back-propagated from the peripheral to the higher level, the agent becomes conscious of the formulation of intention upon which it has acted and only in a “postdictive” manner, i.e., when the intention in the past window is rewritten for the sake of accounting for the current perception, there is consciousness.

With this, we may ask if we can apply the aforementioned analysis to account for the delayed awareness of “free will” as for example evidenced in the famous Libet experiments? One might imagine that no prediction errors are to be associated with decisions about pressing a button as in Libet’s experiments. However, in order to initiate a particular movement, internal neural activity in peripheral areas including muscle potential states must prepare for action. With this in mind, prediction errors may arise when the higher cognitive level such as the prefrontal cortex (PFC) or supplementary motor area (SMA) suddenly attempts to drive the lower peripheral processes such as the motor area and somatosensory area through the parietal area, possibly by chaos, to generate a specific movement when the lower parts are not yet prepared for it (see Figure 11).

In such a situation, a gap may appear between the higher level with the sudden urge for generating the movement and lower level processes which are not yet ready for it. This gap appears in the system as a sort of prediction error, with the intention to act confounded by factors internal to the system as a whole but still external to the intentional processes, themselves. This difference, then, between what is ideally intended and its practical exercise may then cause the conscious awareness of one’s own intention, again with a delay as described by Libet, Gleason and Wright, and as having been conjectured by Tani. To sum up, we consider that free will may originate unconsciously by means of the cortical deterministic chaos which can become an object of conscious awareness only after a certain delay under embodiment constraint in terms of postdiction.57

Before concluding the current paper, give a close look at the process of error regression at the moment that prediction error increases due to unexpected perception. This error regression process involves the nontrivial phenomena of circular causality, analysis of which reveals subtle characteristics of the conscious process. In simple situations such as shown in the experiments by Murata and
colleagues wherein possible actional decisions are only two, either moving an arm to the left or to the right, the conflictive situation can be resolved instantly by sudden modulation of the intention by error regression. However, realistic situations are more complex, for example, when a system has to perform online modification of a goal-directed plan by searching among various possible combinations of behavior primitives by means of error regression, while retaining immediate integrity in the face of environmental forces, i.e., adapting to rapid changes of the current situation until the newly formulated intention can be carried forward.

4. CONCLUSION

The current paper reviewed a series of neurorobotics studies conducted by Jun Tani and colleagues that attempt to provide a purely formal, structural account of dynamical processes essential for consciousness. The core ingredients of Tani’s models are prediction and postdiction through predictive coding and implemented in different recurrent neural network (RNN) models that together represent a progression from reflexive to proactive, self-reflective and creative agency. The review moved from simple to more complex model hierarchies.

Robotics experiments employing these models clarified dynamics inherent in levels of consciousness from momentary self-consciousness (surprise) to narrative self and reflective self-consciousness (the “chunking” of experience and the articulation of perceptual flow according to developing action potentials). The paper concluded with a brief phenomenological analysis of time perception within this family of models, including model extensions accounting for free will and its characteristic postdictive conscious awareness. In the next paper, we will begin with some of Tani and colleagues’ work on these model extensions into more complex situations, before returning to Boltz’s naturalistic non-reductionism and a philosophical analysis of any claim to consciousness of artificial systems.

NOTES

1. The correspondence should be sent to tani1216jp@gmail.com


7. Ibid.


14. Here, recall that it is the object of the network to minimize error through the error back-propagation through time (BPTT) algorithm.

15. Tani and Nolfi, “Learning to Perceive the World as Articulated.”


18. It is interesting to note here a formal similarity with *abductive* agent-level evolutionary models.


22. Ibid.


26. It is important here to bear in mind that these are systems enabling agency, and so an action that ends very far from a target is much worse than one which ends close enough. It is not as innocuous as simply getting something wrong. If variance is high, then a prediction which hits its target is extremely accurate, such that in the real world it may not be believed, e.g., “too good to be true.” However, when variance is high, it also means that average values do not effectively inform action. Acting on the basis of an average will always in the long run result in error proportional to variance. Once this is understood, then an agent may apply estimated variance in the prediction of optimal next actions, as this value may inform the agent what to expect given prior instances, reducing error over the long run. This formal model recalls Plato’s concern with the science of science that is ultimately knowledge of good and bad, a second-order understanding that for example directs sight but never sees a thing, c.f. Charmides.

27. Friston, “A Theory of Cortical Responses.”


31. Redrawn from Murata et al., “Learning to Perceive the World as Probabilistic or Deterministic via Interaction with Others.”

32. Ibid.


34. Redrawn from Murata et al., “Learning to Perceive the World as Probabilistic or Deterministic via Interaction with Others.”

35. Namikawa et al., “A Neurodynamic Account of Spontaneous Behavior.”

36. Redrawn from Murata et al., “Learning to Perceive the World as Probabilistic or Deterministic via Interaction with Others.”

37. Recall that the slow and fast networks showed the same dynamics at each point.

38. In terms of human experience, it feels worse being wrong when sure that he/she is right than when it is a recognized matter of chance.

39. Redrawn from Murata et al., “Learning to Perceive the World as Probabilistic or Deterministic via Interaction with Others.”


41. Tani and Nolfi, “Learning to Perceive the World as Articulated.”

42. Varela, “Present-Time Consciousness.”

43. E. Husserl, “The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness,” trans. J. S. Churchill (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1964). Husserl introduced the famous idea of “retention” and “protention” for explaining the paradoxical nature of “nowness.” He used an example of hearing a sound phrase such as “Do Mi So” for explaining the idea. When we hear the note “Mi,” we would still perceive a lingering impression of “Do,” and at the same time we would anticipate hearing the next note of “So.” The former is called retention and the latter protention. These terms are used to designate the experienced sense of the immediate past and the immediate future.


47. Varela, “Present-Time Consciousness.”


50. Murata et al., “Learning to Perceive the World as Probabilistic or Deterministic via Interaction with Others.”

51. Ibid. and in Namikawa et al., “A Neurodynamic Account of Spontaneous Behavior.”


55. Libet, Gleason, and Wright, “Preparation- or Intention-to-Act, in Relation to Pre-event Potentials Recorded at the Vertex.” The preceding interpretation accords with recent work in the sense of self-agency as it changes due to feedback. In short, the more that an agent perceives itself to be in control of outcomes, the more it feels the sense of ownership of actions performed (c.f. N. Kumar, J. A. Manjaly, and K. P. Myaparam, “Feedback about Action Performed Can Alter the Sense of Self-Agency,” Frontiers in Psychology, February 25, 2014).


58. Murata et al., “Learning to Perceive the World as Probabilistic or Deterministic via Interaction with Others.”

REFERENCES


**Kant on Constituted Mental Activity**

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1 INTRODUCTION

Consider the following functionalist claim:

There is an architecture, describable in the language of computer science, such that any creature or machine that realises this architecture thereby counts as a cognitive agent, an agent with original (non-derivative) intentionality.

Some of the more practically minded among us will be dissatisfied with this existentially quantified assertion: rather than just saying that there is some such architecture, it would be much more helpful to know exactly what this architecture is. What sort of architecture could satisfy such a claim?

I believe the answer to this question has been hiding in plain sight for over two hundred years: in The Critique of Pure Reason, Kant provides a detailed description of just such an architecture.

At the heart of Kant’s vision is the self-legislat ing agent: an agent who constructs rules that he then solemnly follows. The Kantian cognitive architecture is a particular type of computational process: a rule-induction process. If this rule-induction process satisfies certain constraints, then—Kant claims—the process’ internal activities count as cognitive activities.

This paper sketches the philosophical background behind this architecture. It attempts to motivate and defend Kant’s vision of a self-legislat ing computational agent.1

2 MENTAL ACTIVITY AS CONSTITUTED ACTIVITY

We are familiar with the idea that social activity is constituted activity. Pushing the wooden horse-shaped piece forward counts, in the right circumstances, as moving the knight to...
king’s bishop three. Jones’ running away counts, in the right circumstances, as desertion. An utterance of the words “I do” counts, in the right circumstances, as an acceptance of marriage vows. These social actions are things we can only do indirectly, by doing something else. A social action is not something we can just do.

Kant’s cardinal innovation, as I read him, is to see mental activity as constituted activity. This plurality of sensory perturbations counts, in the right circumstances, as my representing a red triangle. This activity of rule application counts, under the right circumstances, as my seeing an apple. This activity of rule construction counts, under the right circumstances, as my forming the belief that Caius is mortal. The surprising Kantian claim is that mental activity is itself constituted. We have to perform a certain type of ritual in order to experience a world at all.

2.1 FROM COUNTS-AS TO COUNTING-AS
Let us start by considering the activity of counting-as:

- Jones counts Smith’s contortion of the lips as a delighted smile
- The sergeant counts Jones’ running away as desertion
- The teacher counts the boy’s squiggle as an “s”
- The vicar counts the utterance of the words “I do” as an acceptance of the marriage vows

Notice that these examples describe the activity of counting-as, rather than the mere relation of counts-as. The counts-as relation is commonly formulated as:

\[ x \text{ counts as } y \text{ (in context c)} \]

This sentence, ascribing a three-place relation between \( x, y \) and \( c \), ignores the person who is doing the counting-as, and the business of counting itself, and focuses solely on the resulting judgment. If we want to acknowledge the individual performing the counting, and the activity of counting itself, we would write it as:

\[ \text{agent a counts x as y (in context c)} \]

This sentence describes the activity of counting-as, and makes explicit the person who is doing the counting.

Under what circumstances would it be ok to forget about the person doing the counting? Perhaps it would be ok to suppress the agent and the activity of counting-as in cases where everyone agreed about what counted-as what, where massive agreement in counting-as was taken for granted. Throughout the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein repeatedly asks us to stop taking this mass communal agreement for granted. He demands “what if one person reacts in one way and another in another?” For example, he considers the case where:

- a person naturally reacted to the gesture of pointing with the hand by looking in the direction of the line from finger-tip to wrist, not from wrist to finger-tip.\(^3\)

The divergence here is a difference in what activity the deviant person is counting the gesture as. The deviant is counting the gesture as pointing in the opposite direction from what “we” count the gesture as.

Whenever Wittgenstein talks about counts-as, he is careful to talk about the activity of counting-as, rather than an abstract relation of counts-as that presupposes communal agreement:

But now imagine a game of chess translated according to certain rules into a series of actions which we do not ordinarily associate with a game—say into yells and stomping of feet. ... Should we still be inclined to count them as playing a game? What right would one have to say so?\(^2\)

Wittgenstein focuses on edge cases like these, cases where we are no longer sure that everybody agrees about what counts as what, in order to help us stop treating this mass agreement as given. In a shared culture, there is indeed mass agreement in what counts as what. But this mass agreement is an *achievement*, something painfully accomplished by constant communication and teaching, a fragile accomplishment that is always in need of renewal. For Wittgenstein, as Cavell reads him, mass agreement in counting-as activity is not something that should be presupposed at the beginning of philosophical activity, but is instead rather *something to be explained*.

I find my general intuition of Wittgenstein’s view of language to be the reverse of the idea many philosophers seem compelled to argue against in him: it is felt that Wittgenstein’s view makes language too public, that it cannot do justice to the control I have over what I say, to the innerness of my meaning. But my wonder, in the face of what I have recently been saying, is rather how he can arrive at the completed and unshakable edifice of shared language from within such apparently fragile and intimate moments—private moments—as our separate counts and out-calls of phenomena, which are after all hardly more than our interpretations of what occurs, and with no assurance of conventions to back them up.\(^5\)

Instead of an abstract “\( x \text{-counts-as-} y \)” relation that suppresses the agent performing the counting-as activity and that presupposes communal agreement, Wittgenstein wishes us to start with an *individual* agent counting something as something. It is this same counting-as activity that is needed, I claim, to understand Kant’s project in the First Critique.

2.2 FROM DERIVATIVE TO ORIGINAL INTENTIONALITY
Consider the humble barometer, a simple sensory device that can detect changes in atmospheric pressure. If the mercury rises, this means the atmospheric pressure is increasing; if the mercury goes down, the pressure is
decreasing. Now we count the mercury’s rising as the machine responding to the atmospheric pressure. We count, in other words, a process that is internal to the instrument (the mercury rising) as representing changing properties of an external world (atmospheric pressure increasing). But although we count the internal process as representing an external process, the barometer itself does not. The barometer is incapable of counting the internal process as a representing because—of course—it is incapable of counting anything as anything. The barometer does not, in other words, have original intentionality. We might interpret some of its activities as representations, but it does not.

The distinction between original and derivative intentionality comes from Haugeland. Intentionality is derivative if something has it because it is conferred on it by something else (by the agent who is doing the counting-as):

At least some outward symbols (for instance, a secret signal that you and I explicitly agree on) have their intentionality only derivatively—that is, by inheriting it from something else that has the same content already (e.g., the stipulation in our agreement). And, indeed, the latter might also have its content only derivatively, from something else again; but obviously, that can’t go on forever. Derivative intentionality, like an image in a photocopy, must derive eventually from something that is not similarly derivative; that is, at least some intentionality must be original (non derivative).

We can distinguish between derivative and original intentionality using the activity of counting-as:

- \( x \) has derivative intentionality in representing \( p \) if an agent \( y \) (distinct from \( x \)) counts \( x \)'s activity as \( x \)'s representing \( p \)
- \( x \) has original intentionality in representing \( p \) if \( x \) himself counts \( x \)'s activity as \( x \)'s representing \( p \)

What distinguishes an agent with original intentionality from a mere sensory instrument is that the former counts its own sensings as representations of a determinate external world:

There is no doubt whatever that all our cognition begins with experience; for how else should the cognitive faculty be awakened into exercise if not through objects that stimulate our senses and in part themselves produce representations, in part bring the activity of our understanding into motion to compare these, to connect or separate them, and thus to work up the raw material of sensible impressions into a cognition of objects that is called experience?

Original intentionality, in other words, is a type of activity interpretation. Just as I can count his moving the horse-shaped wooden piece from one square to another as his moving his knight to king’s bishop three, just so I can count the perturbations of my sensory instruments as my representing a determinate world. Searle makes a similar distinction between intrinsic and derived intentionality. He claims that only a certain type of biological organism can achieve original intentionality. This paper argues, by contrast, that a computational agent built to satisfy a Kant-inspired cognitive architecture is capable of achieving original intentionality. It doesn’t matter what it is made of as long as it achieves the necessary structural organization.

### 2.3 FROM SENSORY AGENTS TO COGNITIVE AGENTS

A sensory agent is some sort of animal or device, equipped with sensors, whose actions depend on the state of its sensors. It might have a temperature gauge, a camera with limited resolution, or a sonar that can detect distance. The sensory agent is continually performing what roboticists call the sense-act cycle: it detects changes to its sensors, and responds by bodily movements.

A thermostat, for example, is a simple sensory agent. When it notices that the temperature has got too low, it responds by increasing the temperature. The thermostat has a sense-act cycle, but it does not experience the world it is responding to. We count the perturbations of its gauge as representations of the temperature in the room it is in, but it does not. The gauge movements count as temperature representations for us, but not for the thermostat. Nothing counts as anything for the thermostat. It just responds blindly.

By contrast, a cognitive agent is a sensory agent with original intentionality, who counts his sensings as his representing an external world. He interprets his own sensory perturbations as his representation of a coherent unified world of external objects, interacting with each other. This world contains one particular distinguished object, with sensors, that the cognitive agent counts as his body, and he counts his sensings as the stimulation of his body’s sensors by interaction with the other objects.

One of Kant’s fundamental questions in the First Critique is:

**What does a sensory agent have to do, in order for it to count its own sensory perturbations as experience, as a representation of an external world?**

What, in other words, must a sensory agent do to be a cognitive agent?

Note that this is a question about intentionality—not about knowledge. Kant’s question is very different from the standard epistemological question:

**Given a set of beliefs, what else has to be true of him for us to count his beliefs as knowledge?**

Kant’s question is pre-epistemological: he does not assume the agent is “given” a set of beliefs. Instead, we see his beliefs as an achievement that cannot be taken for granted, but has to be explained:
Understanding belongs to all experience and its possibility, and the first thing that it does for this is not to make the representation of the objects distinct, but rather to make the representation of an object possible at all.\(^1\)

Kant asks for the conditions that must be satisfied for the agent to have any possible cognition (true or false).\(^2\)

### 2.4 CLARIFICATIONS

Kant’s question, in the first person, is

> What must I do, in order to count these sensory perturbations as my experience?

I wish to make two clarifying points. First, counting-as can be applied to objects or activities. We can count this wooden-shaped piece as a knight (counting an object as another object), or we can count this physical pushing movement as moving one’s knight to king’s bishop three (counting an activity as another activity). In what follows, I am talking primarily about counting-as applied to activities, not objects. It is not that we count this group of sensors as a red triangle, but rather that we count this plurality of sensor activity as representing a red triangle.

Second, the activity that is counted-as is not an individual sensor’s activity, but is typically a large plurality of sensory perturbations. We have a huge array of independent sensors (including 6 to 7 million cone cells in each eye). When we count sensory perturbations as representing something, we are interpreting a large plurality of such sensings. Consider, by way of analogy, a beginner dance-class: under what circumstances does this flurry of bodily movements, this plurality of limb activities, count as waltzing?

### 2.5 THE AMBITION OF THE KANTIAN QUESTION

Some activity can be explained in terms of other activity. Getting married, for example, is not a fundamental primitive form of activity. Instead, we count saying “I do,” under certain wedding-related circumstances, as getting married. We do not treat castling in chess as a fundamental primitive form of activity. Instead, we count moving two pieces, under certain chess-related circumstances, as castling. We explain activity a by counting activity b, under certain circumstances, as performing activity a.

An ingrained assumption of pre-critical philosophy was that the having of thoughts is a fundamental activity that is not in need of a count-as explanation. There may be (at some future time) a physical explanation of this activity in terms of neuronal firings etc.—but there is no counts-as explanation of this activity. This is what it means to say that thoughts are “given”: we do not need to worry about the origin of these thoughts—we just assume that they are handed to us somehow.

Both empiricism and rationalism subscribe to a version of this pre-critical assumption. Empiricists assume that the mind is already capable of having intuitions (constructing pre-conceptual representations of objects), and tell a story explaining how the mind is able to get from intuitions to conceptual thoughts. Rationalists assume that the mind is already capable of thinking conceptual thoughts, and tell a story explaining how the mind is capable of getting from conceptual thoughts to empirical intuitions. Both strategies treat some form of thinking as primitive: as not needing a counts-as explanation.

Kant denies this assumption. He claims, to anticipate, that all thought can be explained by a rule-constructing agent following a procedure that satisfies certain constraints. If the agent constructs and applies rules in a certain manner, satisfying certain constraints, then his rule-following activity counts as his having intuitions, forming concepts, judging, and thinking about an external world.

Kant’s core claim is

> I count this plurality of sensings as my experience if I combine them together in the right way

What, then, does Kant mean by “combine,” and what does he mean by “the right way”?

In section 3, I will describe what Kant means by combining. To anticipate, there are two types of combination, achieved by applying two types of rules (rules of composition and rules of connection).

### 3 COMBINATION AS RULE APPLICATION

The activity at the heart of Kant’s theory is the activity of combination, of bringing cognitions together, “running through and holding together this manifoldness.”\(^3\)

Now this activity of mental combination may seem frustratingly metaphorical or ill-defined. As Wolff notes:

> The inadequacies of such locutions as “holding together” and “connecting” are obvious, and need little comment. Perceptions do not move past the mind like parts on a conveyor belt, waiting to be picked off and fitted into a finished product. There is no workshop where a busy ego can put together the bits and snatches of sensory experience, hooking a color to a hardness, and balancing the two atop a shape.\(^4\)

Similarly, Wittgenstein writes:

> How does one teach a child (say in arithmetic) “Now take these things together!” or “Now these go together”? Clearly “taking together” and “going together” must originally have had another meaning for him than that of seeing in this way or that.\(^5\)

There are two types of combination activity.\(^6\) The first is composition: combining intuitions using the part-of relation. For example: if this configuration of sensors is turned on, then I count their being-on as representing a nose. Or: if this pattern of sensors counts as representing a nose, and this other pattern counts as representing an eye, then the aggregate pattern of sensors counts as representing a face. The second type of combination activity is connection: subsuming intuitions under marks.\(^7\) For example: if this is
a nose, then it cannot be an ear. Or: if this is a dog, then it must be an animal.

3.1 COMBINATION CAN ONLY BE PERFORMED INDIRECTLY VIA THE CONSTRUCTION AND APPLICATION OF RULES

But, although this combining activity is fundamental, it cannot, according to Kant, be performed directly by the agent. The agent cannot just bring representations together willy-nilly. Combing is not something he can just do. On the contrary, the only way, according to Kant, that the agent can perform the activity of combination is by applying general rules that it has constructed. This is Kant’s surprising claim. We are used to thinking of social activity as constituted (e.g., a certain set of sounds counts, under the right conditions, as the request to shut the door). But we are not so used to thinking of fundamental mental activity as similarly constituted.

There are two types of rule corresponding to the two types of combination.22 Rules of composition are rules for combining parts into wholes, producing a part-whole graph united under one element: the totality. A rule of composition produces, if it applies, a defeasible rule permitting the agent to group intuitions together.21 For example, if you count this group of sensings as representing an ear, and this group of sensings as representing a nose, then you may count this aggregate group of sensings as representing a face. Whether or not the rule-following agent makes use of this permission will depend on his concomitant commitments.

Rules of composition are described by defeasible conditionals. Wittgenstein stresses the defeasibility of such conditionals when discussing what counts as a friendly face:

When we notice the friendly expression of a face, our attention, our gaze, is drawn to a particular feature in the face, the “friendly eyes,” or the “friendly mouth etc. . . . It is true that other traits in this face could take away the friendly character of this eye, and yet in this face it is the eye which is the outstanding friendly feature.22

This is defeasibility in action. In this situation, the features of this eye counts as his having a friendly face; but in another situation, the same features plus some other additional facial features might count as something entirely different: mocking cruelty, for instance.

Rules of connection produce obligations to group representations under a mark.23 So, for example, if we count this structure as a nose, then we must also count it as a facial part—and if we count it as a nose, then we must not count it as an ear.

The activities of combination, then, are themselves constituted activity:

• Composing (combining intuitions together using part-of) just is applying a rule of composition

• Connecting (subsuming intuitions under marks) just is applying a rule of connection

The striking Kantian claim is that this activity of combination is not a self-sufficient action. Rather, it is like moving your knight to king’s bishop three: it is something you can only do indirectly by doing something else—by pushing a wooden object in a certain direction. Similarly, requesting Bob to shut the door is not something you can just do: you can only do it by doing something else (perhaps by uttering a sequence of sounds, or by pointing at the door; there are an infinite number of different actions that could constitute such a request, but you have to do one of them—requesting is not something primitive you can do on your own).

All the agent can do is construct general rules of the above form, permitting or obligating him to combine representations in a certain way, and then apply these rules, thus indirectly performing combinations via the construction and application of rules.

This claim appears throughout the First Critique:

all empirical time determination must stand under rules of general time determination.24

In other words, the activity of time-determination can only be performed indirectly by applying a general rule:

everything (that can even come before us as an object) necessarily stands under rules, since, without such rules, appearances could never amount to cognition of an object.25

Again:

Thus we think of a triangle as an object by being conscious of the composition of three straight lines in accordance with a rule according to which such an intuition can always be exhibited.26

In other words, the activity of seeing the three lines as a triangle is only achieved indirectly by the application of a general rule for counting certain connected triads of lines as triangles.

Why can’t a cognitive agent perform the activity of combination directly, without needing to construct and then apply a rule? The answer is that combining without rules would not satisfy the condition of unification at the heart of K’s theory. The unification condition is a set of constraints on the construction and application of rules, and so can only be applied to a rule-following agent. Arbitrary combination of cognitions that was unguided by rules would not produce a unity of experience that I could call mine. If I could combine representations into intuitions without rules, then there would be no self to have the intuitions.

At the beginning of the B Deduction, Kant writes:

all combination, whether we are conscious of it or not, whether it is a combination of the manifold of intuition or of several concepts, and in the first
4 CONCERNS WITH RULE-FOLLOWING
ACCOUNTS OF INTENTIONALITY

4.1 WHAT DOES KANT MEAN BY A “RULE”?
What does a sensory agent have to do to count his sensings as representations of an external world? Kant’s answer is that he must construct and apply rules of combination satisfying various constraints. At the very center of Kant’s theory is the notion of a rule-following agent.

But Kant’s appeal to rule-following has been criticized in multiple ways. Rules have been seen as too explicit, or too rigid, to do the work that Kant requires of them. At the very least, we need a clear sense of what Kant means by “rule” if we are to make sense of his theory. What does Kant mean by “rule”?

Let us start by stating what a rule is, and then clarifying by emphasising what it is not. A rule, for Kant, is something general, something that applies in many different situations. When it does apply, a rule results in a norm becoming operative: a certain activity is now permitted or obligatory. For example, if such and such circumstances hold, you may combine this sensor and that sensor under the mark EAR-14.

A rule, then, is a norm, operating under a condition:

Now, however, the representation of a universal condition in accordance with which a certain manifold (of whatever kind) can be posited is called a rule, and if it must be so posited, a law.

Here, Kant is clear about the generality in the “universal condition” and the normative status (permission/obligatory) in the “can”/“must.”

Next, let us look at what a rule is not. Firstly, a rule is not an explicit, linguistically formulated conditional. In order to describe a rule, we have to use language—but that does not mean, of course, that the rule is essentially linguistically formulated. The rule is not an explicit sentence, but an implicit “procedure for generating a sensible intuition” that the sentence describes. If the rule was merely an explicit, linguistically-ﬁrmulated conditional, then there would be a further question of whether the linguistically formulated antecedent itself applies. If answering this further question itself required a rule, then we would have a regress of rule-application.

Secondly, a rule is not a disposition. A disposition is some sort of probabilistic counterfactual, formulated as: if such and such conditions hold, there is a certain probability that a particular action will be performed. But when a rule applies, there is a norm stating that the action must (or may) be performed.

Much of Wittgenstein’s Investigations is concerned with showing the problems with various inadequate conceptions of rules. I hope I have said enough to distinguish Kant’s sense of rule from explicit conditionals and from mere regularities.
One Wittgenstinian concern with rules is that they seem incapable of capturing penumbral concepts. Take, for example, Wittgenstein’s famous example of “game.” What it is to be a game is not captured once and for all by a set of definite rules. Rather, it is a family resemblance concept: some paradigms (chess, baseball) are central, while others (patience, ring-a-ring-a-roses) are peripheral. Patience is less of a game than baseball, but a game nonetheless. How can we capture penumbral concepts in a rule-based architecture? If we cannot capture them, this would be a serious problem for the account proposed. But it has recently been pointed out that a Bayesian mixture model over discrete rule sets can capture penumbral concepts rather well. The idea is that the inductive learner is trying to construct a set of rules that best explains the data he has received. There are various sets of rules that capture the data with different degrees of success. The Bayesian mixture model applies the various rule-sets in proportion to their posterior probabilities. So if, say, there are just three sets of rules that explain the data, and rule-set \( R_1 \) has posterior probability 0.7 and says that the newly observed instance is a game, and rule-set \( R_2 \) has posterior probability 0.2 and says the new instance is not a game, and rule-set \( R_3 \) has posterior probability 0.1 and says the new instance is a game, then the mixture model says that the new instance is a game with probability 0.7 + 0.1 = 0.8.

### 4.2 WHAT DOES KANT MEAN BY A “RULE-FOLLOWING PROCESS”?

But Wittgenstein has another fundamental concern with a rule-following account of intentionality that we need to address head-on. This is the worry that a rule-following account cannot accommodate the fact that no set of rules can cover all possible cases. Wittgenstein draws our attention, again and again, to cases where our rules give out:

I say “There is a chair.” What if I go up to it, meaning to fetch it, and it suddenly disappears from sight?—“So it wasn’t a chair, but some kind of illusion.”—But in a few moments we see it again and are able to touch it and so on.—“So the chair was there after all and its disappearance was some kind of illusion.”—But suppose that after a time it disappears again—or seems to disappear. What are we to say now? Have you rules ready for such cases—rules saying whether one may use the word “chair” to include this kind of thing? But do we miss them when we use the word “chair”; and are we to say that we do not really attach any meaning to this word, because we are not equipped with rules for every possible application of it?

Our rules for the identification of chairs cannot anticipate every eventuality, including their continual appearance and disappearance—but this does not mean we cannot recognize chairs. Or, to take another famous example, we have rules for determining the time in different places on Earth. But now suppose someone says:

“It was just 5 o’clock in the afternoon on the sun.”

Again, our rules for determining the time do not cover all applications, and sometimes just give out: They do not cover cases where we apply time of day on the sun. Wittgenstein’s vision is that, since any set of rules is inevitably limited and partial, we must always continually improvise and update. But this vision is fully compatible with the rule-following Kantian agent, as I have described him. Such an agent is continually constructing a new set of rules that makes best sense of his sensory perturbations. It is not that he constructs a set of rules, once and for all, and then applies them rigidly and unthinkingly forever after. Rather the process of rule construction is a continual effort.

Kant describes an ongoing process of constructing and applying norms to make sense of the barrage of sensory stimuli:

There is no unity of self-consciousness or “transcendental unity of apperception” apart from this effort, or conatus towards judgement, ceaselessly affirmed and ceaselessly threatened with dissolution in the “welter of appearances.”

Kant’s rule-following agent is continually constructing such norms, so as to best make sense of the barrage of sensory stimuli. If he were to cease constructing these rules, he would cease to be a rule-following agent, and would be merely a machine.

In What is Enlightenment? Kant is emphatic that the cognitive agent must never be satisfied with a statically defined set of rules—but must always be modifying existing rules and constructing new rules. He stresses that adhering to any statically defined set of rules is a form of self-enslavement:

Precepts and formulas, those mechanical instruments of a rational use, or rather misuse, of his natural endowments, are the ball and chain of an everlasting minority.

Later, he uses the term “machine” to describe a cognitive agent who is no longer open to modifications of his rule-set.
He defines “enlightenment” as the continual willingness to be open to new and improved sets of rules. He imagines what would happen if we decided to fix on a particular set of rules, and forbid any future modifications or additions to that rule-set. He argues that this would be disastrous for society and also for the self.

In The Metaphysics of Morals, he stresses that the business of constructing moral rules is an ongoing never-ending task:

Virtue is always in progress and yet always starts from the beginning. It is always in progress because, considered objectively, it is an ideal and unattainable, while yet constant approximation to it is a duty. That it always starts from the beginning has a subjective basis in human nature, which is affected by inclinations because of which virtue can never settle down in peace and quiet with its maxims adopted once and for all but, if it is not rising, is unavoidable sinking.41

Just as for moral rules, just so for cognitive rules: Kant’s cognitive agent is always constructing new rules to make sense of the pattern, a pattern that is new in every moment.

This sort of rule-following model has its critics. Some of Wittgenstein’s remarks, for example, are often interpreted as denying the possibility of any sort of rule-following account:

We can easily imagine people amusing themselves in a field by playing with a ball so as to start various existing games, but playing many without finishing them and in between throwing the ball aimlessly into the air, chasing one another with the ball and bombarding one another for a joke and so on. And now someone says: The whole time they are playing a ball-game and following definite rules at every throw.46

Now there is a crucial scope ambiguity here. Is Wittgenstein merely denying that there is a set of rules that captures the ball-play at every moment? Or is he making a stronger claim, claiming that there is some moment during the ball-play that cannot be captured by any set of rules at all? I think the weaker claim is more plausible: we make sense of the world by applying rules, but we need to continually modify our rules as we progress through time. Wittgenstein’s passage in fact continues:

And is there not also the case where we play and make up the rules as we go along? And there is even one where we alter them, as we go along.

Here, he does not consider the possibility of there being activity that cannot be explained by rules—rather, he is keen to stress the diachronic nature of the rule-construction process.

We have considered various interpretations of “rule” and “rule-following” that are too rigid and inflexible to serve as the foundation for a model of intentionality.

I have claimed that, suitably interpreted, a rule-following account can survive the accusations of inflexible rigidity, as long as the rules are interpreted as:

- conditional norms, rather than explicit linguistically formulated conditionals
- conditional norms, rather than probabilistic dispositions
- defeasible conditionals, rather than strict entailments
- defeasible conditionals under a partial ordering, rather than conditionals with explicit exceptions

I have further argued that our rule-following agent must be continually expanding and modifying his rule-set: the construction of rules is an ongoing activity that we must continue forever.

5 CONSTRUCTING AND APPLYING RULES

The rule-following agent can perform just two types of basic activity. He can construct a rule, and he can apply a rule he has already constructed. I shall consider these two activities in turn.

5.1 CONSTRUCTING RULES

Kant says it is the job of the faculty of understanding to construct rules:

We have above explained the understanding in various ways—through a spontaneity of cognition (in contrast to the receptivity of the sensibility), through a faculty of thinking, or a faculty of concepts, or also of judgements—which explanations, if one looks at them properly, come down to the same thing. Now we can characterise it as the faculty of rules. This designation is more fruitful and comes closer to its essence. Sensibility gives us forms (of intuition), but the understanding gives us rules. It is always busy poring through the appearances with the aim of finding some sort of rule in them.

The understanding is thus not merely a faculty for making rules through the comparison of the appearances; it is itself the legislation for nature.47

Recall that there are two types of rule (rules of composition, and rules of connection), so there are two types of rule construction. Constructing rules of composition is forming perceptual rules, rules of apprehension for counting particular configurations as parts of objects. For example, the agent adds a new rule that, if some of its sensors satisfy such and such a condition, it may count them as representing an ear.

Constructing rules of connection is forming concepts or making judgments. Forming a concept is constructing a set of rules that describe the inferential connections between this concept and others. So, for example, to form the concept of “tree,” we need rules of composition for saying under what sensory conditions we can count an intuition as a tree. But we also need rules of connection for linking this
concept with others. So if we count it as a tree, we must also count it as a plant, and must not count it as a biscuit. Some of the connection rules involved in characterising a concept do more than simply state that one concept is a sub-concept of another, or that one concept excludes another. Some of them relate the concept to another concept only conditionally—dependent on the existence of external factors. For example: "If the weather gets cold, trees lose their leaves," "If a tree gets no water, it perishes." Some of the conceptual inference rules, in Kantian terms, are hypothetical rather than categorical.

Constructing rules of connection is also what is involved in making judgments. If we form the judgment that "All men are mortal," this is just to adopt the rule of connection: if I count a cognition as a man, then I must also count it as mortal. But this inferential understanding of judgment applies to categorical statements just as much as to hypothetical ones: to form the judgment that "Caesar is a general" just is to adopt the rule: if I count a cognition as Caesar, then I must also count it as a general.

This is why Kant says that the faculty of constructing rules is also the faculty of concept-formation and judging: both concept-formation and judging are just special cases of the more general ability to construct rules.47

5.2 APPLYING RULES
Next, I shall turn to the process of applying the rules that the understanding has constructed. Kantian rules, as defined above, are norms operating under a condition. Rules are not explicit linguistic conditionals, where there is a further question whether the antecedent applies. Rather, the rule is itself responsible for determining when it applies. It contains a procedure for determining whether or not it applies. The rule-as-procedure applies itself. If the rule applies in a particular situation, a norm is operative: either the agent must combine the representations under a certain mark (if the rule is a rule of connection), or it may do so (if it is a rule of composition). If it is a rule of composition, then all the agent knows is that he may perform the combination activity—he does not have to do so. Consider, for example, Jastrow’s famous duck-rabbit (Figure 1). Focus on the lines on the left of the image. We have two rules of composition that apply to these lines: we can count these lines as a mouth, or as a pair of ears. Now there is a rule of connection that prevents us from applying both: if something is a mouth, then it is not a pair of ears. We may apply either rule of composition—but we must not apply both. What makes us decide which to apply?

Kant argues convincingly that it cannot be a further rule that tells us which to apply:

Now if it [general logic] wanted to show generally how one ought to subsume under these rules, i.e., distinguish whether something stands under them or not, this could not happen except once again through a rule. But just because this is a rule, it would demand another instruction for the power of judgement, and so it becomes clear that although the understanding is certainly capable of being instructed and equipped through rules, the power of judgement is a special talent that cannot be taught but only practiced. Thus this is also what is specific to so-called mother-wit, the lack of which cannot be made good by any school.50

If we needed rules to determine which rules to apply, then those determining rules would themselves need further rules to determine their application, and so on, generating a vicious regress.

Kant defines the imagination as the faculty responsible for applying the rules that the understanding has constructed. As the duck-rabbit picture shows, the imagination has some choice about how to apply the rules of composition:

Now since all of our intuition is sensible, the imagination, on account of the subjective condition under which alone it can give a corresponding intuition to the concepts of understanding, belongs to sensibility; but insofar as its synthesis is still an exercise of spontaneity, which is determining, and not, like sense, merely determinable, and can thus determine the form of sense a priori in accordance with the unity of apperception, the imagination is to this extent a faculty for determining the sensibility a priori.51

The imagination belongs to sensibility because the only things it can operate on are the sensings that sensibility has provided. But it belongs to spontaneity in that it has a choice about which rules of composition to apply.

This is why Kant says that both understanding and imagination involve spontaneity—the understanding has a choice about which rules to construct; and then, once it has constructed them, the imagination has a further choice about which rules of composition to apply:

It is one and the same spontaneity that, there under the name of imagination and here under the name of understanding, brings combination into the manifold of intuition.52

Note that it is only when applying rules of composition that the imagination has choice about which to apply. When it comes to applying rules of connection, the rule-following agent is obligated to perform the required mental activity.

Figure 1. Jastrow’s famous duck-rabbit.
5.3 HAVING AN INTUITION VERSUS FORMING A JUDGMENT

The rule-following agent has two distinct types of thought:

- Thinking an object (having an intuition)
- Thinking a proposition (forming a judgment)

These two distinct types of representation are achieved by two distinct types of activity:

- An intuition is the representation formed by the activity of combination, by applying rules it has already constructed
- A judgment is the representation formed by constructing a rule

Sellars clarifies the distinction between the two types of representation by using different types of syntactic units: an intuition (thinking an object) is represented by a noun-phrase, while a judgment (thinking a proposition) is represented by a sentence. He starts by noting that some philosophers interpret “seeing as” in terms of a conjunction of a perception and a thought:

This suggested to some philosophers that to see a visual object as a brick with a red and rectangular facing surface consists in seeing the brick and believing it to be a brick with a red and rectangular facing surface:

This is a brick which has a red and rectangular facing surface

Notice that the subject term of the judgement was exhibited above as a bare demonstrative, a sheer this, and that what the object is seen as was placed in an explicitly predicate position, thus “is a brick which has a red and rectangular facing surface.”

He prefers instead to characterize intuitions by noun-phrases:

I submit, on the contrary, that correctly represented, a perceptual belief has the quite different form:

This brick with a red and rectangular facing surface

Notice that this is not a sentence but a complex demonstrative phrase. In other words, I suggest that in such a perceptually grounded judgement as:

This brick with a red and rectangular facing surface is too large for the job at hand

the perceptual belief proper is that tokening of a complex Mentalese demonstrative phrase which is the grammatical subject of the judgement as a whole. This can be rephrased as a distinction between a perceptual taking and what is believed about what is taken. In my terms, there are two activities:

- combining/apprehending/intuiting (i.e., applying rules)
- forming judgments (i.e., constructing rules)

Combining produces an intuition (thinking an object) which is described by a noun-phrase, such as

This brick with a red and rectangular facing surface

Constructing a rule produces a judgment (thinking a proposition) which is described by a sentence, such as

This brick with a red rectangular facing surface is too large for the job at hand

The underlying rule that is adopted for a judgment such as this could be expressed as something like

For any intuition, if you count it as the same object as this brick with a red rectangular facing surface then you must also count it as too large for the job at hand

Kant believed that all judgment-formation is rule-adoption:

Judgements, when considered merely as the condition of the unification of given representations in a consciousness, are rules.

This claim is easiest to see in the case of universally quantified judgments. Judging that “All metals are divisible” just is adopting the conditional norm

If you count an intuition as a metal, then you must also count it as divisible.

But Kant did not just analyse universally quantified judgments in terms of rule-adoption—he applied this account of judging as rule-formation consistently across the board to all types of judgment. Forming the singular judgment that “Caius is mortal” just is adopting the rule

If you count an intuition as Caius, then you must also count it as mortal

This applies equally to sentences involving demonstratives: forming the judgment that “This brick with a red and rectangular facing surface is too large for the job at hand” just is adopting the rule

For any intuition, if you count it as the same object as this brick with a red and rectangular facing surface then you must also count it as too large for the job at hand

If, later, I have another intuition of the brick (perhaps from another angle, and further away), and count this intuition as
representing the same object as my earlier intuition, then I must apply the rule I have adopted, and also count this new intuition as representing a brick that is too large for the job at hand. This new combination, which I am forced to perform because of the rule I have adopted, is a new intuition, that would be described by a noun-phrase rather than a sentence:

This brick, with a red and rectangular facing surface, which is too large for the job at hand

5.4 CONSTRAINTS ON THE CONSTRUCTION AND APPLICATION OF RULES

Kant’s cognitive agent is a rule induction system that makes sense of its sensory perturbations by constructing and applying rules. Given that there are two types of activity (constructing and applying rules), and two types of rule (rules of composition and rules of connection), we have a square of operations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rules of Composition</th>
<th>Rules of Connection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constructing</td>
<td>Forming perceptual rules Forming concepts and judgments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying</td>
<td>Forming intuitions Inferring further properties of objects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recall our original questions:

What must I do, in order to count these sensory perturbations as my experience?

The rule-following agent is a central part of Kant’s answer:

- A sensory agent is a cognitive agent if he counts his sensings as representing an external world
- He counts these sensings as representing an external world if he combines those sensings together in the right way
- He combines his sensings together in the right way if he constructs and applies a set of rules that satisfy a set of (as yet unspecified) constraints

The next question, then, is what set of constraints on the construction and application of rules are severally necessary and jointly sufficient for counting this plurality of sensory perturbations as representing an external world (and thereby achieving original intentionality)?

In the Schematism and the Principles, Kant provides a list of constraints on the self-legislating agent, and argues that these are all and only the constraints that need to be satisfied for the agent to achieve original intentionality. These arguments are difficult and dense. I attempt to summarize them in A Kantian Cognitive Architecture. The basic idea is that an agent can only achieve intentionality if it combines its cognitions together into a unity. The only relation in which all cognitions can be unified is time.

Unifying our cognitions in time involves four aspects: constructing moments in time, generating intermediate moments of time, providing a total ordering on moments of time, and generating the totality of time (by excluding moments that are impossible). Each of these four aspects of time determines constraints on the construction and application of rules. We move from one top-level constraint (Kant calls it the “supreme principle”), that our cognitions be unified, into four sub-constraints (the four aspects of time-determination), and from each of these four sub-constraints, we generate specific constraints on the types of rules that can be constructed and further constraints on the results of applying these rules.

6 CONCLUSION

Some of the most exciting and ambitious work in recent philosophy attempts to re-articulate Kantian (and post-Kantian) philosophy in the language of analytic philosophy. Now this re-articulation is not merely window-dressing. It is not merely dressing up old ideas in the latest fashionable terminology. Rather, analytic philosophy, when done well, achieves a new level of perspicuity. Saying it again, at this level of clarity and precision, is worth saying again.

My aim is to re-articulate Kant’s theory at a further level of precision, by reinterpreting it as a specification of a computational architecture.

Why descend to this particular level of description? What could possibly be gained? The computational level of description is the ultimate level of precise description. There is no more precise you can be: even a mere computer can understand a computer program. Computers force us to clarify our thoughts. They admit no waffling or vagueness. Hand-waving is greeted with a compilation error, and a promissory note is returned, unread.

The advantage of re-articulating Kant’s vision in computational terms is that it gives us a new level of specificity. This is, in fact, the final level of specificity. There is no more precise we can be.

The danger is that, in an effort to shoe-horn Kant’s theory into a particular implementable system, we distort his original ideas to the point where they are no longer recognisable. Whether this is indeed the unfortunate consequence, the gentle reader must decide.

I have formalized (a particular interpretation of the first half of) the First Critique as a specification of a computational architecture. I have implemented this architecture as a computer program and tested it in two domains.

In one domain, the sensory agent has to make sense of its sensory readings in a simple two-dimensional grid world. The rule-induction agent is forced to construct rules that make sense of the barrage of sensory data. In doing so, it creates a unified cognition, combining momentary apprehensions into persisting objects that change over time, objects that change according to intelligible rules, and interact with other objects according to intelligible rules.
The second experimental domain is a verbal reasoning task. The Kantian machine is given a sequence of symbols and has to predict the next element in the series. For example: find the next element in the sequence:

$$a, k, b, k, c, k, k, k, ...$$

The Kantian machine makes sense of these sequences by constructing rules that, when applied, satisfy the various Kantian constraints. Surprisingly, the Kantian machine is able to achieve human-level performance in these verbal reasoning tasks. 

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Barnaby Evans, Joel Smith, Marek Sergot, Murray Shanahan, Peter Boltuc, and Tom Smith for helpful discussions.

NOTES

1. This paper is a companion to Richard Evans, A Kantian Cognitive Architecture (IACAP, 2016), which goes into the technical details.
3. Ibid., §185.
4. For Wittgenstein, the community of "we" just is the set of individuals who count-as in the same way.
8. Ibid., 385.
9. Note that I am not defining intentionality in terms of the activity of counting-as (which would be uninformative). Rather, I am using counting-as to distinguish between original and derivative intentionality. Later, counting-as will itself be explicated in terms of the construction and application of rules.
11. In other words, we can only represent a world because we can count some activity as mental activity. Therefore, the ability to count activity as intentional (representational) behavior is necessary to be able to think a world at all. This has interesting consequences for scepticism about others' minds. The sceptic suggests it is possible for us to be able to make sense of a purely physical world of physical activity, and asks with what right we assume that some of this activity is mental activity. But if the above is right, the capacity to count activity as mental activity is necessary to think anything at all—there is no intentionality-free representation of the world, in terms of bare particulars. There is always already the ability to see activity as intentional activity before we can see anything.
15. Ibid., A99.
18. See Kant, The Critique of Pure Reason, B201n.
19. Kant says little about what a "mark" is, given its load-bearing role in his theory. "Merkmal" is typically translated as "mark," but it can also be translated as "feature." A mark is not a shared linguistic symbol. It is rather what computer scientists call a "gen-sym": a generated symbol, an atomic identifier. A mark is an uninterpreted symbol, on which the only primitive operation that you are given is a procedure for testing identity: the agent can tell, when given two marks $m_1$ and $m_2$, whether or not $m_1 = m_2$. A mark, on its own, is just an uninterpreted symbol. But by constructing inferential rules that relate this mark to others, we can elevate it into a concept.
21. See ibid.: “the synthesis of a manifold of what does not necessarily belong to each other.”
23. See Kant, The Critique of Pure Reason, B201n: “the synthesis of a manifold of what does not necessarily belong to each other.”
24. Ibid., A177, B220.
25. Ibid., B198, A159.
26. Ibid., A105.
27. Ibid., B130.
28. Ibid., A126.
29. Ibid., A108.
30. Ibid., A112.
31. In computational terms, think of a meta-interpreter that is able to construct pieces of code as data, and then execute these new pieces of code.
32. Kant makes the same point in the Metaphysical Deduction: "The same function that gives unity to the different representations in a judgement also gives unity to the mere synthesis of different representations in an intuition, which, expressed generally, is called the pure concept of the understanding. The same understanding, therefore, and indeed by means of the very same actions through which it brings the logical form of a judgement into concepts by means of the analytical unity, also brings a transcendental content into its representations by means of the synthetic unity of the manifold" [A79, B104-5]. In other words, there is only one process (a process of constructing and applying rules) which explains both how we form judgments and how we form intuitions.
33. An activity is shown to be permitted if there is a rule that applies that shows that you may or must do it. Must implies may.
35. Ibid., A113.
38. Thereby steering between the Scylla of regulism (rules as linguistically explicit conditionals) and the Charybdis of regularism (rules as mere statistical regularities). See Brandom’s Making It Explicit, Chapter 1, Section 3.
39. In AI, this is called the qualification problem.
42. Ibid., §351.
43. Longuenesse, Kant and the Capacity to Judge, 394.
48. Longuenesse, Kant and the Capacity to Judge, 145.
50. Ibid., A133, B172.
51. Ibid., B151.
52. Ibid., B162n.
54. Ibid., 456.
55. Kant, Prologomena to Any Future Metaphysics, 1783, §23.
56. For details of the precise constraints involved, see Evans, A Kantian Cognitive Architecture; Longuenesse, Kant and the Capacity to Judge; and Wayne Waxman, Kant’s Anatomy of the Intelligent Mind (Oxford University Press, 2013).
58. For more details of the approach and the experiments, please see Evans, A Kantian Cognitive Architecture.

REFERENCES


I Am, Therefore I Think

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ABSTRACT

I argue that reflexive self-knowledge is the basis of all knowledge, and that a reflexive formulation of mind and consciousness—perhaps unlike formulations couched in more vague terms of subjectivity, felt experience, or what it’s like to be—appears that it might be studied fairly directly as a kind of engineering problem.

INTRODUCTION

Much has been written on the nature of knowledge, and its relation to mind. And the same term—knowledge—is used with abandon in artificial intelligence. In the Fall of 2015 I gave a series of three talks in Birmingham and Lyon, on a variety of topics including mind, meaning, and the history of AI. In subsequent discussions with Peter Boltuc, I came to think that knowledge is a powerful unifying theme to all three talks, and Peter suggested that I might turn those talks into a paper with such a focus.

As a result this paper may take what might seem like a curiously rambling back-and-forth tour covering many areas, which I hope the reader will forgive. In addition, the paper is deliberately of a rather impressionistic style, not a formal analytic argument. My view is that the ideas and concepts are in many cases vague enough (and likely will remain so until such time as we actually scientifically solve much of the mind-body problem) that the most fruitful approach is to suggest promising avenues for research rather than precise definitions and sharp derivations. So hopefully my paper can be read as providing suggestive hints; and that is why I employ a rather loose style that jams together what traditionally are taken as distinct topics. But I think the evidence points to a promising synthesis and unifying direction for investigation across the cognitive sciences. My conclusions will be that while knowledge is an especially narrow kind of thing (essentially a form of self-knowledge) it is also very specially at the center of cognition; and that this can be studied computationally.

PART I: AI RETURNS TO ITS ROOTS; BUT WITH A GLARING CHASM

Artificial intelligence currently is a vast field largely fueled by its eye-catching applications, from the chess-playing
proposed by Deep Blue to the growing presence of robots in many walks of life.

But I think AI may now—with some very major advances under its belt—return to its roots as the science of cognitive agents, with the exalted aim of a computational understanding of the mind. Here is a brief history:

1960–1985: Youthful ambitions, during which were introduced the situation calculus, the frame problem, SHAKEY the robot, and nonmonotonic reasoning, among other advances; but also during which there was a keen interest in building agents with fairly general cognitive abilities (but which proved vastly harder than anticipated).

1985–2010: Age of specialization, in which AI splintered into many separate areas with their own conferences and journals, major applications appeared, and little was heard about cognition. Still, there was also beginning work on time-sensitive reasoning and metacognition.

2010–present: Renewed interest in cognitive agents; natural-language processing (NLP) and robotics and vision and reasoning and planning and learning starting to come together.

But something key still seems missing. Without further ado, I give my view: we need to get a computational grasp on reflexive self. In fact, most AI systems have no notion of self at all—no metacognition, for instance. They simply perform, and do not take themselves into account. Thus, most NLP dialog programs are not able to answer questions about what they just said, or what their words mean; they do not model themselves as agents with purposes. Yet some research does incorporate such constructs, and there does not seem to be any fundamental puzzle about this effort; metareasoning is the principal method.

Reflexive self, however, is something even more: it is the immediate present “I,” the self-knowing self. One doesn’t experience pain and then come to know one is in pain. The having of the pain is the knowing it. This is controversial, but not without supporters. It is to be distinguished from reflective or introspective or biographical self. We will return to reflexive self later; but notice that the notion of knowledge has crept in.

And in fact one construct central to most of AI—the so-called knowledge base (KB)—leaves much to be desired. Most AI systems have no way to relate items in their KB to what those items supposedly stand for in the world; any such relation is in the minds of the human designers. Thus in some strong sense, AI systems today do not know anything.

So this leads us to ask what knowledge is, and how it might be seen as a kind of computational process. We close this section with an aside on the holy grail of cognitive science: what is it to be conscious? From the Latin, conscious (of) = with knowledge (of). I suggest that a (reflexive) conscious state of a subject S is a state that S knows itself to be in, where that very knowing is part of that same state. (Here state is to be regarded as a kind of process, rather than an instantaneous instant.) A not uncommon view is that self-knowledge is a more complex form of knowledge that is preceded by knowledge of things more generally. But, as will unfold later, I think this is exactly backwards.

**PART II: WHAT DOES IT TAKE FOR A PIECE OF DATA TO BE KNOWN?**

A knowledge base is a repository. Without something additional, there is no more reason to regard a KB item as something known (to be true) than as something false or as a mere syntactic entity without meaning. What is missing, it would seem, is a knower that relates the symbolic item to its meaning in the world. (This of course is the famous issue of intentionality, the directedness of cognitive items.) Bozology—putting items in boxes and labeling them as knowledge, goals, intentions, and so on—does not settle or explain anything; yet sadly it is the current standard in AI.

So, what constitutes a knower, and how can anything be known? Can one know anything? It seems easy (e.g., Hume) to doubt anything—yet Descartes insists that there is one thing one can know for sure: that one is carrying out an act of thinking. (To my mind, his further claim that therefore he exists by comparison.) One cannot think and not know it.

As an aside, here is a related kind of argument due to Kripke (in Naming and Necessity, pp 153-4): pain requires a subject, an entity that can feel, can know the pain. But mere C-fiber firings cannot supply such a feeler/knower. Thus pain (and by extension, consciousness) is more than firing of C-fibers. But (pace Kripke), a whole brain-full of fibers firing in the right ways might be able to supply a feeling subject. That after all is the whole question. The reason the C-fibers argument works is that no one imagines C-fibers in themselves—sending signals in one direction—is enough. Kripke’s argument—if applied to the whole brain—is close in spirit to zombie-arguments, which we return to at the end.

But back to knowing, especially since consciousness seems to be a kind of knowing.

**PART III: PLATO TO GETTIER AND BACK TO DESCARTES**

The nature of knowledge has been discussed and argued about for millennia. The JTB—justified true belief—theory is attributed to Plato and was held in wide acceptance until Gettier’s bombshell counterexamples in the 20th century. By now others have extended this almost to a cottage industry for creating such cases. The underlying issue is this: knowledge requires some kind of actual connection (or acquaintance, in Russell’s terms) with the facts; it cannot be a lucky guess to count as knowledge. And this is supposed to be provided by the justification. But standard sorts of justifications seem to fail, surprisingly.

The best example I know of is due to Mason Remaley (who at the time was an undergraduate in my Intro to AI class). It goes like this: You have parked your car outside your office building. While you are at work in the office, unknown to
you a landslide occurs in the parking lot and carries away many of the cars, but not yours. You still believe your car is parked there, and you have excellent reason to believe this, and it is true. Yet we would be loathe to say you know your car is parked there.

Such Gettier-style examples have led some (e.g., Dretske) to suggest that perhaps there is no such thing as knowledge, only beliefs of varying degrees of plausibility. This may seem convincing: isn’t all so-called knowledge inferred, concluded on reflection, and thus error-prone?

We return to Descartes.

Some have argued that his premise “I think”—or cognize—is flawed: How does he conclude he thinks? Isn’t he instead merely justified in concluding that “there is thinking”? But how can he conclude this unless he somehow knows about that thinking, and how can he know about it other than by the very doing of the thinking? Consider what it would mean for there to be thinking going on, but no one at all knows about it; this would not seem to be thinking. (Indeed, one might go further and claim that the present thinking act is the I/self of that moment.) And this does not seem to be introspective knowing—the thinking directly and immediately involves the act of knowing about itself going on. And a form of reflexive self has returned.

PART IV: PERRY AND “I”

John Perry gives a famous example of coming to realize it is he himself whose shopping cart has a torn bag of sugar making a mess. (He is wheeling his shopping-cart along the aisles of a store, going faster and faster in an attempt to notify an unknown shopper ahead of him—following the trail of sugar that is getting thicker and thicker—until he red-facedly understands.) This experience leads him to ask what knowledge he has gained in coming to this realization. And he finds it very difficult to explain the “I”—the self-known self—in terms not involving that same construct. It seems irreducible.

Are we then stuck? Is this perhaps much the same as the explanatory gap between consciousness and physical causation? In a later section I propose a way out.

PART V: BELIEF AND MEANING

Again from Descartes, whatever knowledge is, it is self-knowledge that precedes other forms. And it is a strong form of knowledge, not mediated by reflection, inference, perception.

So self-knowledge precedes JTB; one first knows (oneself) and then infers regarding justifications and so on. But then what is belief? This brings us right back to boxology: a belief-box settles nothing. There has to be meaning for there to be belief. One cannot believe mere symbols; a belief is always about something.

This recalls the problem of intentionality, and also that of external reference. But Putnam’s Theorem shows that there is no unique truth-preserving mapping between words/sentences and the world. For any such mapping, many others do just as well. This seems to rule out any sensible account of meaning (despite Putnam’s own earlier work, see below). But this argument leaves out a key component: meaning is given by meaners—individuals who ascribe meaning to their words and sentences. We are connected to the world via our bodies; and (at least some of) our words and thoughts are canonically connected to our bodies via specific neuronal pathways.

Indeed earlier on, both Putnam and Kripke—in the so-called causal-history theory of reference—refer to dubbers, namers, baptisers, who assign word-meanings that are then later borrowed by other members of a linguistic community. They do not provide a detailed account of such initial dubbing/naming activities, but such an account would seem to be far more fundamental to language and meaning than the borrowings that flow from them. I suggest that the same bodily connection referred to above may be the basis for naming and meaning overall.

Now this is what Searle said cannot be done (by a computational system). Mere symbol processing (which is syntactic) cannot provide semantics. Unless it can. But how can it? What is being suggested here is that a self (embedded in the world) is what is needed, to supply the canonical connections.

In Figure 1, both H and the green hand (encircled in red) are internal representations, and the agent takes H to stand for that hand, which in turn is mapped neuronally and uniquely to the actual hand. So Searle is right in a way: the standard sort of symbol processing cannot supply meaning; it takes a special sort, that has self-representations.

What has this to do with knowledge? Everything! Knowledge requires meaning, hence self. And what is self? I am suggesting it is special kind of processing (that perhaps it is even like something for it to be underway): it knows itself immediately, as part of that very processing. It is the most basic form (and perhaps definition) of knowing—the self. What the self (always) knows is itself as that very process of knowing.

PART VI: MYSTERIES, OR ENGINEERING?

Have we just replaced one mystery (or two: knowledge and consciousness) with another? I think there is some progress here. For the reflexive-self formulation—perhaps unlike formulations in terms of subjectivity, felt experience, or what it’s like to be—appears that it might be studied fairly directly as a kind of engineering problem. By analogy, consider James Watt’s governor that self-regulates (see Figure 2).
As increased steam-flow causes the arms to rotate with increased speed, they are pushed upwards by the vector sum of a force pulling along the arms (upward and inward) and an outward effective centrifugal force; and the new higher position then results in a steam-opening being partially closed thereby reducing the flow of steam and thus slowing the rotation, leading to an up-down cycle until a steady state is achieved. This seems magical, sense-defying, until one studies it. It does indeed have a kind of self-control. To be sure, it is not reflexive (or reflective) in any relevant sense. But it provides a compelling metaphor and food for thought. It does have dual causality—the steam causes the rotation, which also reduces the steam.

What might be a similarly practical example of reflexivity? How about the utterance, “I am now speaking English”? Note the difference from “This sentence is in English.” The latter does not refer to a speaker; there is no performance relevant to its meaning. But the former is uttered by an agent as it reasons about its very same uttering-in-progress. Here is another example: how can one tell one is speaking? It surely is not by hearing ones own voice. We might hear our voice and take it to be a recording. We know we are speaking by the mere fact of engaging in the action (e.g., issuing the commands to our vocal cords). The actual speech might be impeded (say by an overly dry throat), but we still know we are engaged in the process, because we are (voluntarily) undertaking it.

This too can be implemented in a robot—in fact, a robot inadvertently taught my research team this lesson. We had programmed it so that whenever it heard the word “Julia” it would look for her, point, and say “I see Julia.” Yet often it would perform this as expected, and then go on to do it over and over every few seconds. It took us several minutes to figure out that it was responding to hearing itself say “Julia.” We had not thought to provide it with a way to distinguish self-utterances from others. In fact, it had no notion of self at all. But there was ready-to-hand a solution, from neuroscience: efference copy.5

Efference copy is a copy of a motor command (sent to muscles) from the brain; the copy is kept in the brain, providing a kind of working memory of what the agent is doing, and which can be used to make corrections if performance deviates from goals. The most famous example is VOR—vestibular-ocular reflex—in which ones eyes rotate in their socket as ones head turns, so that one retains a stable image on the retina when gaze is fixed on an object. A similar mechanism is hypothesized to be at work in all voluntary actions. We were able to build efference copy into our robot, so that it now can distinguish between cases of hearing its own utterances and those of others; or more precisely, between cases of its undertaking or not undertaking utterances. Is this then a conscious robot, or a “self-knowing” robot in any serious sense? Surely not. But it seems headed in the right direction.

Again, if we are able to get an NLP program simply to use “I” correctly in a wide range of circumstances, we might then be a lot further along. And again, this does not seem fundamentally mysterious, rather a tough engineering problem. But this too will not be enough.

PART VII: IMAGINATION

One needs a real-time and real-space connection with the world, in order to have meaning (and thus in order to have knowledge). This is implicit in what was said above, but it needs to be brought out. Here is an example due to Patrick Winston.6

Consider a table-saw with the warning “Do not wear gloves when using this saw.” This might be puzzling—after all, gloves are usually protective—until we visualize what might happen: in our mind’s eye we see the glove being caught by a saw-tooth and then pulled (along with our hand) into the spinning blade. This inner eye is key to our ability to anticipate possibilities. Essentially it amounts to imagination, without which we would not be able to think, hence not to understand, and thus not to have knowledge (except in the unhelpful boxology sense).

This notion of thinking is not ordinary logic.7 It combines symbolic processing with perceptual processing, perhaps akin to virtual/augmented reality and even a kind of internal self-modeling activity (e.g., seeing oneself pushing ones hand forward). Knowledge then might amount to a Cartesian awareness of self-in-mental-action. And yet, this may turn into a (self-based) engineering problem.

Perhaps then a reflexive-self based process is our only real knowledge—we can’t be wrong about our own ongoing imaginative acts (Descartes; not his dualism but simply his cogito in reverse: in knowing ourselves—i.e., in self-predicating—we can be sure that we know). A so-called knowledge base is a mere storehouse of codes, not known in any useful sense until triggered into imaginative acts of anticipation.

PART VIII: SOME TENTATIVE CONSEQUENCES

A number of consequences seem to follow from the above perspective.

For one, we can suggest a conclusion about Frank Jackson’s color-deprived Mary. She is supposed to know “all physical facts” about the brain, and yet never have actually been in the presence of anything red. Does she then know what it is like to see red? On the theory of knowledge being proposed here, if she knows all facts about the brain then
her brain actually triggers codes for all such facts into her imagination. And then plausibly yes, she will know the actual experience of seeing red.\(^8\)

If this is hard to swallow, consider the following variant: Suppose you have never seen a regular pentagon, living in a world of right angles. You have read (un-illustrated) books about pentagons, describing them verbally in detail. Now will you know what a pentagon looks like? That depends on your brain's imaginative powers, which in turn depends on connections between different envisioning capacities and abilities to retain envisioned information (e.g., up to five linear elements) at once. It is a fact about pentagons and suitable brains that a certain "look" of the former can be imagined by the latter with never an external pentagon to look at; and other brains cannot. Those latter brains then do not have all the facts about brains and pentagons.

Second: In an online video, Kevin O'Regan poignantly asks (of any proposed theory that consciousness consists in X): what is it about X that makes it conscious? This is a powerful question, that leaves many theories in the dust (they offer no explanation of felt experience). But without intending to sound facile or glib, I suggest: self-knowingness is consciousness, and what makes it conscious is that very self-knowingness. This at least is not obviously lacking in plausibility. Self-knowingness does seem tightly linked to consciousness, and has been so linked going back at least to Descartes. Moreover, it is the sort of thing that gives us handles to work with, and might allow an engineering approach that could shine much light.

Third: Block's P-consciousness and A-consciousness now become the same thing.\(^9\) One cannot be a knowing self and yet not know that.\(^10\)

Fourth: In Davidson's "Knowing One's Own Mind" there is a thought-experiment in which a creature suddenly is formed in a swamp by random accident, but coincidentally molecule-for-molecule identical to an actual human (Davidson himself).\(^11\) The Swampman will have consciousness, thoughts, feelings, etc, right off the bat in virtue of its having the identical self-engineering as a human. But (in agreement with Davidson) many of its thoughts will fail to refer externally (in the customary sense), at least until Swampman has gone on to have relevant experiences (such as meeting Davidson's friends, etc.); and some thoughts might never completely refer as long as Swampman takes himself to have Davidson's past history. But this is no great oddity; all of us have misconceptions about ourselves and the world, including failed reference.

Fifth: Determinism and freedom and time. Physics is what it is: either deterministic or not (e.g., quantum-mechanical uncertainty). But our decisions do result from a complex (physical) process that includes (and depends on) our deliberations. Thus we are indeed (partially) the makers of our own fate. This is not independent of physical law but rather part and parcel of it: we too are the physics, and our deliberations are no illusion; without our deliberative activity, our behavior would be far different. This may be less so in the case of minor short-term decisions such as whether to lift a finger as a clock-hand sweeps by during an experiment;\(^12\) but for instance in deciding on whether to buy a house a great many things enter in over a long time-period, and the final moment of "choice" is a result of all the previous efforts (conscious and otherwise). We are as determined as the world (which may be determined or not), but our choices are real and effective internal parts of ourselves and of that world. And this brings us to zombies.

**PART IX: ZOMBIES AND SUMMARY OF THE OUTLOOK BEING PRESENTED**

We can also draw conclusions about zombies, and this will perhaps dramatize the nature of the view being presented here. To set the stage, here is a simple argument that zombies cannot exist (but I note that the literature on zombies is large and sophisticated, and it is unlikely that those who have studied this topic will be swayed by my rendering): When we say (honestly) that we are feeling a throbbing pain in our toe, it normally is the case that (this is premise #1) we are in fact feeling such a pain, and also that (this is premise #2) our saying so is based causally on that felt experience itself (that is, we would not have said so had we not been feeling the pain). But then our zombie equivalent will also say the same thing while not having any such experience (by definition, being a zombie). So its saying so cannot have that same causal basis.

But this is a contradiction: its neural firings are identical to ours, and since its firings are a sufficient cause for its utterance then they must also be so for ours. If we accept the two premises above, then we are forced to conclude that there can be no zombies.

Now, a zombie-loving philosopher may complain about premise #2 and say that is the issue: whether our felt experiences can cause anything physical, as opposed to being mere epiphenomena, feely-freebies, so to speak. Yet we do consult our experience—hmm, does my toe hurt? Let me attend to how my toe feels—ah, yes—there it is, that throbbing pain, and gosh, it's getting worse. To deny that such a statement is in part due to the existence of such a felt experience appears to deny that words have their ordinary meaning. As indeed they do not for zombies. A zombie cannot mean anything by its words, since it has no self, no "I" to take itself to intend something. And thus a zombie also cannot know anything. (This of course is a modest conclusion since we already argued that there can be no zombies.)

The above is contentious—in that it hinges on intuitions. But on the self-knowing theory discussed here, a self-knowing physical process is its own experience, hence again there can be no zombies. Any physical arrangement of the proposed sort already involves any associated feelings, and it will be inconceivable (once we know the details) that it could be otherwise. Pace Kripke (again), pain is like heat: the physics is what it is. It simply is that we do not yet have a clear enough grasp on the kind of complex interactions that can occur in a brain—any more than in 1900 chemists had a clear (or even dim) sense of self-reproducing molecules. Thus the outlook I am presenting is this: Argument is not needed; all (!) we need to do is the (hard) engineering work to discover how self-knowingness occurs.\(^13\)
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NOTES


REFERENCES


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Welcome to the spring issue of the APA Newsletter on Philosophy and Medicine. This issue contains three papers on very different topics. In the first, “Reflections on Procreative Asymmetry,” David DeGrazia engages in a thoughtful analysis of the Misery Claim (it is wrong to bring into existence one whom we can predict will have a miserable life) and the Happiness Claim (it is all right not to bring into existence one who will have a happy life). He works his way carefully through this complicated landscape to the conclusion that this procreative asymmetry ought to be accepted.

Timothy Murphy’s paper, “Against the Interpretation of Homosexuality as Disability,” takes up, as the title suggests, Richard Swinburne’s claim that homosexuality is a form of disability, and, as such, presents a new challenge different than previous claims suggesting that homosexuality was sinful or immoral. Swinburne thus argues that, as we should be working to reduce disability, the same should be true for homosexuality. Murphy takes the disability claim head on and identifies, in his brief discussion, various problematic implications of such a claim, and reveals of number of other weaknesses to such a view as well.

In the third paper, “Terrorism’s Apologia and the Relevance of Philosophical Analysis,” Jan Narveson takes on the position of the Jihadis and the claims they make for their actions that justify the intentional killing of the innocent, individuals whom, from their religious perspective, they deem infidels. Narveson gives their view a “hearing,” the only thing, according to him, that they deserve, but he sees no merit at all in their case. Last, we have included a poem, “I’ve Been Bad,” by Felicia Nimue Ackerman.

We hope you find this issue, while brief, as interesting as we have. And please keep this newsletter in mind as a place to publish the preliminary drafts of your next papers or book chapters, or the occasional piece that doesn’t really fit anywhere else.
Lawyers tend to have trouble making sense of the misery claim and so tend to be skeptical of legal claims of wrongful life. But they easily make sense of the happiness claim insofar as merely possible people are not recognized as having legal standing. Conversely, many moral philosophers (a notable exception is D. Heyd) are confident about the misery claim and defend it in various ways. But some of these same philosophers struggle to explain the happiness claim because their defenses of the misery claim cast doubt on the happiness claim.

I will offer some reflections on both claims. I am not sure anything I say will be entirely original, but I hope that everything I say will enjoy the virtue of good sense. I also hope that the body of my reflections will form a coherent whole.

**THE MISERY CLAIM**

Lawyers often doubt this claim. Yet it is extremely plausible. Why don’t they accept it? I think there are two reasons.

First, they tend to think of wrong action in terms of harm. Tort law requires of a successful complaint, among other things, a demonstration that the defendant caused harm to the claimant. So the first reason lawyers often doubt the Misery Claim is that they assume there must be harm in any case of wrongful life.

Second, if I’m not mistaken, lawyers tend to assume a comparative conception of harm: A harms B only if A makes B worse off in some relevant way. B might be harmed by being made worse off than B was beforehand (a temporal notion of harm) or worse off than B would have been otherwise (a counterfactual notion).

But consider now what is asserted in a wrongful life claim: that someone is wronged by being brought into existence when it is reasonable to expect that she will have a terrible life. The qualification “when it is reasonable to expect that she will have a terrible life” is roughly the charge of negligence, which is also required of a successful complaint in tort law. But let’s set aside negligence so we can focus on what’s really distinctive here.

What’s distinctive is the idea that someone is harmed by being brought into existence. Neither of the two versions of the comparative understanding of harm—neither the temporal nor the counterfactual understanding—seems to fit creation cases: cases of bringing individuals into existence.

Let’s first consider the temporal understanding of harm. Most of us assume that coming into existence does not involve a change in a pre-existing entity—a metaphysically extravagant notion requiring that individuals in some sense exist before they exist! Or, more charitably, we might say that the notion of a pre-existing entity requires the idea of someone’s existing possibly before existing actually, which sounds more like a change of state.

I must admit, though, that I find this way of thinking conceptually monstrous. Accordingly, I will assume that existing is the same thing as actually existing, and that existence is not a property a preexisting entity may or may not have, but more like the metaphysical positing of an entity. It follows that one cannot be harmed by coming into existence, if harm is construed temporally: being made worse off than one was before.

What about the counterfactual understanding of harm? To assert that one is harmed in this sense by being brought into existence is to assert that coming into existence makes one worse off than one would have been otherwise. But if one hadn’t been brought into existence, one would not have been—existed—at all. Some philosophers (e.g., Feinberg) have tried to show that, despite initial appearances, it does make sense to say in wrongful life cases that it would have been better for one not to have existed, in which case one was harmed in the counterfactual sense by being created. I remain skeptical about this way of thinking. If one doesn’t exist, one isn’t in any state at all, so one can’t be better off than one would be if one existed.

In sum, then, if we assume a comparative conception of harm, then as I understand the matter we cannot make sense of the idea of being harmed by being brought into existence. For, to be harmed, one would have to be made worse off than one was beforehand—but one wasn’t beforehand—or worse off than one would have been otherwise—but one wouldn’t have been otherwise.

Getting back to our lawyer friends, they tend to judge quite reasonably that coming into existence is not a matter of being made worse off. From this it follows, on a comparative understanding of harm, that one cannot be harmed by coming into being. And if harm is necessary for wrongful life, then there’s no such thing as wrongful life. This, I think, is Heyd’s view. It enjoys the advantages of conceptual tidiness and logical consistency. But it doesn’t enjoy the advantage of intuitive plausibility. Intuitively, it seems that the Misery Claim is correct. It seems possible to wrong someone by bringing that someone into an existence that we have every reason to believe will be terrible for them.

For those, like me and various other philosophers who wish to vindicate the Misery Claim, there are a couple of moves available.

One possible move is to deny the comparative conception of harm. According to a noncomparative conception, A can harm B simply by making it the case that B is in an *intrinsic*ly bad state. Depending on one’s account of prudential value, one might conceptualize intrinsically bad states in terms of an “objective list”: say, suffering, injury, major disability, extreme constraint, and premature death.

One challenge to understanding harm in this way is the challenge of explaining how all of these states are instances of the same basic thing: harm. This challenge is especially acute when we note that death is, presumably, not really a state at all. Note that this problem exists even if one conceptualizes harm in hedonistic rather than objective terms: There is no way that death is a hedonistically bad state. (Unless, that is, there’s an afterlife, including a hell, and one doesn’t make the crucial grade! I am assuming that there is no afterlife.)
But I won’t lean heavily on my doubts about noncomparative conceptions of harm. Maybe some such conception is correct. Or maybe a disjunctive conception, according to which all instances of harm are to be understood either comparatively or noncomparatively, is correct. Although my sympathies lie more with the comparative understanding of harm, I must admit that explaining the harm of death is difficult no matter what one’s conception of harm—assuming, again, death ends one’s existence. For starters, when is the individual who dies harmed?

Rather than pursuing this first way of responding to the lawyer’s challenge to wrongful life—namely, advancing a noncomparative conception of harm—I will favor a second response. This second response is to make the charge of wrongful life independent of any claim of harming. All one needs to motivate this second approach is the observation that not all wronging involves harming.

For example, a doctor might violate a patient’s confidentiality by discussing her case with people who have no business knowing about it, but in such a way that there’s no reason to expect any harm to befall the patient. The patient doesn’t even know about the disclosure. She is harmed but not wronged.

So it seems perfectly possible for A to wrong B without harming B. This opens up the possibility that in wrongful life cases, the relevant decision-makers—presumably the parents—wrong the individual brought into being without harming him. They wrong him by bringing him into being when it is reasonable to expect that he will have a terrible life. The life is judged to be terrible in terms of some account of prudential value. No judgment of harm is needed.

This is the approach I took in the relevant discussions in Human Identity and Bioethics and Creation Ethics. More precisely, I stayed neutral on the question of which conception of harm—comparative or noncomparative—is most adequate and then claimed that, in wrongful life cases, the individual brought into being is wronged whether or not she is harmed. The charge of wronging was decoupled from any assertion of harm. (My approach bears the influence of discussions by Jeff McMahan.)

At the risk of being slightly original, let me now extend the idea of wrongful life to nonhuman animals. Above, in stating the Misery Claim, I deliberately used the term “individuals” rather than “persons.” I stated the claim as “It is wrong to bring into existence individuals of whom it would be reasonable to predict that they would have miserable lives or lives of extremely low (prudential) quality.” Melinda Roberts, by contrast, habitually refers to persons when talking about it but does so in a way that the individual built into being is a determinate, actually existing individual. No individuals, no claimants. So the lawyers’ conceptual conscience is clear.

First, as many or most philosophers conceptualize personhood, there are human beings who are not persons who nevertheless matter morally. No one on this panel doubts that newborns, for example, matter morally, yet they are not yet persons—at least not on the sort of roughly Lockean understanding of personhood that is common among philosophers. Nor are some severely cognitively disabled, yet sentient, human beings—and surely, they matter morally.

A second problem with referring only to persons in stating the Misery Claim, or defining consequentialism, or, say, characterizing the scope of ethics, is that doing so excludes most or all nonhuman animals. But sentient animals surely matter. Indeed, I don’t think I can name a single respected consequentialist who would deny that sentient animals matter. But let me advance a more controversial idea.

This is my thesis that the Misery Claim should extend beyond persons and human beings to include sentient animals. I claim that it is wrong to bring into existence individuals, including animals, of whom it would be reasonable to predict that they would have miserable lives or lives of extremely low (prudential) quality. This is at the heart of what is wrong with factory farms. Factory farming, as an institution, is guilty of wrongful life.

THE HAPPINESS CLAIM

Let’s turn now to the Happiness Claim: roughly, that it is permissible to decline to bring into existence individuals we expect to have very good lives. Again, lawyers tend to be comfortable with this claim. After all, here the so-called “individuals” we’re talking about—and, to be sure, even to use the noun “individuals” is to reify a bit dangerously—never come into being. By contrast, with the claimants in wrongful life cases, there are determinate, actually existing individuals who claim to have been wronged. In the cases at issue in the Happiness Claim, there are no relevant determinate individuals. No individuals, no claimants. So the lawyers’ conceptual conscience is clear.

But I represent the philosophers who think wrongful life makes sense. I think it’s wrong to bring into being predictably terrible lives—and, more specifically, that doing so wrongs the created individuals—while it is perfectly okay not to bring into being happy lives. Each of the two claims of the Procreative Asymmetry is intuitively plausible, but the question is whether the conjuction and the reasoning in support of each claim can be coherently maintained. I certainly think so.

One difference between the two claims concerns the existence status of the prospective claimants. In short, the individuals who are wronged according to the Misery Claim exist whereas the “individuals” who are permissively deprived of good life according to the Happiness Claim never exist. In other words, in every wrongful life case there is an actual, determinate victim. By contrast, in every case of nonprocreation there is no actual, determinate individual who suffers the loss of a happy life. If nonprocreation did have real victims, there would be significant grounds for condemning nonprocreation. But it doesn’t, so any
compelling grounds for condemning nonprocreation will have to be of a different sort.

These grounds might appeal to *impersonal* value. Where we talk about victims of harm or other types of wrongdoing, we are employing individual-affecting grounds for moral judgment. In every such case, at least one identifiable individual is affected (though not necessarily harmed) by an action judged to be wrong. But some wrongful actions might be wrong only for impersonal reasons. (Several philosophers, including me, have argued that an adequate solution to the nonidentity problem in the context of reproduction and in the context of affecting future generations must appeal to impersonal value. But I won’t get into the nonidentity problem here.) Is it plausible to claim that we have an obligation, grounded in impersonal value, to bring happy individuals into being? Some consequentialists would argue affirmatively.

These consequentialists doubt the moral significance of the difference between harming, or causing bad states to exist, and benefiting, or causing good states to exist. They understand a moral agent’s job description as acting in a way so as to make the world as good as possible. So omissions and, in particular, failures to bring good into the world are on a par with actions and, in particular, making things worse. For this reason, they may believe the Misery Claim is correct while the Happiness Claim is incorrect.

But I am not a theorist of this ilk. I think of myself as either (1) a hybrid consequentialist-deontologist or (2) an indirect consequentialist who believes we should internalize principles of conduct that coincide with many of those favored by deontologists. So I think that not harming tends to be somewhat more important, at least in practice, than benefiting and that not creating bad states of affairs tends to be more important, in practice, than creating good states of affairs. If this is correct, it helps to justify the asymmetry—even if we give a lot of weight to impersonal value. For even if there are moral reasons to create good lives, these reasons would be less weighty than the reasons to avoid creating bad lives—and the former reasons need not amount to an obligation.

Let me add that I think procreative freedom counts for something. Procreative freedom isn’t everything, morally speaking; if it were, there would be no basis for wrongful life claims. Nor, contrary to what I argued in *Creation Ethics*, would there be any basis for criticizing other dubious procreative decisions. But procreative freedom does, I think, have some moral weight.

Suppose I’m right. Suppose procreative freedom has some moral importance. Let’s add the idea that individual-affecting considerations support the Misery Claim but not the Happiness Claim, due to the aforementioned difference in existence status. The further idea that not harming or creating bad states of affairs deserves some priority over benefiting or creating good states of affairs also lends support to the Misery Claim but not the Happiness Claim.

In conclusion, I suggest that we accept the Procreative Asymmetry. It is wrong to bring into existence individuals we expect to have terrible lives. Expecting those we create to have good lives is a necessary condition for the permissibility of procreating. But this expectation does not generate an obligation to create individuals with good lives. The lack of an obligation traces to an asymmetry in existence status between the victims of wrongful life and the imaginary “victims” of nonprocreation, a general moral priority in practice of not producing bad states of affairs over producing good states of affairs, and the value of procreative freedom. The view sketched here is incompatible with some forms of consequentialism but is compatible with good sense.

**Against the Interpretation of Homosexuality as Disability**

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Richard Swinburne argues that Christian ethics prohibit homosexual relationships, but he deploys philosophical objections against homosexuality as well. For the most part, his objections tread familiar ground, but he also introduces one novel claim.¹

It appears that Christians continue to sort out whether the tenets of their faith require the interpretation of sex between men or sex between women as sinful. To judge from the outside, that denomination looks irretrievably divided on the topic, as a matter of theory and practice.² Even if homosexuality-as-sinful were to prevail as the most defensible theological interpretation, it would remain a separate and not-only-theological question whether the law and public policy ought to be deployed against it. The interpretation of an act as sinful does not automatically mean that law and policy should move to punish and/or deter the behavior in question.

When it comes to secular and, thus, purely moral and/or philosophical objections, Swinburne characterizes homosexuality as a disability, saying that “a homosexual cannot beget children through a loving act with a person to whom they [sic] have a unique lifelong commitment.” Same-sex couples are infertile without reaching outside their relationship for gametes, no matter the duration of their relationships, and they are therefore, in Swinburne’s eyes, disabled relative to an important human capacity. Not only that, but Swinburne also describes homosexuality as incurable and as having harmful effects on children, what with its social visibility leading in a self-reinforcing way to more of that incurable disability.

**DISABILITY**

The novelty of Swinburne’s account is its shift away from objections that homosexuality is a sin or immorality, arguments which many people no longer find persuasive.³ Interpreting homosexuality as a disability opens up new prospects for constraining it as a matter of moral judgment, law, and policy.
Swinburne’s argument that homosexuality is a disability relies on its obstruction of the conception of children through acts of sexual intercourse in the context of long-term relationships. Sexual acts between men or between women are sterile and therefore closed off to this good. Whatever their value, on this understanding the sexual acts between men and between women are only simulacra of sex. Whatever their value, the relationships between men and women are only shallow compared to the deepest goods available to different-sex couples. Whatever their value, the children produced in same-sex relationships are deprived of the metaphysically robust parentage to which they are presumably entitled. It is in these senses that Swinburne labels homosexuality a disability.

By invoking the language of disability, Swinburne effectively asserts a naturalized order of sexuality, with the conception of children through acts of intercourse in the context of a long-term relationship at its center. As with other attributions of disability, a primary argumentative gain in doing so is to assert the status inequality of the people labeled as disabled. The “sexually disabled” represent, that is, a falling off from the “sexually able.” And, it almost goes without saying that, in general, we ought to be working toward a world with fewer disabled people in it. Let me first examine the case that homosexuality is a disability on its own before then considering the effects of such a label.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines disability as “a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such individuals; a record of such an impairment; or being regarded as having such an impairment.” Interestingly, the ADA specifically excludes homosexuality and bisexuality as disabilities. On the logic of this statute, homosexuality does not obstruct major life activities.

By Swinburne’s account, homosexuality does close off participation in a major good in human life, but this good requires a particular interpretation of sexuality. Swinburne is free, of course, to recommend a metaphysico-moral interpretation of sexuality, but it is hard to see that it has any “natural” standing, except by imputation. This is not to say that people do not find great value in having children, in conceiving them in acts of sexual intercourse, in doing so in the context of long-term relationships; it is only to say that it is not clear why sexuality expressed this way is metaphysically or morally optimal for all human beings, or—to put it in more robust language—for human beings as such. Without a secular grounding of the idea that people and their children are better off—indeed fully realized—by reason of this interpretation of sexuality, it is hard to see why all sexuality and the conception of children should be measured against it relative to morality, law, or policy. We are, with Swinburne’s account, back in the domain of some version of Natural Law, disputable because of its metaphysical accounts of the ends of human beings.

Most ethics accounts rightly accept the view that the conception of children is an option for human beings and not any kind of duty or pathway into “true” human fulfillment. People may lead lives of moral integrity and value without having children of their own or in raising children of others. Most ethics accounts also accept the use of assisted reproductive treatments as means to help people have children when they are not able to do so as a matter of their anatomy, physiology, or other circumstances. Most ethics accounts also defend homosexuality not only as not harmful in a moral sense but also as positively valuable for some people.

**INCURABLE?**

Swinburne labels homosexuality as “incurable” as a way of bolstering the idea that society has a positive obligation to obstruct it.

Is homosexuality incurable? It is not, but it is not incurable because there is no treatment for it. It is incurable because it is not a disease or a disorder, and something that is not a disease or disorder is neither curable nor incurable. Some people may try to alter their sexual orientation because it is unwanted as a matter of their sexual values. Even then, they are not moving to “cure” themselves of a disease or disorder. They are engaging in “sexual orientation change efforts”—as they have come to be known, or SOCE—in order to change their sexual traits as given.

One might try to change all kinds of traits—from hair color to nose size to fat distribution—but one is not “curing” anything in those efforts. To be sure, some clinicians and therapists have tried to help people redirect their sexual interests from homosexual to heterosexual, but sexual orientations are stubbornly resistant to change. Even here, again, this intractability to change doesn’t mean that homosexuality is “incurable,” only that it is durable in the same way that heterosexuality is.

**EFFECTS ON CHILDREN**

It’s helpful to Swinburne’s analysis that homosexuality be “incurable” because that interpretation legitimizes his interest in constricting social opportunities available to homosexual men and women. Outward social tolerance of gay men and lesbians has the effect—he says—of presenting homosexuality as an option equivalent in value to heterosexuality. He therefore counsels that “if older and incurable homosexuals abstained from homosexual acts, that would have a great influence on young and curable ones; and the older ones would be doing a great service to others, and one which would help to make themselves saints.”

On this account, abstinence from homosexuality is therefore a double good: men and women with homosexual interests would have in that sexuality a charism, which in theological terms means “a free gift or favour specially vouchsafed by God; a grace, a talent.” On such an interpretation, the deficits of homosexuality can be overridden by a certain kind of spiritual life so long as sexual abstinence is observed. The goods available in the charism of homosexuality can, on this interpretation, be achieved only in a particular way, namely, by its sublimation, which sublimation is imagined as more than compensating for the ‘loss’ of any overt sexual behavior. This is the pathway to sainthood that Swinburne describes.
But it’s a lot to ask that all men and women with homosexual interests work toward sainthood. If some people can be protected from this burden, then why not minimize the risk of homosexuality so far as possible in advance? Why not, for example, reduce the ways in which society treats homosexuality as an equivalent in full measure of heterosexuality? Keeping homosexuality at a moral and social distance will—to some degree—prevent some men and women from falling into the category of “incurable.”

In terms of protecting future people from the ills of homosexuality, John Finnis has trod a path similar to Swinburne’s. In the name of protecting children from homosexuality, Finnis has argued that society should limit the “accommodation” of homosexual behavior. He says that the law has a “compelling interest in denying that homosexual conduct—a ‘gay lifestyle’—is a valid, morally acceptable choice and form of life.” He has therefore called for the state to discourage homosexuality through legal intolerance of advertising and marketing of homosexual services, places of resort for homosexual activity, educational promotion of homosexual lifestyles in media or education, adoption of children by homosexually active people, and same sex marriage. All of this is presented as protecting people from a sexuality that is—as Finnis sees things—morally degrading in itself and its effects.

The presumption at work in both the Swinburne and Finnis accounts is that homosexuality is “catching” in the sense that the observable social life of gay men and lesbians inclines maturing adolescents and young people toward homosexuality in ways that would not happen otherwise. The infectious character of homosexuality has long been used as a cudgel against the social visibility of gay men and lesbians, but this characterization does not succeed, and that’s true no matter whether homosexuality is “catching” in the ways imagined or not.

If homosexuality is not objectionable in itself because it is not a disability, for example, it does not matter whether more people engage in same-sex sexuality or relationships. Future people do not need to be protected against sexualities that are not morally objectionable in themselves. Neither do people need to be protected against sexualities that are not morally objectionable in their effects. In some ways it may well be that a society which accepts homosexuality on a par with heterosexuality leads more people to engage in that kind of sexuality than would otherwise happen. Such an increase would not necessarily represent an increase in the total amount of homosexual interest, only an increase in the number of people who act on—rather than suppress—their homosexual interests. But even if there were more homosexual interest overall, more homosexual experimentation, more gay and lesbian people than there would otherwise have been, it is difficult to maintain that this interest should be constrained in the name of an aspirational ideal of sexuality that is disputable as to its nature and meaning.

CONCLUSIONS
Homosexuality is not a disability in any morally meaningful sense. Life’s major activities are open to men, women, and adolescents, any homosexual interests notwithstanding, so long as societies allow as much. Men can have sex with men, and women can have sex with men, all the while building identities and relationships and also taking steps to have children, if they wish.

While Swinburne extends the concept of disability to homosexuality in the name of protecting people from what he sees as a kind of metaphysical impoverishment, he can only do so by relying on one amalgamated view of sexuality, conception, and parenthood as coextensive with human fulfillment itself. People have many ways in which to fulfill themselves as sexual beings. His characterization of homosexuality as incurable is, moreover, incorrect because it wrongly treats a trait as if it were a disease or disorder; not even the durability of homosexuality is evidence for its “incurability.” It might well be that social visibility of gay and lesbian people may lead to more homosexuality in the future, but that matters not at all if we accept that homosexuality is not immoral in itself or its effects. Anyone not persuaded about the immorality of homosexuality is, of course, free to try and disengage from homosexuality and even to treat his or her own homosexual interests as the opportunity for spiritual growth by sublimating them.

I want to close by saying that my response so far has let Professor Swinburne set the agenda. He has claimed that homosexuality is a disability, and I have tried to show that it is not. I think I have more than met the burden of proof in this regard, but I have not tried to throw into question the integrity of the idea of disability itself. If we consider the effect of the label disability—that is, justifies differential social treatment—it may ultimately be more important to show that we need considerable reason to accept at face value any label that works to the social disadvantage of the people it purportedly characterizes. I hope this is at least part of the effect of my analysis.

As against just simply announcing that “homosexuality is a disability,” it would be nice—just once—to have people making claims like this seek the advice and consent of the people the judgment would most affect. It has always been very curious that people making judgments that put gay and lesbian people at an advantage—such as Margaret Somerville’s case against same-sex marriage—would not at least have the courtesy to address their arguments to the people most directly affected by them. Why not go to gay and lesbian people themselves and ask if they wish to be considered “disabled”? Why not go to gay and lesbian people and ask if they accept the view that their marriages would be damaging to the sexual ecology in which one generation transmits life to the next? Why is there no dialogue here, and just pronouncements from on moral high? Gay men and lesbians should, that is, be assumed as equal participants in their social fate, and not just objects of academic authorities deciding what is and what is not best according to their interpretations of human nature.

In the end, Swinburne’s Procrustean sexual metaphysics is dangerous for the authority it implies in regard to the suppression of the social visibility of gay and lesbian people. Extending the label of disability to people should ordinarily benefit the people in question, not impose social burdens on them, especially when those burdens are
grounded in a natural sexual order that is itself very much in doubt.

NOTES
1. H. Farley, "Eminent Christian Philosopher Richard Swinburne Criticized After Calling Homosexuality a "Disability", Available at www.christiantoday.com/article/eminent.christian.philosopher.richard.swinburne.criticised.after.calling.homosexuality.a.disability/96687.htm. All further quotations from Swinburne are from this article.

Terrorism’s Apologia and the Relevance of Philosophical Analysis
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Despite the title, this isn’t exactly about terrorism, and I won’t be entirely fussy about how the term is defined. I want, however, to seize on one familiar vein of definition: that terrorism is the deliberate targeting, for violent death, of noncombatants or (in a more controversial wording) innocents. This sort of activity is by no means unique to those usually called “terrorists,” and that this paper, as I say, is “not exactly” about terrorism is why that doesn’t bother me much.

I lean considerably here on a recent good book by Alex Bellamy about all this. He does want to emphasize the wrongness of killing noncombatants. But I want to insist that the reasons why we should consider the killing of noncombatants as wrong is also a reason why the killing of some combatants would also be wrong. And so my general program here is also a short essay about war and what makes it wrong when it is.

Let’s go back, though, to terrorism ordinarily so called for the moment. Our most prominent cases of terrorism in the recent past, no doubt, are jihadists, or Islamic fanatics. (I have to emphasize the word “fanatics.” By far not all Muslims are fanatics, nor perhaps “Islamists” either, as that term has come to be used of late. The fact that most of our prominent examples these days are Muslims is not intended to impugn that religion specifically, or any religion necessarily. However, the standard examples of terrorists, as it were, do display quite prominently a feature that is my central concern in this discussion, and which I call “fanaticism.”) Namely, Jihadi are distinguished—insofar as they are—from mere thugs and the lesser-order fanatics especially by claiming divine sanction for their activities. As analyst Scott Stewart notes,

It is very important to understand that jihadists are theologically motivated. In fact, in their ideology there is no real distinction between religion, politics and culture. They believe that it is their religious duty to propagate their own strain of Islam along with the government, legal system and cultural norms that go with it.2

Their activities are also political, which is something of a giveaway. Those religious proclamations, of course, promote their political ends in two ways. First, they inspire the fanaticism that is such a prominent feature of jihadi activities. And second, they hope to cement good relations on the “home front.”23 Most Muslims are not jihadi, to be sure. But they tend to have a general sympathy at least with the fundamental aims of the jihadi, if not with their methods.

The idea is to ennable their stature, as it were, by putting forth visions of the Good for Man, and by claiming to be on the right side, if not to be the right hand, of God. Good credentials, no? And so when they proclaim that this or that group are “infidels” or some such thing, their idea is to bring the weight of theology on behalf of their programs of intense violence.

Are those, as they think, “good credentials”? Well, no. We need to understand why the jihadi’s shrill sermons need to be firmly rejected. What they present is, to be precise, a ploy. Undoubtedly it’s an effective one among some—and that’s what provides the motivation for this paper. For the truth is it doesn’t deserve anyone’s favorable response. It is, to be blunt about it, a loser. That is, it’s a philosophical loser. The jihadi build on a house of sand.
Liberal tolerance, especially, inhibits people from speaking out about the basic paucity of conceptual appeal in the jihadis’ case. But wrongly, I think. Liberalism should never prevent a careful critique of ideas put forward on behalf of social causes. And that goes double for causes so potentially calamitous as this one.

Here’s why. It’s not a new story, but perhaps it is one whose importance for present purposes has been underappreciated.

According to jihadis, the apparently (as we would say) innocent people they blow up or shoot are not, actually, really innocent. After all, they are infidels! And as to the many Muslims among those victims, well, so worthy is this cause that they too should feel honored to be selected for this treatment. That’s the sort of thing they would reply to critics who accuse them of moral wrong in their terrorist attacks. It is, after all, the only thing they can say.

But it doesn’t fly.

The reasons for this were well understood by Socrates but can be solidified for our day and age.

We need to ask the Jihadi why he is so confident that Allah is on his side, especially in this respect and to this extent. Or we need to ask him why he thinks that the presumed preference by Allah constitutes a morally good reason for carrying on as he does. (The two questions are closely related.)

Islam belongs to the sizable group of world religions who proclaim a universal god who is supposed to have created the whole show and who is supposed to have some kind of very special moral authority. It is the latter we are especially concerned about here, of course. So why does Jihadi think that if Allah approves of x, then that is sufficient reason to think that x is right?

To this the answer is familiar: Allah is a good being (“God is good”; “Allah the great, the merciful,” etc.) This should lead the philosophically curious among us to ask, well, what makes him a good being?

There are two sorts of answers that have been floated. (1) According to one of them, Allah’s power enables him simply to make things right—anything whatever. He says it’s right, and that’s it! According to the other, (2) Allah in his wisdom, etc., knows what’s right and wrong, and, being such a Good being, is, of course, firmly in favor of what’s right.4

Every thinking religious person has seen the absurdity of the first idea. We should be careful here. What would be absurd is that God creates the universe as it is and that therefore, morality is, as it were, a totally independent variable that can be absolutely subordinate to somebody’s will. That was the idea that St. Thomas Aquinas refuted with his theory of “natural” law. What makes that law natural is the way we, and things, are. Even if the world had somehow not been created by an intelligent being, it is those facts that would determine what’s right—not the independently operating will of the creator. Once God creates the world with features x, y, and z, what’s right and wrong is thereby determined. There is no space for, and no sense to, the idea that nevertheless God is free, just on a whim, to make murder right and assisting the lame wrong. Maybe in some weirdly different universe, which, let us assume, He could have created had he felt like it, things would be different—but in ours, that’s how it is.

This means that we have to take the second option. What God does is to see that this and that are right, and then on some (perhaps the usual) account, he acts as universal administrator and, perhaps, policeman as it were. But what is right is so for reasons fundamentally independent of God.

There is no coherent alternative to that sort of view. And so the question we must ask the Jihadi is this: How can you think that God is in favor of various actions that look to be totally immoral—blowing up peaceful people, for example?

It would follow also that God can’t play favorites among people: “He” couldn’t have created the world for the special benefit of some smallish fraction or any fraction, of the world’s people, for all of whom (after all) he in some way is responsible for their creation. And so, for example, if the Jihadi’s actions are directed toward the erection of a theocracy, then that looks flatly impossible.

This all interacts with the other general problem he has. He supposes that his religion is a distinct one, different from and incompatible with those of millions of others, such as the Christians and Jews. But there is no way he can prove that his is the right one among these any more than the Christians or whatever could prove that their view is the right one.

But this matter of being “the right one” is important because he’s proclaiming to the whole world that this is how things ought to be and purports to justify his actions on just those premises. But proclaiming this is pointless if you don’t have solid reasons you could present to the others to persuade them of your way. Needless to say, neither the Jihadi nor any other proponent of any religion can do that.

Consequently, the Jihadi is in the position of fighting a sort of war against everyone else—a war that he can’t justify and which is prima facie thoroughly immoral. The fact that I, or you, or Mohammed, believes that p is not any sort of reason why any of the others should accept p. And if they don’t, then the Jihadi, or any other religious fanatic, has no basis for claiming that his view is reasonable. He needs to go back to the beginning and provide credible moral reasons why it is OK or even obligatory to blow miscellaneous people to smithereens.

But, when we come to social interactions, what this means is that terrorism isn’t reasonable. It is, instead, quite simply outrageous.

So we should not think that somehow jihadis are noble or worthy of some kind of recognition for their supposedly elevated motivations. They’re not. They’re just sophomore philosophy students, only a lot more dangerous.
I’ve Been Bad
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“I’ve been bad,” you gravely told me. So I asked what you had done. Did you sneer at someone homeless, as he sweltered in the sun? When you saw your daughter shoplift, did you shrug and just keep quiet? “None of that,” is what you answered. “But I cheated on my diet.”

All of which makes us justified in attributing to them the same old motivations that every other murderer, conquerer, or would-be potentate has always had: the desire to enhance their own position by controlling everyone else’s. Jihadis look like a gang of cutthroats because they are a gang of cutthroats.

If this sounds pathological, it’s because it is.

Jihadis deserve no sympathy whatever. What they deserve, like everyone else, is a hearing; but it’s a hearing that we can see from the general features of their “case” is doomed to failure. And when what it’s supporting is wholesale murder, that is not OK. The fact that someone is not of the same religion cannot constitute any justification for using violence against that person. Until the jihadi comes to see that, there can be no peace with them.

The “war on terrorism” has more than its share of problems. But one of them isn’t that our position lacks foundations.

NOTES
4. The term “knows” here is used simply to mean whatever is meant by claims to moral knowledge; no particular meta-ethical outlook is being invoked here.
5. This article does not discuss possible political justifications for terrorism. It is an interesting further question whether anything like terrorism can be justified for political reasons. I am only addressing here the theological/moral position that appears to be assumed by typical jihadis in interrogations, etc. I also assume that the possibility that awaiting the terrorist upon entry into heaven is a substantial staff of virgins to accommodate his sexual interests is beneath discussion.
FROM THE EDITORS

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We would like to say that it is an honor to assume, as new editors, the helm of the APA Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience. For nearly fifteen years, editors John McClendon and George Yancy have done a tremendous job of providing us with articles and reviews that reflect the importance of African-American philosophers and the philosophy of Black experience. We thank them for their commendable efforts. As the new editors, we hope to continue their efforts.

We don’t conceptualize African-American philosophy as only or primarily concerned with philosophy of race. Indeed, we make a conceptual distinction between the works of African American philosophers concerned with philosophy in the broad sense and works concerned with the philosophy of Black experience. We truly believe that such an approach enhances and enriches the normative framework that makes up Africana philosophy. We strongly encourage potential authors and book reviewers to submit their work for possible publication. We also encourage any suggestions that you think might help make the newsletter more philosophically rigorous and engaging.

Lastly, we have decided that we will capitalize the word “Black” when referring to Black Africans and people of African descent. As a proper noun, we capitalize it like Negro or African American. Over many generations, there was a consistent fight to capitalize the word “Negro” as a way of establishing racial respect and dignity. Since “Black” has now come to replace “Negro” as the contemporary convention, we follow in that tradition with the capitalization of “Black.” As Robert S. Wachal observes: “The failure to capitalize Black when it is synonymous with African American is a matter of unintended racism, to put the best possible face on it.”

We are happy to have contributions from Clevis Headley, Clarence Sholé Johnson, Devon R. Johnson, Charles F. Peterson, John Torrey, and Naomi Zack. Our issue begins with Clevis Headley’s discussion of the metaphilosophical issues surrounding Afro-Caribbean philosophy. Following in the footsteps of Paget Henry, “On Afro-Caribbean Philosophy: Metaphilosophical Inquiry and Black Existence” explores the metaphilosophical implications of viewing Afro-Caribbean philosophy as a discursive practice that investigates the Afro-Caribbean experience. Naomi Zack follows with a philosophical discussion of Cornel West’s concept of the Black Prophetic Tradition and its contemporary relevance. She seeks to deepen our understanding of West’s legacy and its importance for what Raymond Williams calls “The Long Revolution.” Next, Charles Peterson explores philosophical issues in the Cinemax’s dramatic series The Knick. Peterson argues that the character of Dr. Algernon Edwards serves as an important and timely representative of the complex intersectionality in which the tensions of race, class, and gender in Black male life are placed on display for society to consume. Through the prism of W. E. B. DuBois’ concept of “double consciousness” and contemporary hegemonic constructions of masculinity, Dr. Edwards is examined as an example of the conflicted and porous nature of the social-cultural demands placed on subaltern subjects. Next, John Torrey offers a discussion of the normative dimensions that inform the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. He discusses the ways in which non-canonical philosophical works have informed the BLM movement. In addition, he offers a critique of the limitation of Western philosophy, particularly the canon, with respect to understanding the value of Black lives, particularly in contemporary times. Devon Johnson offers a “philosophical rumination” on Africana philosophy, anti-Black racism, and nihilism. Lastly, Clarence Johnson provides us with a review of Naomi Zack’s recent work, White Privilege and Black Rights: The Injustice of U.S. Police Racial Profiling and Homicide.

For submissions to the APA Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience, articles and book reviews should be emailed to either Stephen C. Ferguson or Dwayne Tunstall at apa.pbe.newsletter@gmail.com. The deadline for submissions for the fall issue is May 1, 2017.

NOTES

On Afro-Caribbean Philosophy: Metaphilosophical Inquiry and Black Existence

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There is no exaggeration in claiming that philosophy, among other things, is in the midst of a metaphilosophical turn. Although metaphilosophical concerns are not alien to the history of philosophy, the recent popularity of metaphilosophical concerns indicates the ongoing implosion of the dominant paradigm of philosophy. But this implosion need not be construed as destined to culminate in the demise of the discipline of philosophy. Indeed, in the midst of this current implosion, there exist abundant opportunities for the exploration of alternative areas of philosophical inquiry. More importantly, the current implosion of the dominant paradigm of philosophy invites a radical rethinking or critical engagement with philosophy itself. Accordingly, the current situation of philosophy is poised to facilitate pluralism rather than disciplinary homogeneity. The focus of this brief essay is Paget Henry’s inaugural conception of Afro-Caribbean philosophy. The tradition of Afro-Caribbean philosophy, a subtradition of Africana philosophy, is presented as a discursive project informed by Black experience—in this context, the Afro-Caribbean experience. As a philosophy informed by the experiential parameters of race and Black identity, metaphilosophical concerns infuse its theoretical reach.

The idea of Afro-Caribbean philosophy probably strikes many as an unmitigated category mistake. This conclusion emerges in reaction to claims that Afro-Caribbean philosophy is a highly complicated affair due to the complexity of the idea of “Afro-Caribbeanness,” on the one hand, and the concept of “philosophy,” on the other hand. This double contestability, however, need not be construed as a problem but, rather, as characteristic of the semantic flexibility deeply embedded in language itself. While dominant traditions of philosophy view philosophy as a distinctively a priori discipline, Afro-Caribbean philosophy more closely resembles a naturalized philosophy, precisely because Afro-Caribbean philosophy has borrowed much from less formalized disciplines. We can also further construe Afro-Caribbean philosophy as a creolized philosophy since it is not dependent upon maintaining a priori purity. Rather, Afro-Caribbean philosophy is a philosophical discourse that renders itself vulnerable to influence and change from its interactions with other disciplines. Indeed, Afro-Caribbean philosophy represents an interdisciplinary model of philosophical praxis; it is the focal point of a constellation of underlying possibilities and overlapping intextualities. This site of confluence reveals the struggle by Afro-Caribbean philosophy to claim disciplinary identity, institutional visibility, discursive autonomy, and epistemological credibility.
Nonetheless, there is the lingering assumption that the circumstances of Caribbean history preclude the possibility of philosophy taking root in the Caribbean. As Naipaul declares, “The history of the islands can never be satisfactorily told. Brutality is not the only difficulty. History is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies.” Indeed, one implication of Naipaul’s position is that there is no Afro-Caribbean philosophy.

**CONTEXTUALIZING AFRO-CARIBBEAN PHILOSOPHY**

Although we must guard against strategies of simplistic reductionism directed at Afro-Caribbean philosophy, it is important to appropriately situate Afro-Caribbean philosophy. Afro-Caribbean philosophy emerges from the scars and trauma of Caribbean history. Accordingly, we must acknowledge the discursive dilemmas of Afro-Caribbean philosophy precisely because of its origins. Chamberlin writes:

> Blacks in the West Indies are not the only people with a history of oppression. But theirs is a special history, bringing with it a grim inheritance of someone else’s images of difference and disdain, images that for five hundred years have conditioned their special and sometimes desperate need to determine for themselves who they are and where they belong.

And, finally, Orlando Patterson underscores the unique facticity of Caribbean societies by calling attention to the historically unprecedented project that shaped the daily existence of Afro-Caribbean subjects. According to Patterson, Caribbean societies represent “one of the rare cases of a human society being artificially created for the satisfaction of one clearly defined goal: that of making money through the production of sugar.”

Afro-Caribbean philosophy seeks to work through the dense complexity of this historical reality. Hence, Afro-Caribbean philosophy cannot claim a pure origin but must be seen as philosophical activity situated within the Caribbean legacy of racism, slavery, and colonialism. Such a contested inheritance offers us an intercultural model of philosophy beyond the traditional binary of particularity and universality.

**AFRO-CARIBBEAN PHILOSOPHY AND THE NATURE OF PHILOSOPHY**

Engaging Afro-Caribbean philosophy requires critical involvement with metaphilosophical inquiry regarding the nature, origin, scope, and objectives of philosophy. On this view, even if certain styles of philosophy involve making hairsplitting distinctions and positing formal metaphysical abstractions, efforts to limit philosophy exclusively to pure conceptual analysis or linguistic analysis are premature. We must resist the rhetoric of the “simplifying seduction” that proper philosophy is formal analysis. Attempts to render philosophy totally independent of the practical problems and concerns emergent from human existence fail to appreciate the extent to which philosophy can legitimately engage human existence.

From another perspective, there is no exaggeration in holding that Afro-Caribbean thinkers share Randall Collins’s insights about the connection between the history of philosophy and philosophy itself. Collins states that the “history of philosophy is to a considerable extent the history of groups. [N]othing but groups of friends, discussion partners, close-knit circles that often have characteristics of social movements.” Indeed, historical circumstances have rendered Afro-Caribbean philosophy dependent upon theoretical infusion from nontraditional sources of philosophy. Accordingly, Afro-Caribbean philosophy’s indebtedness to literature and history explains its interpretive struggles over literary and historical texts. Paget Henry has insightfully maintained that Afro-Caribbean philosophy “has largely been social and political in nature and concerned with problems of cultural freedom, political freedom, and racial equality.” And he adds that “history and poetics assume an ontological status as the domains in which Afro-Caribbean identities and social realities are constituted.”

Resisting efforts to pursue a formal definition of philosophy facilitates the emergence of critical discourse or, rather, metaphilosophical inquiry into Afro-Caribbean philosophy. The attempt to go formalistic or procedural will seem irresistible since, on the traditional view of things, philosophy seeks to reveal the necessary and sufficient features of things. Similarly, any formal definition of philosophy should manifest its necessary and sufficient characteristics. Hence, once we have settled upon these necessary and sufficient conditions of application of the term “philosophy,” we can then determine whether there is an Afro-Caribbean philosophy answering to these conditions. The strategy here is as follows: let us first define philosophy and then easily supplement this formal definition with the appropriate ingredients that would transform it into an Afro-Caribbean philosophy. Inevitably, the notion of the universality of philosophy leads many to define philosophy as the rational pursuit of certain perennial questions about the nature of truth, justice, reality, and ethics. Of course, it should be noted that even on a universalistic conception of philosophy, it is possible to call into question the existence of Afro-Caribbean philosophy. Here, Afro-Caribbean subjects are viewed as lacking epistemic credibility since, historically, they have been the victims of what Miranda Fricker (2007) calls “testimonial injustice,” lacking the appropriate resources to describe their style of existence.

Nevertheless, defining philosophy in universalistic terms privileges the traditional conception of philosophy with its bias against the contingent and the temporal. Uncritically supporting this conception of philosophy threatens to make us unwilling participants in the violent project of treating a specific particularity as a normative universalism. As Tsenay Serequeberhan writes, regarding the progressive pretensions of the dominant tradition:
In the name of the universality of values, European colonialism violently universalized its own singular particularity and annihilated the historicality of the colonized. . . . Western philosophy—in the guise of a disinterested universalistic, transcendentalist, speculative discourse—served the indispensable function of being the ultimate veracious buttress of European conquest.¹

We are now well positioned to articulate the way in which understanding the possibility of an Afro-Caribbean philosophy leads to a reconsideration of philosophy in the very act of identifying Afro-Caribbean philosophy. Afro-Caribbean philosophy shares with Deweyan pragmatism the idea that reconstruction allows for the successful practicing or doing of philosophy, where the idea of reconstruction in philosophy suggests sober questioning of traditional conceptions of philosophy. Furthermore, this deliberate questioning will also be a decisive metaphilosophical exercise that questions the enterprise of philosophy itself. Such reconstruction, then, will be a critique of the institution of philosophy and not a misguided demand for the rejection of philosophy. Indeed, it is a call for philosophy to open itself to the advent of the Other, a call for philosophy to become more hospitable in its disciplinary practice and less authoritarian. Since these concerns are metaphilosophical, I contend that Afro-Caribbean philosophy will be, to some extent, metaphilosophical precisely because it must critically engage questions about the origins, nature, and the goals of philosophy. Once again, it seeks to liberate the institution of philosophy from the hegemony of its totalizing identity and its phantom claims of universality and objectivity.

**PAGET HENRY ON PHILOSOPHY AND AFRO-CARIBBEAN PHILOSOPHY**

Henry appropriately situates philosophy within the drama of human existence. Hence, he views philosophy as one among many intertextually constituted cultural projects. Not surprisingly, he situates Afro-Caribbean philosophy outside the closed discursive space of universalistic conceptions of philosophy. Clearly, he does not believe that mathematical models of thinking can uncontroversially provide answers to existential philosophical questions. Philosophy, he claims, "is neither absolute nor a pure discourse. It is an internally differentiated and discursively embedded practice, the boundaries of which will continue to change as we move in other fields requires the taking up of new philosophical positions."² Unlike thinkers who seek to defend the immaculate purity of philosophy, to guard it from cultural contamination, to segregate it to the sterile realm of reason, as well as to protect it from being kidnapped by those who lack the necessary sophistication to handle its analytical rigor, Henry offers a deflated and more "profane" account of philosophy. Here, philosophy does not escape involvement with the other, less cognitively demanding areas of culture. But philosophy’s fraternizing with these other "bastard" areas of culture does not compromise its institutional integrity. Indeed, philosophy’s entanglement with these epistemologically suspect areas of culture is its very strength. Such discursive fraternizing by philosophy, then, leads to the positive development whereby philosophy itself can be construed as a narrative of liberation.

Hence, Henry’s construal of Afro-Caribbean philosophy does not fall prey to any insidious particularism that threatens to “ghettoize” Afro-Caribbean philosophy or render it the profane ranting of an insidious ethnic chauvinism. While advocating for an intertextual strategy, Henry appropriately situates Afro-Caribbean philosophy, stating that it will participate in the project of decolonization. Accordingly, he writes that Afro-Caribbean philosophy is “a radically decolonized philosophical practice that [should] adequately meet the current postcolonial demands of the region.”³ The emphasis on an Afro-Caribbean philosophy being a decolonizing practice is significant precisely because the expectation is that such a philosophy will be concerned with a decolonialization of Caribbean consciousness. Here, the significance of decolonialization should be understood as efforts to decenter ways of thinking premised upon alien assumptions of life as well as axioms of existence. Likewise, decolonization should also take the form of encouraging the exploitation of indigenous metaphorical resources emergent from the lived reality of Caribbean peoples. Furthermore, Henry construes the process of decolonialization, assigned to Afro-Caribbean philosophy, as focused on emancipating traditional African thought from “cloud[s] of colonial invisibility.”⁴ Henry correctly maintains that a strategic retrieval of traditional African thought can contribute much by aiding in the understanding of both ego genesis and ego formation. Such a contribution is bound to be significant given that the phenomenon of ego constitution in the Caribbean has been formally captive to the dictates of colonial and/or imperial regimes of power.

Consequently, Henry articulates three important technical reforms that must be undertaken to further the flourishing of Afro-Caribbean philosophy. First, he suggests that we change the patterns of creolization characteristic of Caribbean philosophy. To this end, he favors a process of creolization that is agreeable with the aim of creating “a creole [hybrid] philosophy whose identity is closer to those of Caribbean literature, dance, theatre, calypso, reggae and other creole formations.”⁵ Clearly, Henry supports greater dialectic interaction between philosophy and the arts. Indeed, he claims that an Afro-Caribbean philosophy stands to gain much from the arts precisely because of the “creative and transformative forces” of the arts.⁶ Obviously, then, Afro-Caribbean philosophy will not seek to exploit the bogus opposition of reason versus intuition. However, in light of its situatedness, it will gladly exploit the spontaneous creativity and imagination characteristic of the arts. The idea emergent from the preceding considerations is that there are certain innovative capacities of the arts which can function as transformative capabilities to legislate new styles of human existence.

Second, Henry does not run the risk of engaging in unconstructive ideological posturing in his take on Afro-Caribbean philosophy. He demands that it should be “capable of thematizing its own concerns, making distinct discursive contributions to knowledge production
in the region,” while realizing that “[t]he time has come for Caribbean philosophy to declare its independence from its historic intertextual subordination to ideological production.”

Third, Henry demands that we change the intertextual address of Afro-Caribbean philosophy by making it a new critical writing. As a new critical writing, Afro-Caribbean philosophy will “help to link the founding categories of the subject in disciplines such as political economy and history to those of the arts, making dialogue and translation possible along these and other lines.” While seemingly exaggerated, I will develop this last construal in such a way as to connect it with the issue of subjectivity. I interpret Henry as, in part, demanding that an Afro-Caribbean philosophy should focus on the question of subjectivity and creative human agency in the Caribbean. Certain popular notions of subjectivity tend to favor accounts that theorize subjectivity in terms of recognition. On this view, awareness of subjectivity emerges from a hostile struggle between two opposing parties. The self and other do not result from mutuality of purpose or mutual reciprocity, but from an antagonistic and violent struggle. This conception of subjectivity that is premised on domination and violence and that makes subjectivity captive to the dialectics of recognition is a pathological subjectivity precisely because it requires violent struggle to be actualized. Put differently, one’s subjectivity becomes dependent upon recognition from opposing consciousness. Given the Caribbean history of colonialism and imperialism, it would indeed be tragic if the subjectivity and agency of Caribbean peoples were dependent upon recognition from their former colonial masters. Hence, efforts to investigate and explore the contours of Afro-Caribbean subjectivity cannot legitimize the antagonistic conception of subjectivity as paradigmatic of subjectivity. One challenge for Afro-Caribbean philosophy, then, is to theorize subjectivity and agency beyond the horizon of a subjectivity premised on the erasure of the other. So Henry, in delicately balancing the divide between intercultural and intracultural conceptions of philosophical activity, describes Afro-Caribbean philosophy as “an intertextually embedded discursive practice, and not an isolated or absolutely autonomous one. It is often implicitly referenced and engaged in the production of answers to everyday questions and problems that are being framed in nonphilosophical discourses.” This description of Afro-Caribbean philosophy can accommodate the unique historical and cultural circumstances that have shaped and influenced human existence in the Caribbean. Alternatively, an Afro-Caribbean philosophy can be understood as a discursive practice dedicated to investigating the Afro-Caribbean collective “center of gravity,” while resisting “hermeneutical imperialism,”—the assumption that culturally specific interpretations of human existence are valid for all human beings.

Finally, such a philosophy will also investigate the process of Afro-Caribbean people caring for their cares. Notice, then, that Henry is not interested in sanctioning a hegemonic discourse premised on vague notions of authenticity. In seeking both to articulate as well as to systematize the numerous voices of Afro-Caribbean philosophy, Henry clearly underscores the internal debates constitutive of the Afro-Caribbean philosophical landscape. Consequently, Henry identifies two schools of Afro-Caribbean philosophy: poeticism and historicism.

The poeticist tradition denotes a group of thinkers (Sylvia Wynters, Wilson Harris) who claim that questions of identity, ego formation, and self must be resolved before there can be any constructive change in Afro-Caribbean society. The historicist tradition, on the other hand, (Frantz Fanon, C. L. R. James) argues that external institutional change must be antecedent to any meaningful transformation of consciousness of self within Afro-Caribbean societies. Poeticists favor projects attentive to the immateriality of consciousness, whereas historicists favor projects focused on overhauling the material structures of production, distribution, and consumption.

Before considering others matters, it is imperative to reach some understanding about the philosophical concerns that will occupy the attention of Afro-Caribbean philosophy. Indeed, these concerns will serve partly as textual reference points in the effort to gain a more critically informed understanding of the very canonicity of Afro-Caribbean philosophy. Questions that are destined to attract the attention of Afro-Caribbean will not focus on developing global theories of knowledge, truth, or reference. Rather, they will focus on, without being limited to, matters of identity, freedom, liberation, agency, subjectivity, philosophies of culture, and philosophies of history, as articulated by Wilson Harris.

A significant idea emergent from this critical reflection on Afro-Caribbean philosophy is the importance of recognizing that “concepts lose their meaning and significance for people when it is assumed that they are universally accepted and taken for granted.” We can augment this insight by acknowledging that Afro-Caribbean philosophy champions the importance of recognizing that our practices, language, history, etc., not only affect but indirectly constitute the ways we interpret the world. This idea further reinforces the metaphilosophical insight regarding the historical and cultural embeddedness of philosophical practice.

Implicit in the idea of an Afro-Caribbean philosophy is the notion of human thought and existence claiming intelligibility against the background of a shared form of life. This idea builds on Charles Taylor’s account of human beings as self-interpreting beings. Self-interpretations generate self-constitutive commitments that render a person’s life intelligible since such commitments emerge from one’s desires, interests, intentions, etc. Contrary to universalist construals of philosophy that inevitably place it in conflict with our being-in-the-world, philosophy, grounded in the task of self-understanding and existential intelligibility, plays a decisive role in enabling human beings to achieve a certain existential intelligibility. Such existential intelligibility is achieved by making sense of our categorical desires, namely, our basic commitments, concerns, and emotions. This approach to philosophy and its role in human interpretation and understanding, then, sheds light on the styles of existence common to human existence. Here, styles of existence are the basic modes of existence not answerable to the dictates of those who seek
to impose evidentiary demands on human existence at the price of intelligibility.

Some traditionally minded philosophers will certainly raise questions regarding the normativity of philosophy. Such critical concerns may very well take the form of addressing the importance of logic and rationality to human life. On this traditional view, thinking which is not rationally grounded in neutral principles of logic or neutral epistemic criteria of truthfulness and justifiability is either confused or false. I want to offer two responses to this challenge. First, Henry's construal of Afro-Caribbean philosophy is not a blind and arrogant rejection of rationality. Rather, there is critical acknowledgement that symbolic logic, with its basis in notions of mathematical rigor, analysis, proof, and clarity is not necessarily applicable to all areas of inquiry regardless of context. Furthermore, the point here is that we should be on guard against attributing unnecessary importance to the ontological commitments and assumptions of the formal, logical, and set-theoretic tradition by uncritically buying into the idea that all thinking is abstract. Consequently, Afro-Caribbean philosophy remains both "normatively subservient" to reason and the existential weight of lived experience.

Stephen Toulmin (1958) has argued that we should not allow formal logic to colonize all aspects of human existence. Toulmin appeals to the idea of an "argument field," stating that practical argumentation is used in a variety of fields, and that certain aspects of argumentation differ from field to field. By contrast, other features of arguments are field-invariant; these formal and abstract features hold regardless of the argument field in question. The trouble with uncritical deployments of formal logic is the assumption that all aspects of arguments are field-invariant. Rationality is not the problem. The problem is the conviction that formal logic defines the universal standards of any instance of "good" thinking. This style of thinking categorically exiles imagination as void of any cognitive significance to human praxis. However, the appeal to the context sensitivity of thought need not entail surrendering critical thinking. Hence, it should not come as a surprise to learn that Henry refers to Afro-Caribbean philosophy "[a]s a rational discourse that examines the human subject, its epistemic strategies and its objects of knowledge."17

Second, the narrow hyper-rational construal of human thought betrays a certain inattentiveness to the fact that much conflict in human life does not relate to matters of consistency and rationality. Rather, conflict emerges because of antagonizing and irresolvable incommensurability between cultures and individuals. Resolving epistemic, existential, and cultural incommensurability is not simply a question of appealing to neutral frameworks and bringing formal argumentation to bear on the situation. It is precisely because such basic existential disagreements are cognitively underdetermined that new metaphorical structuring of things and new frames of interpretation offer new possibilities of existence. Hence, philosophy can contribute to the restoration of incommensurability in the face of conflicting self-interpretations by, among other things, overthrowing and restructuring our narrative identities, while discouraging blind dogmatism and the paralyzing inertia of existential complacency. Indeed, there is no escaping the finite ground of our everyday existence in order to make our life intelligible from the perspective of the "view from nowhere." This is precisely because our understanding of ourselves as human beings depends upon a shared form of life, and not on grasping eternal logical relations among disembodied forms, or mechanically assenting to a set of abstract propositions. All of these considerations emerge from Henry’s idea of philosophy as a form of intertextuality informed by lived experience. The notion of intertextuality need not be construed as implying that Afro-Caribbean philosophy is a linguistic idealism. Rather, the notion of intertextuality underscores the extent to which Afro-Caribbean philosophy is embedded in clusters of interdisciplinary texts.

In conclusion, I have presented a sympathetic yet critical account of Afro-Caribbean philosophy along the lines of that advocated by Paget Henry. I have also concentrated on describing a conception of philosophy agreeable with the kind of philosophical project being pursued by Henry. It is hoped that some headway has been made in making the case for an alternative tradition of philosophy, one that any reconstructive metaphilosophical project would enthusiastically accommodate and, moreover, embrace.

REFERENCES


NOTES

1. The term "discursive," in this context, connotes the interdisciplinary status of Afro-Caribbean philosophy, namely, the fact that it is not exclusively informed by efforts to engage in a priori reflection to answer perennial problems regarding truth, reality, knowledge, etc.; rather, Afro-Caribbean philosophy is, among other things, deeply informed by and embedded within the multiple intellectual practices constitutive of the Afro-Caribbean intellectual tradition.


The Long Revolution, Cornel West’s Black Prophetic Tradition, and Temporal Perspective

Naomi Zack

Raymond Williams was a twentieth century English cultural critic who seems to be largely unknown to U.S. philosophers of race who write about social justice. He was one of the founders of the British New Left Review, but his ideas were a site of contention for more orthodox Marxists, because he was skeptical of economic analyses that did not take lived cultural experience into account. Williams believed that masses, and also perhaps classes, did not literally exist, except for how theorists defined and viewed them. He also anticipated later feminist emphasizes on “nutritive and generative” aspects of lived experience as a major social institution on a par with the economy and politics. Williams was considered most influential for his ideas that all members and groups in society contribute to its structured feelings at any given time and for his idea of The Long Revolution that recurred throughout his writing, but was first fully introduced in a 1961 book of the same title.

The Long Revolution named by Williams was a process of social change toward democracy that began in modernity in the late eighteenth century with the French Revolution, which he called the mould in which experience was cast. By experience in this context, Williams meant the experience of writers and poets, and he believed that what was expressed in literature both reflected feelings in society and influenced them. The structured feeling of the Long Revolution is centered on goals of universal human recognition, for all members of society, as whole human beings. Everyone is to be accepted for what they are in the system to come after capitalism: “There can be no acceptable human order while the full humanity of any class of men is in practice denied.”

In disagreement with contemporary Marxists, Williams was skeptical of the ability of socialism or state control that would entail complex bureaucracy to realize the goal of universal humanity: “We seem reduced to a choice between speculator and bureaucrat and while we do not like the speculator, the bureaucrat is not exactly inviting either.” His proposed solution was a form of self-rule based on open discussion and voting, with representatives to larger governing bodies responsible to their constituents. Williams has been interpreted as advocating that “the people” rule themselves, but he is not usually associated with anarchism.

It is very difficult for a theorist to decide how big a picture to consider, how long a period of history to take as a unit for long-term trends. Since we cannot successfully intervene in a global system, and the same facts can usually be explained by more than one theory, there is little that can or should interfere with a long-term view that is tilted toward optimism. The temporal perspective introduced by Williams, although he probably would not have described it in these terms, permits us to think about history as extending into the future as well as the past. Suppose that there is a Long Revolution and there are Wide Humanistic Values to match it, which preclude racism because the full humanity of all human beings will be recognized, eventually. It might be useful, as a matter of sanity as well as hope, to see the present conditions of American anti-Black punitive racism as a relatively short span of events within those lengths. Such events need to be endured, and the hope is that they will pass into the past at some stage in the future of the Long Revolution. About hope, Williams wrote the following at the end of Towards 2000:

It is only in a shared belief and insistence that there are practical alternatives that the balance of forces and chances begins to alter. . . . Once the inevitabilities are challenged, we begin gathering our resources for a journey of hope. If there are no easy answers there are still available and discoverable hard answers and it is these that we can now learn to make and share. This has been, from the beginning, the sense and impulse of the Long Revolution.

The term “racial climate” has a history of meaning “micro-aggressions” based on race, small cuts, insults, and slights that can have a cumulative effect of individual harm. In using the term “racial atmosphere,” reference may be made to other issues of harm to people of color, such as ignorance of Black history and contemporary racism or discrimination in career advancement. The implication of these meanings is that the micro-aggressions add up to what is perceived as a general predisposition of white people to treat people of color in unjust ways. But, at this time, ideas of racial atmosphere and climate also work as metaphors for what is unknown about race relations and attitudes to capture the vagueness and unpredictability of racial prejudice and discrimination that occur in a society where nonwhites remain disadvantaged, even though there is formal equality. This “vague weather” aspect of atmosphere and climate is an epistemological condition of indecision that may or may not constitute a lasting crisis, although some syndromes of political injustice should be viewed as crises.
A crisis is a period of indecision and uncertainty that requires a resolution before life can go on. Will Blacks and other people of color achieve more equality with whites, or is the United States—and, with it, the world, because U.S. racism is exported with business practices, tourism, and entertainment products—on the brink of a new era of explicit and direct oppression against people of color? Are most white Americans, whose race-neutral economic and social activities have racist effects on nonwhites, genuinely ignorant of how the system in which they operate works, or are they secretly but knowingly hearts-and-minds racists? It is not clear that this indeterminate aspect of present racial atmosphere (and smaller climates) must be resolved now. We do not know if life (in a general sense) can go on if it is not resolved or what it means for life to go on, or not. We do not even know if the putative crisis can be resolved at this time because there is as yet no sustained, impassioned, liberatory discourse for our condition of ambiguity, a time with a Black president and police killing with impunity of unarmed Black youth, a time of voting rights for everyone but new restrictions and requirements that disproportionately affect African Americans. Academics have much to write and say about contemporary issues at this time, but the light of their disputatious discourse shines in a windowless tower with a semi-captive audience of colleagues and students and no reliable means for it to illuminate the real world. The public media yield few constant intellectuals, and progressive pundits speak to those who already agree with them on public radio and via specialized electronic outlets. American discourse of racial liberation is thereby at a standstill, which means that it drifts in the river of history. We do not know what is going to happen from day to day or in the long term.

CORNEIL WEST’S PARADIGM OF THE BLACK PROPHETIC TRADITION

It is important to keep Cornel West’s protean background in mind for consideration of his major philosophical claims. West has had a very productive career, publishing fifteen or twenty books and maintaining a schedule of two or three talks a week for decades. His academic credentials are impeccable. He studied at Yale University, taught at Union Theological Seminary, Harvard University, Princeton University, and, most recently, back to Union. His academic positions have been in departments of religion and African American Studies, but many philosophers of race have claimed him also, and he has not completely repudiated that disciplinary ascription, although unlike most philosophers, he says about himself: “I’m a blues man in the life of the mind. I’m a jazz man in the world of ideas. . .”

West has been recognized as a public intellectual by people of all races and is one of the most well-known African Americans of arts and letters in his generation, regularly presenting his thought in television and radio interviews. West’s speech and writing are highly erudite, spanning the whole Western humanist tradition and stylized by his encyclopedic knowledge of Black history, appreciation of Black popular music, and insistence on Christian spirituality as a source of individual dignity. He has recorded hip-hop music, both solo and with a band called “Cornel West Theory”; he played the role of “Councilor West” in the movies “Matrix Reloaded” and “Matrix Revolutions.” West’s mode of address consistently has the cadenced grandeur of a prophet of his times. His writing reverberates in his speech and after a while, in reading his prose, one hears him speaking. The content of West’s discourse is literally reiterated throughout his publications, talks, and critical exchanges. Overall, he seeks to alleviate and redignify conditions of human suffering by proceeding from the experience of African Americans. His advocacy of socialism is motivated by an ethical interpretation of Marxism combined with the ultimately altruistic selfless love of others exemplified by Jesus Christ. But his resultant “radical democracy” is grounded on the suffering of African Americans. West describes himself as a “Chekovian Christian” because human death and other tragedies are unavoidable, and he constructs and draws on the tradition of Black prophecy to develop a dignified stance of hope in the face such gloom and doom.

Similar to many liberatory theories, West’s paradigm of the Black Prophetic Tradition is both descriptive and normative. West has been developing this paradigm at least since the early 1980s, and he is aware both of the nature of his own work as discourse and of historical vicissitudes in real life politics that result in uneven progress toward racial justice in reality. In his first book, Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity, he wrote:

The object of inquiry for Afro-American critical thought is the past and the present, the doings and the sufferings of African people in the United States. Rather than a new scientific discipline or field of study, it is a genre of writing, a textuality, a mode of discourse that interprets, describes, and evaluates Afro-American life in order comprehensively to understand and effectively to transform it. It is not concerned with “foundations” or transcendental “grounds” but with how to build its language in such a way that the configuration of sentences and the constellation of paragraphs themselves create a textuality and distinctive discourse which are a material force for Afro-American freedom.

West’s expressed intention here—and nothing that he has done since then would cause one to infer that he has ever waivered from that intention—is to create a form of speech that can become a real causal force for black liberation in the United States. In other words, West is here explicit about his belief in the power of cabalistic rhetoric and the existence of “magic words.” In this way, he is like many other academics who write and speak as though that is all they need do for reality to change. But West is also unlike them because his messages have religious overtones. There is an even greater distance between West and other philosophers. It seems reasonable to assume that a philosopher constructing a Black tradition would refer to the texts of past Black philosophers as a main source of inspiration as well as reference. West instead turns to music and claims that the thought of Alain Locke, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Sylvia Winters is not in the same league of genius as the intellectual (not experiential) work of Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, and, above all, Sarah Vaughan. West has
made it clear that he “ironically nurtured in the academy” his interest in literature as opposed to philosophy and there is no reason to believe that the same is not true of his interest in music.18

TIME AND TIMING

However, West understands that the timing between prophecy and what it delivers is difficult to predict. West staged an event in Riverside Church in November 2014, in dialogue with Bob Avakian, the chairman of the Radical Communist Party, USA. The result was the 2015 film, “Religion and Revolution: A Dialogue between Cornel West and Bob Avakian.” West there says that the ruling class “won” over the past thirty years, but that progress is often interrupted by regress, so that after the breakthrough of the Civil Rights Movement, when a small number succeeded, there has been regress.19 In his Black Prophetic Fire discussion with Christa Buschendorf about Ella Baker, West distinguishes between immediate events in “market time” and “democratic time,” which in Raymond Williams’s terms constitutes a “long revolution.”20 We should understand that prophecy for West is not prediction of the future: The prophetic has little or nothing to do with prediction. Instead, it has to do with identifying, analyzing, and condemning forms of evil and forging vision, hope, and courage for selves and communities to overcome them. Radical democracy is visionary plebodicy—the grand expression of the dignity of the doxa of the suffering demos.21

West himself regularly performs prophecy as a certain stance toward injustice and human suffering, that is, an willingness and ability to speak the truth about what for us mortals is evil. In his address to 3,000 people at Riverside Church in New York City, for a 2011 event commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the 1971 riot in Attica Prison, West said about courage at the present time:

The condition of truth is to allow suffering to speak. If you don’t talk about poverty, you’re not telling the truth. If you’re not talking about working people being pushed against the wall, with corporate profits high, you’re not telling the truth. If you’re not talking about the criminal activity on Wall Street and not one person gone to jail yet, you’re not telling the truth. Don’t tell me about the crime on the block with brothers and sisters and Jamal and Latisha out taken to jail, and yet gangsters who are engaged in fraudulent activity, insider trading, market manipulation, walking around having tea at night.22

But prophetic inspiration also comes from the past, for West. He said about Ida B. Wells in his 2014 interview/conversation with Christa Buschendorf:

She stands between Frederick Douglass and W. E. B. Du Bois and she knew both men personally. Wells was the pioneering figure in the anti-lynching campaigns of her day, and the way in which she courageously and undauntedly took up a difficult and dangerous struggle against prejudices about the “beastly nature” of the Black man, certainly renders her a worthy candidate in our series of long-distance freedom fighters in the Black prophetic tradition. . . . Ida B. Wells, in so many ways, teaches us something that we rarely want to acknowledge: that the Black freedom movement has always been an anti-terrorist movement, that Black people in America had a choice between creating a Black al-Qaeda or a movement like Ida B. Wells’s, which was going to call into question the bestiality and barbarity and brutality of Jim Crow and American terrorism and lynching, but would do it in the name of something that provided a higher moral ground and a higher spiritual ground given her Christian faith . . . she said: “We want a higher moral ground, but I’m going to hit this issue head-on.”23

Not only is timing the fulfillment of Black prophecy impossible, but there is no guarantee it will be fulfilled. At the close of his Attica address, West indicated that the willingness to continue the fight might be more important than winning:

We’re going to have a new wave of truth telling. We’re going to have a new wave of witness bearing. And we’re going to teach the younger generation that these brothers didn’t struggle in vain, just like John Brown and Nat Turner and Marcus Garvey and Martin King and Myles Horton and the others didn’t. And we shall see what happens. We might get crushed, too. But you know what? Then you just go down swinging, like Ella Fitzgerald and Muhammad Ali.24

The title of West’s Riverside Church address, “Attica Is All of Us,” was cashed out in this talk and subsequent talks and publications. For West, Attica is all of us after 9/11 because it was the beginning of the “niggerization” of all Americans. He has repeatedly claimed, following Malcolm X, that oppression of a people is equal to what they will accept without resistance:

America been niggerized since 9/11. When you’re niggerized, you’re unsafe, unprotected, subject to random violence, hated for who you are. You become so scared that you defer to the powers that be, and you’re willing to consent to your own domination. And that’s the history of Black people in America.25

However, it is not only American Black people who have been niggerized, according to West, but all post-9/11 Americans who live in fear:

The Black prophetic tradition has never been confined to the interests and situations of Black people. It is rooted in principles and visions that embrace these interests and confront the situations, but its message is for the country and world. The Black prophetic tradition has been the leaven in the American democratic loaf. When the Black prophetic tradition is strong, poor and working people of all colors benefit. When the Black prophetic tradition is weak, poor and working
class people are overlooked. On the international level, when the Black prophetic tradition is vital and vibrant, anti-imperial critiques are intense, and the plight of the wretched of the earth is elevated. What does it profit a people for a symbolic figure to gain presidential power if we turn our backs from the suffering of poor and working people, and thereby lose our souls?\footnote{20}

The symbolic figure who has gained presidential power, to whom Cornel West repeatedly refers in these terms is, of course, President Barack Obama, “the first black president of the United States.” At first, West sounded hopeful about Obama, disclosing after his 2008 election: “I hope he is a progressive Lincoln, I aspire to be the Frederick Douglass to put pressure on him.” In other words, Black prophecy might require the human agency of those inspired by it in order to activate “the material force for Afro-American freedom.” If this is a correct inference, then West does not fully believe that the discourse of the Black prophetic tradition can directly cause change and that would reduce this discourse to a form of secular rhetoric and persuasion.

In recent controversies with other Black intellectuals, public figures, and activists, West’s criticism of President Barack Obama’s political, military, and economic policies has been operatic: “Ferguson signifies the end of the age of Obama” because of the injustice of the “Jim Crow U.S. prison system that does not deliver justice to black and brown people.” In claiming to represent global suffering in the tradition of Frantz Fanon, West has referred to Obama’s “empty neutrality, moral bankruptcy, and political cowardice.”\footnote{30}

**PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECTS OF WEST’S PROPHECY**

“My existential soulmates and intellectual sources are more life-wrestling artists than academic philosophers.”\footnote{31} It is easy to understand what West rejects about academic philosophy, its cold abstraction and dryness. He works in a number of dimensions, writing and speaking for academics, college students, and general readers, and delivering public discourse for wider audiences. His thought is available on an official website and a YouTube channel with over 80,000 entries.\footnote{32} His public prophecy and public political criticism have the same content as his writing and speech on college campuses. Therefore, West’s writings about the Black prophetic tradition and his public political criticism can be taken together as part of a cognitive structure that is grist for abstract and dry philosophical criticism.

West’s basic historical insight is that Black Americans have suffered unjustly, from pain and death inflicted by whites, as well as from their own nihilism, a spiritual failure to use the strength from their belief in God to face up to their ills courageously, and with dignity. Talking about Black history and current battles is in itself, according to West, a valuable and worthy activity. However, his ideas and reaction to their rejection, taken together, indicate that he does not hold participation in this discourse to be morally optional, but, rather, that it is obligatory for certain people, namely, Black men in power. West expresses bitterness and rage when those in political office and activists such as Reverend Al Sharpton, who he thinks should join him in the Black prophetic tradition, choose not to do so. Such castigation may be part of the exhortation that goes along with the preachers' aspect of West’s role as a public prophet, but it is problematic for those of us who value the detachment of academic philosophy.

But what if West is right about the wrongness of the American path in moral humanistic terms? Rightness or wrongness makes no difference if others choose not to live within the Black prophetic tradition, whether they do so in order to remain addicted to drugs, or to preserve their political careers, or because it does not fit into their lifestyles. The point is that in not being willing to accept disagreement or lack of interest from some people, West has turned a profound construction of an historical liberatory Black tradition into an inconsistent ideology. West does not have the usual defense of the intellectual who claims that what he does as a person should not be used as an attack on his ideas. Because West, as a public prophet for a people, has made himself an integral part of the content of the prophecy he preaches, he has become like Midas in making Black prophecy inert and lifeless in its impermeability to those who may not be with him but are not necessarily against him.

Not all advocates of Black liberation within the United States or critics of the racial imbalance of the U.S. criminal justice system agree that it is necessary to change American foreign policy or the structure of global finance in order to correct the ills of racial bias. But the globally holistic nature of West’s critique does make it seem as though such fundamental institutions must be overthrown for the correction of social injustice. For a specific example, homicide resulting from police racial profiling would be reduced if police had more cautious rules of engagement for approaching suspects.\footnote{33} This is not to say that a full understanding of contemporary racism in the United States does not require or would not be facilitated by a sweeping analysis such as West’s ethical Marxism, but that correction of specific conditions of suffering may not. It is an empirical question whether some things can be fixed without overthrowing everything, but West’s insistent ideological stance blocks such questions from being asked.

However, such academic criticism of West’s paradigm of the Black prophetic tradition is not the end of the story. By over-reaching into real life public political discourse, from history, religion, and alleged philosophy all rolled up into one, West forces political philosophers to think about new subjects that include what thinkers who exceed the academy say and the boundaries between truth and freedom. This provides a new dimension to contemporary political philosophy as well as it reaffirms the power of spoken discourse within its own realm. West’s written and spoken utterances remain on the verbal side of discourse, but in taking the contemporary world as a subject, he has opened a window out of the academy for cultural analysis and criticism. When West refers to historical Black figures in constructing the Black prophetic tradition, he brings accounts of their lives and ideas into the “magic word” aspect of his own discourse, which is also a new approach to intellectual history.

To do philosophy or present other complex thought in public, and for the public, is not an easy task because it calls for
communication skills and non-specialized language, which many academic philosophers have not yet developed. The degree of controversy centered on matters of race in which West has immersed himself, in a public auditorium with many reactionaries, probably carries personal risks and stresses that would be beyond the capability to sustain, of even the most highly skilled ninjas of academic politics. Time will tell whether others who identify or are claimed as philosophers successfully emulate West's kind of project. If enough of them do, West's prophetic discourse may come to symbolize their endeavors.

Cornel West has written that for real change to occur, leaders have to be willing to act in public, to be arrested, and to be killed. It helps if they are charismatic and if members of the group they represent love them. Martin Luther King, Jr., was a prime example of a charismatic organic intellectual in West's sense. However, West's stated conditions for becoming an organic intellectual are an empirical claim about what is necessary, although not sufficient. If the Left did indeed lose in the decades following the Civil Rights Movement, as West has also claimed, then that in itself would indicate that these necessary conditions are not sufficient for lasting, sustainable change. West contrasts the contributions of Ella Baker to those of King, describing her as "an unassuming person who helps the suppressed to help themselves." Baker's organizing work included her service as secretary of the NAACP, executive director of the Southern Christian Leadership Council, and co-founder of the Student Non-violent Co-ordinating Committee. Baker knew both Du Bois and King and was skilled at grassroots organizing, but she did not write essays or books or produce mesmerizing speeches. She talked about humility and service alongside everyday people and insisted that members of a movement motivate themselves.

To conclude, for the time being, we need public prophets for inspiration. There are dramatic events and stoic day-to-day disciplines. It may not be necessary to change everything that should be changed in order to correct specific injustices.

NOTES

1. This article is a slightly different version of my discussion of West as well as racial atmospheres and climates in Applicative Justice: A Pragmatic Empirical Approach to Racial Injustice (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield), 131–43.


6. Ibid. See also the foreword by Anthony Barnett, xvii.


18. Ibid., 361.


23. West with Buschendorf, Black Prophetic Fire, 139 and 141.


25. Ibid.


27. Overlooked in Obama's status is the mixed race identity with which he began his campaign in 2007. For discussion of issues related to that transformation, which would only confuse matters to being into the current text, see Naomi Zack, "The Fluid Symbol of Mixed Race," Hypatia, 25th Anniversary Issue, 25, no. 4 (Fall 2010): 873–90.


29. West has been involved in ongoing controversy within the African American intelligentsia concerning federal programs that he believes harm the poor and fail to support Black people.

30. Ibid.
32. See notes 27 and 28, supra.
35. West with Buschendorf, Black Prophetic Fire, 104–5.
37. West with Buschendorf, Black Prophetic Fire, 90.

Walking the Scalpel’s Edge: Identity, Duality, and (Problematic) Black Manhood in “The Knick”

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W. E. B. DuBois, in 1903, proclaimed that the Negro is “Always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in bemused contempt and pity.” This assertion accurately describes the sociological and phenomenological relationship of African Americans to the Euro-American mainstream. Yet, as DuBois writes at the dawn of the technological innovations contained within the creation of “moving pictures,” his insight takes on a more literal meaning. The development of film and later television makes DuBois’ concept of “double consciousness” a dramatic experience wherein the tensions of Black life are concentrated in the actions of specific characters that can become archetypical in the popular perception of the complexities of Black life. Within these characterizations, the audience is allowed to witness the range of images and ideas that serve the white supremacist indoctrination that transmitted white supremacist representations of Black (non-)personhood. These images have served as a part of a larger structure of hegemonic incultication that served as a prerequisite to the expansion of Black social movement or, more recently, and in greater examples, through the expanding recognition of Black social movement or, as Chris Rock would articulate it, White American social-cultural maturation. The “doctor” as character serves as a vehicle to heighten the presentation of African-American humanity and achievement. Doctors are granted a specific type of social-cultural capital from the public as their work lends them immediate credibility in the areas of intellectual, ethical, and moral ability. The public believes “doctors” as a whole to be good, honest, and talented people and the presentation of them, on the whole, in film and television reinforces that belief. Thus, the character of a Black doctor makes an assertion about Black ability that challenges those made by white supremacist stereotyping. From Diahan Carroll, as a nurse in the NBC television series Julia (1968–1971), to Denzel Washington’s Dr. Philip Chandler on NBC’s St. Elsewhere, (1982–1988), to Chandra Wilson’s Dr. Miranda Bailey on ABC’s Grey’s Anatomy (2005–2015), these characters also serve as vehicles by which the iconic image of the doctor is given depth and complexity through their experience of race in the social worlds of the television show. In this compelling line is the character of Dr. Algernon Edwards (Andre Holland) in the Cinemax series The Knick. This essay argues the character of Dr. Algernon Edwards represents a demanding process of intersectional tension within a DuBoisian framework, as the character exists in jagged racial, gendered, and classed environments in which he consciously attempts to project environment-specific constructions of himself that reflect a proactive, self-determined consciousness, interactive but not dependent on external dynamics or, as DuBois states, a “self-conscious manhood.”
W. E. B. DuBois’ early twentieth century assertion of “double consciousness” as endemic to “Negro” life is a tremendous model for considering the fractures in Black material and mental life. The DuBoisian subject wrestles with the marginalization resulting from Jim Crow segregation/white supremacist projections that alienate Negros from their native country and encases them in a mask upon which white supremacist assumptions about Black life and identity are fixed. The Knick’s character of Algernon Edwards is an embodiment and example of this DuBoisian subject. Purposefully, the show’s creators, Jack Amiel and Michael Begler, crafted Edwards as an echo of DuBois’ thoughts as a critic of race and experiences’ as a highly trained professional oftentimes isolated in his career circumstances. Like DuBois, Edwards earned a Harvard degree, studied in Europe, and was one of the first Blacks to hold a position at a mainstream institution. The fictional Algernon Edwards broke the color line at The Knickerbocker Hospital, and W. E. B DuBois “integrated”[8] The University of Pennsylvania department of sociology.

Set in a turn of the twentieth century fictional hospital, located on the lower east side of Manhattan, Edward is the only Black credentialed professional on staff of a segregated hospital, The Knickerbocker, from which the series’ title is taken. Appointed as the deputy chief of surgery, Edwards is the beneficiary of the support of the hospital’s primary financial supporters, in whose kitchen his mother and father continue to work. Despite his impressive résumé—Harvard Medical School graduate, a surgical Residency in Paris, France (!), and a published author—Edwards struggles to gain the acknowledgement of his presence and the respect for his training from his fellow surgeons. His alienation from Director of Surgery John Thackery (Clive Owens) and his staff rests upon their notions of Edwards’ Negro inferiority, the heightened arrogance of their professional bearing and the intrusive/disruptive nature of his presence in their all-white, all-male fraternity. Edwards’ expectation is that his entrance into the life of “The Knickerbocker” would be challenging considering the racial politics of the time, yet in the field of scientific knowledge and surgical expertise he would gain acceptance, respect, and recognition from his colleagues. Edwards’ beliefs in the possibilities of reason, logic, and truth as spaces that can erase the stains of racial prejudice are echoed by the thinkers of the character’s time. As Anna Julia Cooper states,

She [educated women] can commune with Socrates about the daimon he knew and to which she too can bear witness; she can revel in the majesty of Dante, the sweetness of Virgil, the simplicity of Homer, the strength of Milton. She can listen to the pulsing heart throbs of passionate Sappho’s encaged soul, as she beats her bruised wings against her prison bars and struggles to flutter out into Heaven’s æther, and the fires of her own soul cry back as she listens. “Yes; Sappho, I know it all; I know it all.” Here, at last, can be communion without suspicion; friendship, without misunderstanding; love without jealousy.[9]

DuBois, echoing Cooper over a decade later, states,

I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not. Across the color line I move arm in arm with Balzac and Dumas, where smiling men and welcoming women glide in gilded halls. From out the caves of Evening that swing between the strong-limbed earth and the tracery of the stars, I summon Aristotle and Aurelius and what souls I will, and they come all graciously with no scorn nor condescension. So, wed with Truth, I dwell above the Veil.[8]

It is this belief in knowledge/education as a) the definer of humanity, b) display of civilizational capability, c) the bridge over which the tensions of racial difference can be traversed, and d) in the context of the male-dominated world of medicine, proof of Manly qualities (i.e., masculine privilege) which drives Edwards to assert himself as worthy of recognition from his (white) peers. Edwards’ position places him on the playing field of masculinist white supremacy, motivating him to “conform to the dominant culture’s gender role expectations—success, competition, and aggression.”[9]

It must be noted, the series shows there to be a network of Black run and staffed hospitals in the New York City of the time[10] that would have accepted Edwards and allowed him to work and receive acknowledgement and respect for his abilities without racist degradation. However, there is intentionality and provocation in Edwards’ decision to be at The Knickerbocker Hospital. Edwards’ unspoken goal is to challenge the segregated nature of knowledge and treatment in turn-of-the-century medicine through deed and example. His experiences in France have raised his expectations regarding his role and place in the medical hierarchy, and it is his intention to achieve a similar position at The Knickerbocker. Edwards’ presence in the hospital wards and the surgical theater is challenged in aggressive ways that do not demand he show proof of his possession of the requisite qualities for acceptance into the white male surgical establishment but demand his absence, pure and simple. If, for most of his white colleagues, Edwards is assumed to be the physical embodiment of savagery, primitivism, and animal instincts, “responsible at the same time for [his] body, for [his] race, for [his] ancestors . . . and above all else ‘sho good eatin’,” then his physical response to displays of physical aggression toward him are traps waiting to be tripped. Edwards must change the terms of the debate and move his demands to different fields of contestation.

In the Season 1, episode, “Where Is the Dignity?,” Edwards, who is the only member of staff that has knowledge of a particularly demanding cardio technique, talks his peers through the procedure but at a key step in the surgery, withholds a necessary step from the lead surgeon, Everett Gallinger (Eric Johnson). Edwards plays a game of chicken with Gallinger (Gallinger growls, “We have no time for your nigger tricks!”), while the patient bleeds out. Refusing to budge, Edwards forces Gallinger to surrender the scalpel and completes the procedure. Gallinger, who represents the most extreme resistance to Edwards’ presence, at the conclusion of the procedure punches Edwards in the eye in the operating theater. Gallinger’s anger is rooted in having been humiliated by the fact that a Black person has
a greater medical knowledge than he, that he had been manipulated into this “humiliation,” and that Edwards was appointed to the deputy chief of surgery position, which Thackery had promised to him. Edwards’ resistance to striking back against the assault upon his person tells the viewer much about Edwards’ understanding of himself and the world he occupies. Edwards makes a conscious choice in his form of engagement and investment in a different articulation of manhood. Edwards’ choice was to disrupt the trope that identifies “whites with rationality or mind . . . [and] associated peoples of color with the body”\textsuperscript{11} and present himself in the racial-gendered terms he believes will be most convincing to his peers, the terms of rationality versus physicality. By not striking back, Edwards chooses a form of resistance/affirmation that contradicts the “sufficiently manly”\textsuperscript{12} response to racial aggression, physical violence. The Edwards character is neither a pacifist nor an obvious adherent to the ideas of Rev. William Whipper.\textsuperscript{13} Edwards does not strike back practically, because striking a white colleague would have led to his immediate firing, but strategically, his performance in the surgical theater had already established the terms of his relationship to Gallinger, demonstrated his technical superiority as a surgeon, and defiantly announced these facts to the public in the space of the surgical theater. Moreover, the French medical journal article from which the procedure was adopted, to Gallinger’s chagrin, had been co-written by Dr. Edwards. From Gallinger’s view, Edwards is a disturbing and frustrating paradox, a “nigger” that has all the “bearing” and “elements” of a white man, yet is irredeemably “Black.” Yet that is a part of Edwards’ own paradox. By choosing to present himself in terms most relevant to his professional position and his colleagues, a skilled medical professional, he appears to his colleagues as alien and a being unfathomable in their conception of Black identity. In this effort, Edwards functions as a disturbing model of African-American bifurcation. Like many African-American professionals working within predominately white institutions historically and contemporarily, Edwards saw “adapting to mainstream culture as gaining access to opportunity”\textsuperscript{15} and has little room to present himself in the fullness of his identity but must present himself only through the narrow prism of his intellectual ability, leaving the deeper complexities of his being behind the partition of American racial orders.

As the series continues, Edwards’ medical ability and inventiveness make his skills apparent to the chief of surgery and through a growing professional relationship, Edwards receives the professional regard for which he strives. Via the lens of Gallinger’s jealousy and his feelings of inadequacy, Thackery affirms Edwards’ rational supremacy in Season 2, Episode 3, “The Best with the Best to Get the Best.” When Gallinger asks Thackery why does he “always go [consult] to him [Edwards]?” Thackery responds, “Since he started here, Edwards has invented and improved procedure after procedure, technique after technique.”

Edwards’ achieving acceptance as doctor and colleague via his technical ability would be a realization of his belief in the transcendent possibilities of knowledge/education as overcoming belief in the supposed subhumanity of the Negro mind. Yet Edwards, for those outside of his technical fraternity, remains defined by his Black body, and no amount of scientific facility will convince those outside of the fraternity and most within that fraternity that he is as capable as his white colleagues. In episode 3, “The Busy Flea,” this view is exemplified by an Irish patient brought into the hospital for rat bites who sees Edwards and shouts, “I need a doctor, not a shoe shine!” Within the realm of medicine, Edwards, at best, exists only as mind, flattened and narrowed, his body, his racial presence, continues to be suspect and the resolution of that duality into a single unified being, untenable.

Outside of The Knickerbocker Hospital, in the eye of the Euro-American beholder, Edwards exists as gross body, stripped of his intellectual possibilities. As the Season 1, Episode 7, “Get the Rope,” depicts the 1900 New York Race Riot, Edwards, along with his fellow Black New Yorkers, is a faceless Black body, undifferentiated and constructed by the white mob’s racial desires. Yet in Black communities, his apartment house in the Tenderloin District, and neighborhood watering holes, Edwards’ capability as a rational being is not in question nor is his fundamental humanity. It is his credible embodiment as a normative [Black] man that is in doubt. Season 1, Episode 2, “Mr. Paris Shoes,” unveils a wrinkle in Edwards’ construction of his manhood in Black spaces. While standing in line for the water closet in his rooming house, Edwards is accosted by a fellow resident, “Diggs Man”, about the make and origin of his shoes. The resident is persistent in his curiosity and incessantly names different shoe stores until Edwards reluctantly tells him.

\textbf{Edwards}: L’Observe (sic).

\textbf{Diggs Man}: What? Where’s that?


\textbf{Diggs Man}: Paris?

\textbf{Edwards}: France.

\textbf{Diggs Man}: I know where Paris is, niggal (-45:38)

Later that evening, Diggs Man confronts Edwards, refers to him as “Mr. Paris Shoes,” steps on his shoes (“a little poor man’s shoe polish”), and declares Edwards an “Uppity motherfucker. Think his ass don’t stink. You think you better than me?” Edwards appears to submit to the aggression; when Diggs Man relents, he strikes, quickly beating Diggs Man senseless with a series of punches (-5:19). The expression of any experience, traveling to Paris, studying medicine, etc., beyond the common experiences of Black men of the time mark Edwards as culturally different. His tone and bearing are perceived as condescending toward his fellow resident and the cultural affectations read as lacking in the physical substance of Black working-class life. Specifically, Edwards projects cultural/class capital that reveals his emersion in mainstream/white culture. Edwards’ childhood development in a bourgeois household, the patronage provided by shipping magnate Captain August Robertson, a Harvard education, and professional maturation in France are the factors that underlie his cultural difference.

An example of W. E. B. DuBois’ “Talented Tenth,” Edwards is a member of a slowly growing African-American elite class, created through birth and education, whose experience of race and class in the United States places them in an
interstitial space between the two worlds, created by American racial, legal, social, and cultural policies and practices. From the perspective of Edwards’ neighbors, he has the stink of cultural whiteness and privilege about him, thus making him different, alien, and, in spite of his skin color, a stranger. Whereas in his professional space, Edwards seeks to display the elements deemed to be markers of equality in white male spaces, in working-class, African-American communities, those same elements call into question Edwards’ racial identity, cultural allegiance, and communal consciousness. Edwards projects a different image and understanding of what constitutes manhood for working-class Black men. His challenge is to assert himself within African-American, working-class, masculine spaces in ways he believes will suppress the contempt his class and cultural bearing engenders among working-class Black men. Diggs Man’s reference to Edwards as a “nigga” is a negative recognition of Edwards as it imposes a commonality and commonness upon him, in an attempt to demonstrate to Edwards that his cultural capital, regardless of its supposed meaning in white spaces, does not empower him nor give him higher status in the eyes of working-class Black men. It is an attempt to humble, humiliate, and, in spite of the recognition of difference, impose upon Edwards an aggressive sameness. From the perspective of the defeated Diggs Man, Edwards no doubt appears a paradox, a Harvard accent wrapped around a perspective of the defeated Diggs Man. In a fevered (drunken) state, Edwards, with brutal intention, establishes agency with his body at the expense of another Black man. The details of exertion and physicality are intimately displayed, as blood and sweat seem to define the very edges of Edwards’ being. Edwards carves out his gross being in spaces where his intellectual ability is obvious, his class/cultural presentation suspect, and his body, as a site of empowerment (re: masculinity), is dubious.

In subsequent episodes, these blind challenges become a ritual of sort for Edwards. They serve two seeming functions. The first function is the cathartic release of frustrations experienced in his work life. The incident in “The Busy Flea” happens after Edwards loses a patient in his underground night clinic for Black patients. Edwards’ loss of a patient generates a level of tension and frustration, but it must be seen as compounding on the displays of antagonism he receives at his job and repudiating his desire to display his excellence as a physician. This ritual can be understood as a part of the churning psychological cauldron that is his life and a context for Edwards’ aggressive behavior. “Research on African American adults indicates that the expression of anger (Anger out) is an important predictor of life stress.”

The second function is that Edwards’ drunken brawls exhibit a positive sense of bodily empowerment denied him in that same work life, one where his body is not suspect or a monstrosity. These encounters give him a ground to assert his body in deeply problematic but recognizable ways within his community. In these fugue states, Edwards’ valued logic and reasoning skills are suppressed and passions unleashed.

The final episode of Season 1, “Crutchfield,” depicts a bartender warning Edwards against provoking a fight with a noted boxing champion. He does not listen. In these moments he is aware of himself as a physical body but not as threatening or racialized. An immediate observation would be that Edwards exorcises his workplace anger and humiliations onto unsuspecting bar denizens while simply accepting the workplace insults. However, his confrontations with his white colleagues, specifically Gallinger, do not indicate cowardice as later in Episode 4 he invites Gallinger “outside” if he wanted to “swing at him again.” Edwards seeks to gain recognition from his colleagues on terms that disrupt their racist assumptions about him. As well Edwards does not limit himself to his physical being in Black communities as he is shown interacting with other Black professionals with no evidence of his desire to dominate those around him. Edwards’ engagement with his fellow members of “The Talented Tenth” does not betray a desire to physically or intellectually dominate those around him based on a distorted perception of him. In the midst of his racial, gender, and class “peers,” Edwards is arguably located in an environment where his unified vision of himself as Negro, man, and physician reflected back to him in recognition of a unitary sense of the self, a fully realized manhood is reflected back at him. It is not the transference of anger generated by whites onto working-class Black men, nor is it the flashing of his brilliance before whites because few Black men would value it. Edwards’ duality is a conscious choice, affirming that what little control he
has over how he is perceived will be confronted by an exaggerated projection of manhood as it is understood in those discrete spaces.

The DuBoisian approach to the problems of Dr. Algernon Edwards would find resolution in the merger of Edwards’ disparate expressions of his consciousness. Ideally, in his work life, Edwards’ Negro-ness would be seen as irrelevant, the intellectual and technical skills that were used to gain respect from (some) of his colleagues seen as expressions of his transcendent human capacity. “The Negro can do math,” but of course! In that circumstance, it would not be impossible for Edwards to be a brilliant surgeon and a Negro and have the doors of professional opportunity open wide for him. In his community/social life, this merger would be demonstrated in Edwards’ freedom to display hegemonic cultural signifiers, which would be seen as part of a broad vocabulary through which Black masculinity/manhood is expressed, not as an expression of condescension or superiority. However, this is not the case. Dr. Algernon Edwards’ shifting circumstances and the floating signifiers of manhood place him on a Mobius strip of identity transitions wherein he is constantly sliding from one extreme to another, rarely finding still spaces where a unified sense of himself can be experienced. Edwards lives in a historic moment where the overt and conspicuous expressions of racial and cultural difference and the codes that betray where a body stands in relation to that difference undermine the possibilities of unified subjectivity and the hope of a unified “self-conscious manhood.”

From activists calling for greater respect and regard for Black lives by America’s public security forces to the demands by college students for real diversity and opportunity in the halls of academe, the question of the recognition and respect for the humanity of Black people remains grounded in the failure to see Black lives as more than superficial characterizations that reflect the limits of the white imagination. The character of Dr. Algernon Edwards is a representation of the Black male body as the battlefield upon which these failures play out. The depiction of his identity as fractured is reflective of the experiences of the national body as it imposes its self-inflicted duality upon those with the opportunity and desire to bridge the chasm that separates the two worlds of Black and White America. In the experiences of Dr. Algernon Edwards, we are shown the terrible battles that are waged to achieve this goal. At the conclusion of Season 1’s finale, we see Dr. Edwards sprawled out in an alley behind a bar, having lost his battle with the champion boxer. Whether Edwards is able to recover from his fight, what injuries he has endured, and what effects they will have upon his future is unknown. There may not be a more apt visual metaphor for this society’s long and drawn out war with itself over the question of and the damage that battle has had upon Black men’s assertion of their humanity.

NOTES


3. I mean this in reference to Chris Rock’s insight, “When we talk about race relations in America or racial progress, it’s all nonsense. There are no race relations. . . . White people were crazy. Now they’re not as crazy. To say that Black people have made progress would be to say they deserve what happened to them before.” In Conversation with Chris Rock. The New Yorker Magazine, http://www.vulture.com/2014/11/chris-rock-frank-rich-in-conversation.html


5. Show creators Jack Amiel and Michael Begler specifically reference the inclusion of a Double Consciousness frame for the character of Algernon Edwards in an interview with actor Andre Holland. “We were on stage with you [Andre Holland] at the Television Critics Association and you [Andre Holland] discussed Double Consciousness and we hadn’t discussed with you the fact that we were going to bring in W. E. B. DuBois and . . . all these thinkers of the day who talked about Double Consciousness.” The Knick podcast, December 19, 2015, 8:00 a.m. (-22:02).

6. In DuBois’ case, “integrate” is being used in the loosest sense possible, as Dr. DuBois was commissioned by the University of Pennsylvania to conduct a case study of Black life in Philadelphia’s 7th Ward, which became one the earliest documents of modern quantitative urban sociology, The Philadelphia Negro (1899). DuBois, however, was refused the title of professor, was not granted office space in the department, and was not allowed to teach courses for the institution. So DuBois “integrated” the Department of Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania in the most meager sense of the word.


10. Season 1, Episode 7, “Get the Rope,” depicts a race riot in New York. In an effort to safely transport Black patients away from the besieged Knickerbocker Hospital, Edwards and Thackery smuggle them in a wagon top a nearby Black-run hospital.


14. Rev. William Whipper was an African-American abolitionist who argued for moral suasion as a means to abolish slavery and resist white aggression against African Americans. His most noted essay is “Non-Resistence to Offensive Aggression” (1837), http://www.blackpast.org/1837-william-whipper-non-resistance-offensive-aggression


16. Ibid., 29.
WHAT DOES THE “MATTER” IN BLACK LIVES MATTER REFER TO?

Let me begin by offering a number of recent incidents as pieces of a historically mounting pile of evidence that Black lives have little perceived value in this country. Matthew Ajibade, in Savannah, Georgia, was killed while in police custody. He was tazed four times in the groin while tied to a chair and was found dead two hours later still tied to it. The deputies that assaulted him were acquitted of manslaughter. Tamir Rice, in Cleveland, Ohio, was killed by police when he played with a toy gun in the park. The shooting was considered justified. Adding insult to injury, the city of Cleveland filed a $500 lawsuit against Rice’s estate for his ambulance. Johnathan Ferrell, in Charlotte, North Carolina, was killed by police after staggering for help following a car accident. The case went to a mistrial and the officer who killed him received over $100,000 in back pay. Yvette Smith, in Bastrop County, Texas, was shot and killed by police after opening her front door. Police had inconsistent statements about whether or not she was armed. The case also went to a mistrial. Walter Scott, in North Charleston, South Carolina, was shot and killed by police and had evidence moved closer to his dead body by the officer who shot him. Also in Charleston, nine African Americans attending church were slaughtered by a young white man who was fearful of a race war. He was arrested without violence, including a Burger King trip on his way to jail. Eric Garner, in New York City, was filmed being choked to death by police for selling loose cigarettes while shouting, “I can’t breathe.” The officers were acquitted of any wrongdoing. Michael Brown, in Ferguson, Missouri, was shot and killed by an officer while he had his hands up. Should you need more contemporary evidence, there is the racial wealth gap, the racial education gap, the racial unemployment gap, the racial homeownership gap, studies showing Black Americans receive unfair treatment with loans, job applications, and job evaluations, and studies showing whites view Blacks as threatening even as children. Lastly, feel free to check the comments section of your favorite website.

Reverend Traci Blackmon, a St. Louis-area pastor and activist, following the killing of Michael Brown commented, “Let me be clear. If it had not been for the fortitude and fierce resilience of the millennials of FERGUSON . . . the ones who have occupied the streets . . . the front lines . . . the jails . . . the Internet over these last four hundred+ days . . . NOT the meetings . . . not the funders . . . not the engagements . . . not the awards . . . not the accolades of anyone . . . not the commission. . . . But because of the ones who risked it all. . . . That we just watched a panel of white candidates (save 1) who are running for President declare “Black Lives Matter!” Not the slogan . . . but the sacrifice. Before August 10th (the militarization of the police vs. the might of the people) that would not have happened. There is a new attempt to change this country to acknowledge and redress both historical and contemporary harms against Black people. This begins by recognizing the actual value of Black lives and protecting those lives. “To matter” here seems analogous to “to have value,” particularly since my (generous) understanding of the “All Lives Matter” position is to refute the erroneous claim that only Black lives have value by claiming that all lives have value. Value theory, in fact, can be used as a catch-all term for a large number of branches of philosophy that engage in evaluation, e.g., moral philosophy and aesthetics. What does it mean, then, for Black lives to have value? Is it value with regard to humanity (Blacks are humans like everyone else, therefore have the same value as everyone else), or value with regard to rights protection (Blacks are citizens deserving of equal protection under the law)? Because this movement has a largely de-centralized structure, I am interrogating the spirit of the movement regarding the relationship between mattering and having value. The goal of this essay is thus twofold: to explain an understanding of Black lives’ value that activists nationwide promote using three non-canonical philosophers often cited by activists; and to note limitations that canonical philosophy displays in lacking usefulness within a contemporary movement founded on a normative ethical position. It should give Black citizens hope for the country that a potential president of the United States agreed that Black Lives Matter and that this position is historically conscious and politically appropriate. It is not clear that Black philosophers should maintain that same hope for philosophy since Black Lives Matter is a normative statement supported by a set of beliefs informed by theorists that are often not considered philosophers.

Black Lives Matter is more than a slogan; it is a normative call to action regarding the treatment of Black people in this country, including LGBTQ members of the Black community who are further marginalized by both society at-large and the Black community. It is not merely a call to white America to recognize systemic inequality and the contemporary perniciousness of racism. It also functions as a call to Black America to recognize systemic inequality and the contemporary perniciousness of racism. It also functions as a call to Black America to recognize systemic inequality and the contemporary perniciousness of racism. It also functions as a call to Black America to recognize systemic inequality and the contemporary perniciousness of racism.
goodness to Elizabeth Anderson’s *Imperative of Integration* and its insistence on the social, moral, and political value of integration policies. Given this history, canonical Western philosophy appears to have tools to provide the foundation for any argument regarding the value of Black lives in America. Contemporary Black activists do not cite ancient philosophers like Plato, modern philosophers like Kant, or political philosophers like Rawls. These thinkers are useful in developing fundamental bases of ethical or political systems, but few if any canonical philosophers are utilized to develop the “Matter” in Black Lives Matter. Revolutionary thinkers like Assata Shakur, critical legal scholars like Michelle Alexander, and social and political theorists like bell hooks form the ground upon which the Black Lives Matter understanding of the value of Black lives is built. That speaks poorly for the value that canonical Western philosophy possesses in framing current social and political matters for many young Black people.

**SHAKUR, ALEXANDER, HOOKS: BUILDING A VIEW ON THE VALUE OF BLACK LIVES**

Assata Shakur, aunt of famous rapper Tupac, was a member of the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army. Her willingness to use her life to confront state violence that Blacks regularly felt helps constitute the spirit of the current movement. She fled to Cuba in 1984 after escaping prison following a shootout with New Jersey police and has not returned since. Her lived experience is a referendum on the depth of sacrifice many activists share—a desire to use their lives to improve conditions for Black Americans using whatever means they can access. There are two popular maxims of hers amongst activists that demonstrate these means. One, from her autobiography, *Assata: An Autobiography,* ends nearly every action: “It is our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love and support each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains.” Her language of duty pulls from a deontological framework; it is what one ought to do, whether one wants to or not, because doing so affirms one’s humanity. Following this duty to fight for and win freedom is necessary to do because Blacks are human, not to prove Blacks’ humanity. She challenges Blacks to affirm their humanity in the face of a world that normally disqualifies their humanity. She maintains the non-ideal conditions of a white supremacist framework as the starting point for articulating an affirmation of the value of Black lives, showing that the notion of value she is designing responds to the bleak conditions many Black Americans find themselves in. Because Blacks are owed freedom, they must continue to push for liberation and equality.

To that end, she says, “Nobody, nobody in history, has gotten their freedom by appealing to the moral sense of the people who were oppressing them.” Black Lives Matter is a normative statement, not an open question. This appeal is not based upon moral suasion arguments regarding the humanity of Blacks. As you look at the various rallies, marches, protests, and discussions with policymakers, presidents and future presidents, the appeal to the value of Black lives is centered on a view of Blacks as citizens who are not receiving equal opportunities or equal protection under the law. Though accurate, moral suasion arguments have not proven useful for consistently achieving gains for Black Americans. Shaming or guilting white America into changing its position about the treatment of Black Americans likely peaked when mass media showed the brutal police tactics in the 1960s. Instead, they highlight the hypocrisy in this country between the treatment of Blacks and whites by the criminal justice system, expose systemic inequality, and ultimately say that this cannot keep happening.

Michelle Alexander is a legal scholar and civil rights litigator who wrote *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness,* which established an important set of harms that Black Lives Matter sprang forth from: the disenfranchisement of Blacks through the criminal justice system and its disproportionate targeting of Blacks. Alexander notes, “No other country in the world imprisons so many of its racial or ethnic minorities,” with roughly 2,200 Blacks incarcerated per 100,000 compared to 380 whites per 100,000 for the United States. Her work provides background considerations that demonstrate the level of disenfranchisement Blacks experience from the current justice system which should be unconscionable for a country to do to its own citizens. The background considerations that she engages are the legally justified disenfranchisement of Blacks in the creation of the Jim Crow system. State and municipal governments used creative reasons to imprison Blacks and by doing so, removed access to their civil liberties. The Center for Law and Justice describes the premise of her project:

More African Americans are under the control of the criminal justice system today—in prison or jail, on probation or parole—than were enslaved in 1850. Discrimination in housing, education, employment, and voting rights, which many Americans thought was wiped out by the civil rights laws of the 1960s, is now perfectly legal against anyone labeled a “felon.” And since many more people of color than whites are made felons by the entire system of mass incarceration, racial discrimination remains as powerful as it was under slavery or under the post-slavery era of Jim Crow segregation.

On her view, the War on Drugs and its disproportionate penalties helped re-create a racial caste that formally existed with Jim Crow. The racial caste system morphed from legal segregation into mass incarceration of Black Americans. This led to the revocation of civil liberties for the incarcerated (such as voting) and the acceptance of civil penalties after serving time, including an inability to gain student loans or live in public housing. This awaits those who survive the school-to-prison pipeline that begins with increased punishments for Black children as early as preschool.

Alexander has her finger on the pulse of Black America’s tension with the criminal justice system. Many of the aforementioned were killed for crimes that many whites have either been excused for or arrested without incident. To be sure, working-class whites have not been unsathed in the process of mass incarceration, as they are also a vulnerable economic target in the criminal justice system,
In "Love as the Practice of Freedom," hooks cites M. Scott Peck to define love. He defines love as "the will to extend one’s self for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth."62 She later comments, “Acknowledging the truth of our reality, both individual and collective, is a necessary stage for personal and political growth.”63 hooks’ position regarding the transformational nature of love (which includes the profound idea of using the pain of one’s own life in order to develop both the political and personal) demonstrates Blacks’ value in the world. Love, for hooks, is a practice, one that Black people deserve to participate in, as love affirms one’s humanity in a world that regularly dehumanizes Blacks. Blacks are not the only people who should practice love, as every person deserves love. If love is universal in that every person should participate in practicing love, then Black lives’ value is equal to everyone else’s lives insofar as humanity is concerned. Black people’s existence as people in the world is valuable on the same grounds that any other group of people’s existence is valuable—because Blacks are humans, capable of and deserving of the transformational love hooks champions as necessary to revolutionize the world.

All three thinkers shared the notion that non-ideal conditions are the proper starting point for understanding of the perceived and actual value of Black lives. This location includes beginning with the lived experiences of oppressed people. The claims about the value of Black lives do not center on being valuable in virtue of the mere existence of Black people, rather because of the kinds of people Black people are—humans and citizens. When people chant “Black Lives Matter,” they are arguing that Black lives have value because they are the lives of fellow citizens who are being denied rights and opportunities and because they are human lives that are deserving of compassion and love. Shakur, Alexander, and hooks are just a few of the influential thinkers on modern activists.64 What we should be wondering is why these thinkers are being called upon to help answer the question of value within a society rather than more well-known philosophers who have written extensively on the issue.

**CANONICAL PHILOSOPHY AND THE MILLENNIAL ERA OF SOCIAL JUSTICE**

To close, let me offer a review of the Western philosophical canon’s inability to connect with a Black millennial audience.
engaging in questions of justice. Shakur, Alexander, and hooks are part of a larger discourse that seeks to assert the incontrovertible value of Black lives, and yet they commonly aren't required philosophical material and some would say not even philosophical. The honesty regarding the current scenario for Black Americans painted by all three resonates strongly with young Black leaders and activists. They speak directly to questions that many young Black people have burning on their minds right now. Save for the very recent (and likely not quite canonical but professionally acceptable) development of Africana philosophy, canonical philosophy largely avoids dealing with the problems of being an oppressed minority in society. That said, there is a history of Black philosophers using the canon to address issues of being a minority in society. People like Angela Davis, Bill Lawson, and Leonard Harris have cleared the path for future generations of Black philosophers by doing this, but their work was often considered at the margins of philosophy. This is a shame, as the development of considerations for achieving justice in our non-ideal society is the kind of project philosophers should take up, discuss, and develop. Except, as Charles Mills notes, "race has not traditionally been seen as an interesting or worthy subject of investigation for white Western philosophers" and the few who take the plunge usually discuss the rights and wrongs of affirmative action. This is because of a limited understanding of what canonical philosophy should be, tucking the ivory tower safely away from the impending storm of diversity. Philosophy (as a discipline with a strict understanding of what is philosophy and who is a philosopher) should be embarrassed at its inability to resonate with a group of people who are grappling with real-world ethical dilemmas rather than thought experiments, people who are crafting policies that redress past and present harms to an actual group rather than a possible world. Unfortunately, this quote from Assata may shed light on what Black Americans feel about the value of philosophy in assisting on these matters: "Before going back to college, I knew I didn't want to be an intellectual, of philosophy in assisting on these matters: "Before going back to college, I knew I didn't want to be an intellectual, speaking my life in books and libraries without knowing what the hell is going on in the streets. Theory without practice is just as incomplete as practice without theory. The two have to go together." 

NOTES

1. I would like to thank the 2015 CSLEE Values and Leadership Conference for the feedback I received on this project.
2. One deputy did get convicted for cruelty to an inmate. The other was convicted of perjury (see McKay, "Deputies Acquitted in Killing of Inmate Matthew Ajibade.
3. They ultimately rescinded the suit after public pressure and scrutiny. Shaffer, "Cleveland Wants Tamir Rice Estate to Pay Ambulance, Life Support Bills.
5. Murray, "Dash-cam Video Played in Murder Trial of Former Deputy.
9. The median income for Blacks is roughly $5,000—over twenty times fewer than whites. The recent Great Recession exacerbated this gap. See Luby, "Worsening Wealth Inequality By Race."
10. Although Black women are the most educated demographic in the country (see National Center for Education Statistics), the gap between Blacks and whites of equal education level still exists. Cook, "U.S. Education: Still Separate and Unequal."
12. Vega, "Black Wealth Not Protected By Home Ownership."
14. Another recent study (Todd, Thiem, and Neel, "Does Seeing Faces of Young Black Boys Facilitate the Identification of Threatening Stimuli?" noticed that the dangerous Black male stereotype extends to children.
16. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2012) offers this definition of value theory, and it is this sort of broad-based understanding of value that I am using the term.
17. Hilary Clinton and Bernie Sanders have echoed this sentiment, with Sanders saying during the October 15, 2015, Democratic Presidential Debate: "The African-American community knows at any given day, some innocent person like Sandra Bland can get in a car and three days later end up dead in jail. Or their kids will get shot. We need to combat institutional racism from top to bottom and we need major, major reforms in a broken criminal justice system." See Vega, "Black Wealth Not Protected By Home Ownership."
18. See McCready, "Understanding the Marginalization of Gay and Gender Non-Conforming Black Male Students" and Fogg-Davis, "Theorizing Black Lesbians within Black Feminism: A Critique of Same-Race Street Harassment."
19. Anderson's work focuses on the positive arguments for integration given nonideal conditions, emphasizing a genuinely inclusive democracy.
21. The "nothing to lose but our chains" is reminiscent of similar revolutionary language from Marx's Manifesto of the Communist Party, where he says the proletariat has nothing to lose but its chains.
23. In the aftermath of many of the aforementioned killings (many available to watch on the Internet), a significant part of the public response was to believe that officers had no other choice but to kill in these scenarios. I imagine that for many of them, sending the dogs and spraying fire hoses would be justified actions for people who support what must be a criminal since he or she was killed by police.
26. See the Center for Law and Justice, "Summary of New Jim Crow."
27. Thanks to laws like the 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act, crack possession and other drug offenses that were associated with Blacks received much harsher sentences than powder cocaine, which was associated with whites.
29. An example of the argument: Blacks are responsible for their relative social, political, and economic position due to their own behaviors rather than structural influences; these actions are not
empowering to American citizens for maximizing their potential. Therefore, Blacks earned their disenfranchisement and do not possess much value as citizens. This argument errs in mistaking Blacks’ value as citizens as solely their placement on the social totem pole.


32. Ibid., 247.

33. Ibid., 248.

34. Brittney Cooper, the Crunk Feminist Collective blog, Angela Davis, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Ta-Nahesi Coates are a few of the influences on today’s activists.

35. Ignoring the philosophical problems Alexander raises of justice as an oppressed minority in society because she is not a professional philosopher is an example of philosopher’s gatekeeping that often rejects problems related to the Black experience.


37. One could argue that canonical philosophy itself does not lack the tools needed to address these questions. Activists just are not familiar with the appropriate philosophers to help articulate their view. This objection, however, assumes that the specific problems Black Lives Matter addresses are already present in or accessible via the canon. Thanks to Jake Fay for bringing this up.


REFERENCES


Beyond Tradition: A Short Rumination on Africana Philosophy and Nihilism in 21st Century America

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An American Philosophical Association newsletter dedicated explicitly to Africana philosophy in the beginning of the twenty-first century is as timely as was W. E. B. Du Bois’ famous announcement of the relevance of the problem of color in the beginning of the twentieth century. Within the discipline of Black existentialism there is a particularly important debate going on raising serious questions concerning the prospect of future qualities of life for Black people in a well-documented anti-Black racist United States of America. With an increasing number of cases being brought forward of police officers raping Black women (and men), disturbing amounts of unsuccessful cover-ups of police murders, and brutalization of Black peoples being revealed, alongside emerging information regarding lead-water poisoning in the Black communities of Flint, MI, as a cost-cutting measure for the state, as examples, the phenomenon of nihilism as it is experienced and faced by the inheritors of these lived existential threats and realities induces serious philosophical questions.

Philosophical analyses sometimes tend to focus on questions of Black pessimism and optimism in relation to the ability of American socio-political institutions to address the most pressing needs of Black American life, in addition to ontological questions around the realist nature of anti-black racism’s relationship with American culture and its lived experience through Blackness. I have created a philosophical framework that situates these debates within a deeper discussion concerning the philosophical relationship between nihilism and anti-Black racism. I argue that the issues underlying the above-mentioned questions go beyond choices between optimism and pessimism. Furthermore, whether racism is treated as on par with forms of metaphysical reality or not, the question of and answer to what must be done remains the same: one must fight for values beyond these traditions. I distinguish between the concepts of pessimism and nihilism, and further distinguish between the categories of strong, or what Friedrich Nietzsche called active, nihilism, and weak or passive nihilism. In raising the question of whether or not one ought to be optimistic or pessimistic regarding the ability of American sociopolitical and cultural life to address the needs of Black people, one may miss the underlying question of how human existential reality situates us in relation to the processes of transitioning from dying to living values. I argue that anti-Black racism is a form of weak nihilism that ultimately attempts to arrest the existential development of all parties involved, and which requires strong nihilism preceded by a form of pessimism that avoids some of the idealist pitfalls that may be carried along with certain forms of racial realism in order to be overcome.

Pessimism as a form of racial realism is weak nihilistic in response to the weak nihilism of anti-black racism; it treats the existential phenomena as if it were an ontological and metaphysical reality. A strong nihilistic response to weak nihilism rejects all human values attempting to ontologize themselves. What I am suggesting requires examining the philosophical relationship between the existential category of nihilism and the phenomenological experiences of anti-Black racism. I mobilize the thought of Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche, Cornel West, Derrick Bell, and Franz Fanon in articulating the interconnections between race, racism, and nihilism. To do this I develop Nietzsche’s understanding of European nihilism as containing both “strong” and “weak” dimensions, further developing Nietzsche’s original distinction in terms of being “active” and “passive.” I argue that weak nihilism manifests itself in anti-Black racism, and I suggest ways in which one ought to respond.

In a dissertation entitled “A Philosophical Analysis of Nihilism and Anti-Black Racism,” I argued that anti-Black racism depends on transcendental philosophies of modern Europe which ultimately conflate rational human cognition with certain modes of European anthropology, comprising an anti-Black racist, white-normative, philosophical anthropology that undergirds Western humanities in a variety of ways up and through this day. In other words, anti-Black racism relies upon the weak nihilism of traditionally modern European understandings of the meaning and value of whiteness in human life, which I call “white nihilism.” Anti-Black racism is a form of weak nihilism that conditions the situation of cultural meaninglessness and socio-political invisibility constituting the existential parameters of Black life, which I call “Black nihilism.” My research suggests that the active dimensions of Black nihilism responds not only to the meaninglessness conferred onto Black life through the lived situation of anti-Black racism, but also to the weak nihilism of modern European modes of valuing conditioning it. As a result of the implicit nihilism inherent in anti-Black racism, Black existential life occupies a Black nihilistic situation. One can respond to this situation either weakly or strongly. Passive/weak nihilism is the inability to value human phenomenal projections without depending upon metaphysical ideals. Active/strong nihilism is the ability to value human values without depending upon metaphysically situated ideals. I conclude that strong Black nihilism is the healthier response to nihilism and anti-Black racism because it involves a transvaluation of traditional forms of anti-Black racist valuing, which exemplifies a commitment to the language and action of constructing non-decadent human worlds premised upon the limitations of existential freedom and responsibility for all human beings.

My situating of the question of the future potentialities for value productions of meaningfulness in Black life has bearing on the now vibrant debate between what some are calling Afro-pessimism and Afro-optimism. The question of whether Black people ought to view their prospects in the United States of America optimistically or pessimistically is
I envision a potential third way, which I am in the process of developing into a larger monograph. Where Afro-pessimism misconstrues legitimately pessimistic dimensions of Black life as fundamentally precluding Black social meaning, some Afro-optimism nevertheless tends, in the words of Jared Sexton, to work “away from a discourse of black pathology, only to twerse right back into it,” especially where the notion of the Black self is concerned. Sexton’s argument that something “new” might be “unfolding in the project or projections of afro-pessimism,” and that, ultimately, “we might create a transvaluation of pathology itself” invokes explicit dimensions of this debate upon which my research bears direct significance. My conception of Black nihilism is one where pessimism and strong nihilism (and thus, an ironic form of optimism) are necessarily related phenomena; each comprise dimensions of healthy existential development in response to anti-Black racism. However, if not disambiguated in the ways my research attempts to make clear, this potential-filled debate may run the risk of a stalemate.

Pessimism involves the rejection of all metaphysical ideals. Nihilism is the attempt to value anew in light of the truths of pessimism. However, the prospect of valuing in light of the truths of pessimism requires strength against potentially debilitating experiences. Attempts to value that rely on metaphysical conceptualizations demonstrate a failure of strength to move beyond that which entails decadence. It is the decadence of anti-Black racist ideals and existential realities that must be moved beyond regardless of whether one considers the nature of anti-Black racism to be idealist or not. For instance, a thinker like Derek Bell’s conceptualization of anti-Black racism would be appropriately pessimistic of anti-Black racism in its rejecting of the metaphysical bases upon which the ideals tend to be promulgated. One’s prescription for developing legal programs within such realities, as Bell persuasively argues, for instance, must take the reality of anti-Black racism seriously if Black existential life is to be made socially-politically sufferable at all. The point is, however, whether one chooses to treat this sociopolitical reality as permanent in some metaphysical way or not, the question of what it means to value beyond these modes of traditional valuing ultimately remains. My argument is that strong nihilism, through the struggles of pessimism and despair, is the way to healthily move beyond tradition in attempts to do more than cope and/or make the insufferable sufferable.

It may be the case that we have reached a point in Western world history where increased colonial confrontations with “others” have created dimensions unprecedented and utterly exhaustive of the limitations of traditionalist anti-Black racist, as well as anti-racist, Western humanistic traditions. The question of moving forward, realized through discussions of Black nihilism and anti-Black racism, at least in the ways in which I have framed the discussion, can provide a powerful lens for what it may mean to value humanity anew in the twenty-first century and beyond. I hope my subsequent work alongside this short essay serves as a call for thought around the subject of developing critical theoretical frameworks within Africana philosophy and Black nihilism contributing to a forward-looking, non-decadent, global articulation of what it means to fight for the freedom and responsibility of all human beings.

NOTES
3. Ibid., 177.
5. Ibid., 24.
6. Ibid., 28.

BOOK REVIEW
White Privilege and Black Rights: The Injustice of U.S. Police Racial Profiling and Homicide

Reviewed by Clarence Sholé Johnson
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This book is a timely, focused examination of the recent epidemic of well-publicized extrajudicial killings of young Black men by law enforcement personnel (legal authority) and white vigilante (nonlegal) self-appointed custodians of public order. Ryan Gabrielson et al., citing a ProPublica analysis of federally collected data on fatal police shootings, report that “Young black males in recent years were at a far greater risk of being shot dead by police than their white counterparts—21 times greater.” Continuing, the authors provide the following statistics to substantiate their claim: “The 1,217 deadly police shootings from 2010 to 2012 captured in the federal data show that blacks age 15 to 19 were killed at a rate of 31.17 per million, while just 1.47 million white males in that age range died at the hands of police.”
By investigating the nature of the sociopolitical and legal climate within which such killings occur, Naomi Zack brings attention to the racial injustice Black men are experiencing in that such killings abridge their constitutional rights simply in virtue of their race. And such injustice runs counter to the ideal of a just and fair society that the U.S. professes in its Constitution. The main thrust of Zack’s position is that the policies and practices in the society that allow for, if not explicitly sanction, the homicide of Black men both by law enforcement and by unauthorized others are blatant transgressions of constitutional protections guaranteed to all citizens, including Black men, and so need to be looked into. It is such an examination she undertakes in the three chapters that comprise this book.

In chapter 1, “White Privilege, Entitlements, and Rights,” Zack delineates three cardinal concepts in sociopolitical discourse of social justice and brings out their significance for the existential predicament of Black men. These concepts are privilege, entitlements, and rights. In chapter 2, “Black Rights and Police Racial Profiling,” Zack takes a critical look at how police racial profiling contravenes a fundamental tenet of the U.S. Constitution, namely, the Innocence Clause, which states that an individual is presumed innocent of a criminal wrongdoing until proven guilty. And in chapter 3, “Black Injustice and Police Homicide,” she establishes a causality between police racial profiling and the homicide of Black men. There is an organic link among all three chapters, so in what follows I will elaborate some of the most important issues Zack addresses and comment on her treatment of them.

Zack commences her investigation with a discussion of the concepts privilege and rights and brings out their implications for the unsavory treatment of Black men by law enforcement personnel in the U.S. Antiracist scholars of social justice issues generally view social inequities in the U.S. as a function of white privilege, a distributive paradigm that favors whites and disadvantages people of color, especially Blacks. So they critique white privilege, disparage and disavow it, and advocate a system that would equalize opportunities for all so that nonwhites too can gain benefits undeterred. In this way, they hope that all persons would be treated fairly. But Zack thinks it is mistake to focus on white privilege because a privilege, she says, is a mere extra benefit, “an extra perk,” that a person happens to have (3; also xiii). The individual may have this benefit owing to her/his standing in the society or her/his feeling of superiority in the society, but it is not an entitlement, the denial of which constitutes a violation against that person. Zack’s point, put otherwise, is that a person to whom such extra perks are denied does not suffer an injustice even if the rationale for the denial is the person’s race, gender, or other characteristics. Undoubtedly, such denial is morally repugnant, but it does not constitute an injustice against the denied person. This is because injustice applies only where a right is violated, and since one does not have a right to a privilege, “an extra perk,” there is therefore no injustice if a privilege is denied. Zack illustrates this point with an analogy of membership in a golf club or a country club. That a person is privileged to be a member in any such club does not violate any rights of another person to whom such privilege is not extended. In this regard, even assuming that white privilege violates our moral norms or offends our moral sensibilities, it does not violate the rights of others who are not white and are thus racially unprivileged. What, then, is a right?

A right, unlike a privilege, is an entitlement to which a person, qua person, lays claim. It is “a moral condition of human life that precedes law and political action” (40). A right may be codified into law, but its existence is prior to its codification. It is this preexisting feature of a right that is sometimes encapsulated in the term “inherent” or “natural” in sociopolitical discourses, such as in the phrase “the right to life.” The implication of calling a right “inherent” or “natural” is that the right is inalienable and thus inviolable. All that laws or stated documents do, such as the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, is to make explicit these features of a right. Accordingly, when a person is deprived of her/his right because of race, gender, or other modalities, then an injustice has been committed against that person. Such injustice is called a violation of the person’s right.

In the context of the racial violence against Black men, especially by law enforcement, Zack’s overall aim in distinguishing between a right and a privilege is to show that the concept of white privilege is inadequate to address the fundamental issue at stake in police violence and sometimes killing of Black men, namely, the transgression of the constitutional rights of Black men. The concept white privilege is inadequate because, as Zack says, what is sometimes mistakenly referred to as white privilege is, in reality, a right to which whites and Blacks are entitled, but which is protected for whites and denied Blacks especially in encounters with law enforcement (4). It is the consequence of this state of affairs in the lived reality of Black men, their homicide by law enforcement in particular, that Zack thus brings out in the succeeding chapters. But before turning to her discussion in these chapters, let me briefly comment on what I consider a grave error that I believe Zack makes in her discussion of white supremacy.

Attendant to the distinction she draws between a privilege and a right, Zack argues that while white privilege advantages whites and disadvantages Blacks (and people of color generally) in the U.S., this state of affairs does not automatically entail white supremacy or justify calling the U.S. a white supremacist society as some would have it. White privilege as described may be racist, she says, but it is certainly not white supremacist (7-8; also 36). This is because racism in the distributive paradigm is a bias towards a person’s own race. It is like ethnocentrism, which is a bias that favors a person’s ethnic group. White supremacy, on the other hand, is an ideological declaration and characterization of a society as of a particular type, and this characterization is enacted into law and is upheld and enforced by and through various institutions, policies, and practices in the society. Such a state of affairs obtained, for example, in apartheid South Africa and Rhodesia. At an earlier time in U.S. history there were such formal documents and instruments that specified racial boundaries between Blacks and whites, wherein the two groups were designated separate housing, separate public facilities such as schools, restrooms, and the like, and members of both groups were
legally prohibited from entering into marital relations with each other. But this is not the case now. There is no formal document at present that demarcates and separates racial groups or that characterizes the U.S. as a white supremacist society; therefore, the U.S. is not a white supremacist society (35-36).

Zack is correct that there is no formal/ideological declaration that the U.S. is a white supremacist society. However, she cannot deny that in practice her position is overwhelmingly belied by the facts of Black experience. Since a condition of receiving the “extra perks” is that one be white, and since the society is structured in such a hierarchical way that power invariably resides among whites who constitute the dominant group, and added to these facts is the pervasive belief among whites that they are superior to people of color, then, clearly, we have white supremacy practically at work insofar as white supremacist beliefs influence the distributive paradigm. On this showing, white privilege is intertwined with and directly follows from white supremacist beliefs.

The ubiquity of white supremacist beliefs can be demonstrated further. Consider the recent killing of nine Black parishioners of the historic Mother Emanuel AME church in South Carolina by a white supremacist, Dylann Roof, during a prayer meeting. As reported in various news outlets, Roof was motivated by white supremacist beliefs. Indeed, every so often Blacks have had to endure and sometimes challenge what they perceive as the expressions or manifestations of white supremacist beliefs by prominent, powerful, and influential white individuals. Examples here include some of the acerbic and unseemly racist insults that have been hurled at President Barack Obama by public figures such as Ted Nugent, Donald Trump, John Sununu, Rush Limbaugh, and others. There is very little doubt that in the minds of such individuals (and their ilk), the U.S. is a white society whose president therefore ought to be white. Accordingly, although not so explicitly articulated, it is contrary to their thinking, and to what they consider the norms of the society, for anyone they consider ontologically inferior to whites to preside over the nation in which whites comprise the dominant group. Theirs is unquestionably a psychosomatic reaction to seeing a Black man as president; hence they will stop at nothing to delegitimize him. Such a belief is clearly white supremacist!

Finally, even the academy of which we are members is not immune to white supremacist belief and practices, a point demonstrated by Leonard Harris as Zack herself has noted (6-7). So, to distinguish between white supremacy and white racism, as Zack seems to do, is to draw a distinction that is invalidated by the pervasive beliefs and practices of the society. And on this note I should point out that, according to Mark Scolforo and Jeffrey Collins of the Associated Press, since the removal of the Confederate flag from state buildings in South Carolina and Alabama, following the outcry about the Charleston massacre by Dylann Roof mentioned above, there has been an upsurge in the purchasing and displaying of the flag in both Northern and Southern states. We know that for Blacks, this flag is the penultimate symbol of white supremacy. So, on this particular score, I think Zack is just plainly mistaken. The U.S. may not be a de jure white supremacist society, but if the evidence I have adduced holds, then it certainly cannot be denied that the U.S. is de facto white supremacist.

Zack’s motivation for the distinction is obviously to highlight the fact that rights violations need not necessarily require or presuppose white supremacy. With this I certainly agree, since not all forms of oppression are racial. Other modalities of oppression are ethnicity, gender, disability, etc. However, since we are talking specifically about the sociopolitical and legal climate within which violence against Black men occurs, I think Zack must accept the brute fact that white supremacist beliefs unfortunately saturate and permeate that climate. It is these beliefs that influence the stereotypical image that is constructed of Black men as violent, unpredictable, and animalistic, and that undergird the brutal racial violence to which they are subject. In fact, it is precisely such beliefs that inform the very racial profiling and the New York Police Department (NYPD) “stop and frisk” policies that Zack discusses in chapter 2. There, she amply demonstrates that those policies abridge both the Fourth and Fourteenth Amendments of the Bill of Rights. The Fourth Amendment proscribes unreasonable searches and seizures, but it is precisely such proscription that is being transgressed when young men of color, but especially Black men, are randomly stopped, detained, and frisked on the presumption that they are potential criminals. The Fourteenth Amendment proscribes, among other things, the deprivation of an individual’s liberty “without due process of law.” But, again, it is precisely such proscription that is violated when young men of color are randomly detained on the basis of the subjective perception (or belief) that they may be up to no good. The Innocence Clause mentioned earlier is what is violated here. In this connection, Zack rightly challenges the statistical basis of police use of racial profiling and “stop and frisk” policies as crime-fighting techniques, namely, the high incarceration rate of African American and Hispanic males in the society. The justification usually given for these techniques as crime-fighting instruments is that criminals in the society are largely African-American and Hispanic males, as evidenced by their high numbers in the prison system. Citing the statistics that “1 in every 15 African American men and 1 in every 36 Hispanic men are incarcerated in comparison to 1 in every 106 white men” (55), Zack responds quite appropriately as follows: “What is overlooked is that these figures entail that most African American and Hispanic men, like most white men, do not commit the kinds of crimes for which police seek suspects. . . . What this focus leaves out is the majority of people in minority groups, who are law-abiding, but are nonetheless, because of their nonwhite appearance (especially if it is black) more likely than whites to be suspected of crimes. If 14 out of 15 or more than 93 percent of African American men are not “in” the criminal justice system, compared to more than 97 percent of Hispanic men and 99 percent of white men, then racial profiling that relies on the racial proportions of convicted criminals ignores the rights of the overwhelming majority who are law-abiding—in all races” (55; emphasis in the original) I could not agree with Zack more. But this all the more makes it quite puzzling that Zack would deny that such racialization is not owing to white
supremacist beliefs and the prevailing power dynamics in the society wherein power is disproportionately held by whites. Her general reluctance to accept the brutal reality of white supremacy in the polity is undercut by some of her own very observations, such as that while it would be inaccurate to say that American police are overwhelmingly white, yet “the culture and attitude of American police officers inevitably reflect who they think criminals are. And they seem to strongly associate nonwhites, especially blackness, with criminality” (34).

This picture that has emerged about the prevailing beliefs about the race and face of crime in the society explains the nature of the relation between law enforcement and African-American males, a relation that Zack takes up in chapter 3 using a haunting analogy of hunter and prey. With young Black men “criminalized” and “animalized,” they become fitting objects to be hunted down and killed as evidenced in the recent spate of extrajudicial killings already noted. Zack’s use of the analogy of hunter and prey is effective to show why such killings have been acceptable to the society at large. As she says,

The hunting of humans by other humans would be criminal homicide in most other contexts. But in the context of young white police officers killing young black males, it is protected by prosecutors, judges, and juries, and accepted by the majority of the white majority, because of respect for the authority of the police and widespread belief, based on the disproportional imprisonment of blacks, that young black males are likely to be criminals, indeed dangerous animals according to long-standing racist mythology. (82; emphasis in the original)

This is a frightening and haunting analogy, but it accurately represents the reality of the relation between young Black men and law enforcement in the society, a relation of which every Black parent, grandparent, and others are all too familiar, and which motivates them to give “the (life-preserving) talk” to their young sons, grandsons, and nephews in order that the young men may not leave home and never return, as was the case with Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Eric Garner, Walter Scott, and others.

Zack has done an admirable job in such a small book by focusing attention on the epidemic of the extrajudicial killings of young Black men in the society by law enforcement and white vigilantes as a violation of the constitutional rights guaranteed to the victims. This focus on rights needs to be taken up further by legal scholars, policy makers, activists, and all those who value and pay homage to the Constitution as the law of the land. For, on the basis of the analysis Zack has advanced, it would appear as if young Black men are existentially situated outside the boundaries of the U.S. Constitution, in which case their lives don’t really seem to matter! Despite my reservations about Zack’s unwillingness to establish a causal relationship between white privilege, white racism, and white supremacy, even as her examination of the issue tends in that direction, I find the work to be absolutely exemplary as it is timely.

NOTES


2. Ibid.


CONTRIBUTORS


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FROM THE EDITOR

Thomas Urban
RETIRED PROFESSOR, HOUSTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE

This issue of the Newsletter on Philosophy in Two-Year Colleges focuses on three separate concerns. One is the value of studying philosophy at a two-year or community college, beyond the aim to earn transfer credits. Two are the pedagogical challenges that face two-year or community college faculty when student educational backgrounds and demographics demand unusual approaches to the selection and presentation of materials from philosophy and its related history. Three is the continuing disparity between adjunct or part-time faculty and their full-time, tenure-track colleagues and what that disparity actually implies relative to the question of justice in the workplace.

Professor Richard Legum of Kingsborough Community College (CUNY) lays out what he deems to be the goals and objectives that philosophy courses ought to target, his basis for assigning value to the study of philosophy in two-year and community colleges. Legum’s article seeks to accomplish this by way of contrasting his understanding of philosophical scholarship at research and four-year institutions with that of teaching that focuses on the development and improvement of certain core competencies, i.e., “understanding, interpreting, and reconstructing arguments, (ii) understanding the criteria for dealing with these arguments in a rational manner, i.e., by evaluating arguments and reasoning; known in the field as informal logic.”

Darren Jones, a community college professor in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, provides our readers a possible approach to matching Legum’s goals and objectives to the presenting challenges one encounters in two-year and community college populations in a discussion that focuses on basic lower division pedagogy, namely, the selection of informative topics and teaching materials, including texts.

Our third article, by Ian M. Duckles of San Diego Mesa College, presents us with an interesting “apples to apples” discussion of the seeming contrasts between adjunct and full-time, tenure-track teaching at two-year and community colleges. By showing an “apples to apples” comparison, Duckles is able to formulate an argument for justice that challenges the more common comparisons one finds based on difference. In part, he is able to do this by developing a case study that draws on his own experience as a longtime adjunct instructor who was ultimately able to move into a full-time, tenure-track position. Duckles sees this case study as something that would be useful in teaching ethics, and also as factual evidence for the absence of justice in an educational system that increasingly relies on part-time faculty to staff its courses.

The fall 2016 inaugural issue of this newsletter stated its aim is to foster a rich discussion concerning the nature and issues that characterize the evolution of two-year and community colleges. It also aims to highlight the great differences one finds from institution to institution, and the great diversity of faculty and students who populate their campuses. We invite all philosophers and students of philosophy to contribute to this discussion, without regard to employment status. A CFP for our next issue appears at the end of every issue.

ARTICLES

The Value of Studying Philosophy for Community College Students

Richard Legum
KINGSBOROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE, CUNY

Anyone attending a college graduation can’t miss the elation on the graduates’ faces. This is even more evident at community college graduations, where many graduates are the first generation in their family to attend college. The faculty takes pride in the fact that they have been able to guide their students through obstacles of school to reach this climax. However, we members of the faculty are not there on the day after graduation, when the graduates descend into an abyss as it sinks in that they are unable to find employment commensurate with their level of education. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that along with their coveted sheepskin many find themselves in significant debt with no obvious means to pay it off. Politicians on one side of the aisle propose to solve the problem by providing a free college education to all qualified students. But that only addressed one side of the equation, i.e., the debt that the student incurred. Politicians on the other side of the aisle propose formulae for economic growth that they believe will increase the number of entry level jobs in careers for college graduates. But the government cannot guarantee robust job growth.

Some of our colleagues in the humanities and social sciences enjoy speculating and/or pontificating on which
of these alternatives is the “right” approach. In fact, some members of the faculty, especially those who view the role of educator as a social reformer, try to enlighten their students as to how to ensure that society does not end up in this “unjust” outcome. This view of “education” is reinforced by some colleges instituting “civic engagement” as an additional graduation requirement.

Rather than preaching their solutions to the impressionable minds sitting in their classes, I will argue that the faculty ought to do some serious soul searching concerning the goals of the education they are tasked to provide. I would suggest that they should focus on the question of what they can do to help provide the students with the requisite skills and knowledge to qualify them for entry level jobs in promising careers. I propose to examine the goals and objectives which philosophy courses ought to target. I will argue that:

1) Philosophy courses, by their very nature, provide the students with an important, perhaps unique, opportunity to acquire a set of competencies that are directly correlated with those cited by employers as being difficult to find in today’s new employees.

2) Philosophy departments at major research institutions fail to focus on these competencies as a result of professors’ parochial views that their primary role is that of philosopher, rather than educator.

3) Philosophy professors at the most selective liberal arts colleges have inherited this same mindset from their mentors at research institutions, the education of their students taking a backseat to their philosophy scholarship.

4) The study of philosophy at community college ought to (and often does) break this mindset because of the nature and mission of the colleges—focusing on the development and improvement of certain core competencies.

5) The core competencies developed by the study of philosophy are those of (i) understanding, interpreting, and reconstructing arguments, (ii) understanding the criteria for dealing with these arguments in a rational manner, i.e., by evaluating arguments and reasoning, known in the field as informal logic.

Philosophy, from its ancient Greek inception, has had the reputation of being a discipline which lacks any practical application. Plato tells a well-known story about the founder of Greek philosophy, Thales, who “[w]hile . . . studying the stars and looking upwards, . . . fell into a pit, and a neat, witty Thracian servant girl jeered at him . . . because he was so eager to know things in the sky that he could not see what was there before him at his very feet.” Plato, well aware of this occupational hazard, continues, “[t]he same jest applies to those who pass their lives in philosophy.” This impression of philosophy did not end two and a half millennia ago. Even during times when a liberal arts education was viewed as the preferred course of study in college, a goal of a college education remained preparing the student for a career.

As a philosophy professor at a two-year college in an era when the study of business is preferred to the study of the arts and sciences, I am frequently confronted with a similar mindset. I encounter it not only on campus, but even at home and in social contexts. I am asked whether community college students ought to be studying philosophy. The underlying premise, put somewhat diplomatically, being that two-year college students should be spending their time in remedial studies and vocational studies that prepare them for a career. Their study of philosophy is an intellectual exercise which at best will be of marginal value, at worst detrimental, to their acquiring the skills that they need to master. Even professional educators, who are well aware of the educational challenges of community college students, express these sentiments. For example, my wife, a twenty-year veteran of teaching history to at-risk high school students, insists that “your students don’t need philosophy; they need training in some skills that will get them a job.”

Are the critics right? Are we two-year college philosophy professors so vested in our thinking about the intrinsic value of philosophy (or so desperate to keep our teaching positions) that we fail to see the obvious flaw in what we are trying to do? I think that the critics are wrong. I believe that studying philosophy has a vital role in the education of two-year college students. Studying philosophy facilitates the students’ cognitive development through the development of skills in argument analysis and logical thinking (what we, in philosophy, call informal logic). Philosophy, in contrast to other academic disciplines, uniquely concentrates on the development of logical thinking skills. As such, I believe that our philosophy courses ought to focus, primarily, on the development of these skills. Moreover, we must exercise care and restraint to avoid focusing too heavily on inculcating knowledge of philosophy—knowledge that we personally value so highly. I will argue that an introductory course in ethics, for example, ought to focus primarily on the logical analysis and assessment of moral arguments, theories, and concepts. Our obligation is to develop our students’ logical thinking skills, enabling them to come to rational conclusion and decision, not to tell them what to believe and decide.

1. THE VALUE OF STUDYING PHILOSOPHY

Bertrand Russell, a luminary of twentieth century philosophy, concluding his book The Problems of Philosophy with a chapter entitled “The Value of Philosophy,” sums up his view as follows:

*Philosophy is to be studied, not for the sake of any definite answers to its questions, since no definite*
answers can, as a rule, be known to be true, but rather for the sake of the questions themselves; because these questions enlarge our conception of what is possible, enrich our intellectual imagination and diminish the dogmatic assurance which closes the mind against speculation; but above all because, through the greatness of the universe which philosophy contemplates, the mind also is rendered great, and becomes capable of that union with the universe which constitutes its highest good.  

For Russell, the value of studying philosophy is not to be found in adding philosophical facts to one’s body of knowledge. The study of philosophy is of practical value only to the extent that it opens and enhances the mind through contemplating philosophical questions and proposed solutions to the same. In an age where annual tuition at private colleges approaches the U.S. median family income, it is extravagant to spend large sums of money for this vague and somewhat nebulous benefit. If this is the value of studying philosophy, the student could accomplish this in less expensive ways: reading philosophy books, watching YouTube videos on philosophy, and taking free online courses about philosophy.

It is interesting that Russell never imagined his philosophical work to have practical and tangible benefits. It is ironic considering that his philosophical work in logic and the foundations of mathematics laid the foundation of the digital era. However, Russell’s life work was that of a brilliant man of letters, not an inventor. Practical considerations did not motivate his work. While Russell’s *Problems of Philosophy* is an engaging introduction to the classical problems of epistemology and metaphysics, there is a better explanation of the value of philosophy to which his comments allude. Studying philosophy is a mind-expanding experience but has practical value. One might wonder whether it is oxymoronic for the words “philosophy” and “practical” to be in the same sentence. However, there is a set of skills sought out by employers which are uniquely developed in the study of philosophy.

Susan Adams writes in *Forbes Magazine* (a leading business magazine), “Can you . . . make decisions and solve problems? Those are the skills employers most want when they are deciding which new college graduates to hire.” The logical thinking skills developed in philosophy cultivate an ability to solve problems and make decisions. Many academic disciplines claim to teach critical thinking skills; however, philosophy is unique in teaching, exercising, and inculcating students to think logically. Critical thinking skills are employed in other disciplines and, moreover, may be essential to success in other disciplines. However, one of the disciplines in philosophy, logic, is uniquely devoted to the study and development of the rules and techniques of rational thinking, i.e., informal logic. The study of philosophy essentially involves the application of informal logic, the essence of critical thinking and decision making.

Why have we philosophers missed this critical educational outcome that we uniquely provide the students? Why have we missed the opportunity to make the case of requiring all students to study philosophy for these important practical benefits? The short answer to these questions is that our interests in the subject matter and our graduate education has blinded us to this vital role for philosophy. I will now turn to clarifying the role that academic programs in philosophy and our having been brought up in these environments have played in our failing to focus on this critical role for philosophy.

2. FOCUS OF PHILOSOPHY IN GRADUATE PROGRAMS

Graduate programs in philosophy are (and ought to be) the training grounds for philosophy professors. Their primary focus is on the development of professional philosophers rather than philosophy professors. It is worth clarifying the distinction that I am employing. Professional philosopher, as I am using the term, is one who works on philosophical problems and questions with the goal of obtaining a solution to these problems or an answer to these questions. A professional philosopher (in contrast to a teacher or professor of philosophy) works to contribute to philosophical literature. The output of a professional philosopher is a written document, a published manuscript, or a presentation. While most professional philosophers have teaching responsibilities and many (perhaps most) take their teaching responsibilities seriously, they are, for the most part, compensated for and evaluated by their contributions to the philosophical literature and their reputation thereby gained for philosophical scholarship.

A philosopher who is a brilliant and talented educator of undergraduate philosophy students, who does not publish and make presentations, will not be a likely candidate for a faculty position in a graduate program (nor for tenure and promotion). A brilliant philosophers who devotes his entire effort to educating undergraduates would not be considered a professional philosopher in this special sense of the term.

The goal of graduate programs in philosophy is to produce professional philosophers. Most faculty members in these programs do teach undergraduate courses. Almost all philosophy departments rely on funding from tuition, especially undergraduate tuition, to keep the department financially afloat. Teaching undergraduate philosophy courses is thus required of faculty members. Teaching undergraduate courses in a necessary condition for the existence of graduate philosophy programs; however, it is not a sufficient condition for their continuing to operate. A graduate program which did an excellent job teaching undergraduates, especially in teaching core general education courses, but produced few professional philosophers would not be viewed favorably by university administrators.

Educating undergraduate students in this environment is on a par with fulfilling department administrative responsibilities such as serving on university and department administrative committees and advising students. I am not suggesting that one will be promoted without having served in these capacities, but they are necessary contributions that faculty members are required
to make to the operation of a department. They are not essential duties of a member of the philosophy faculty.

The essential role of the faculty of graduate programs is that of professional philosophers. One could be a poor undergraduate educator, a minimal contributor to department administration, but be a successful philosophy professor as a result of the person's publications and the publications of his/her graduate students, i.e., on one's success as a professional philosopher. It should be noted that because the primary focus of graduate departments of philosophy is not undergraduate teaching, it does not follow that these departments do not provide undergraduates with first-rate education in philosophy nor that they do not train their budding future professional philosophers with experience that will make them first-rate philosophy teachers.

The pedagogical focus of graduate-level philosophy courses is building the students' corpus of "philosophical" knowledge. What exactly is this corpus of knowledge? I will not try to do the impossible, i.e., define philosophy. Rather, I will answer this question with examples of the subject matter of philosophy courses, how this subject matter is addressed in graduate courses in philosophy, and what students in these courses are required to learn to demonstrate their mastery of this subject matter. In a graduate course in the history of philosophy, for example, the work of a particular philosopher (or group of philosophers) would constitute the subject matter of the course. In particular, the course might focus on the philosopher's (philosophers') answer and support for his/her answer to a particular (or group of) philosophical question.

Remediating or developing basic logical thinking skills is not a focus of graduate studies in philosophy. Graduate programs do not generally accept students lacking in these basic skills. Occasionally, they admit students who have not majored in philosophy as undergraduates, but in general it is assumed that those students will teach themselves any missing skills during the course of their graduate education. Graduate courses develop discipline knowledge, not remedial skills. A consequence of this is that graduate programs and the courses they offer are not models of courses in which basic skills are developed.

Few graduate programs offer courses in teaching philosophy, and virtually none mandates such a course as a degree requirement. The graduate student typically learns how to teach philosophy through an "apprenticeship" program, beginning as a teaching assistant grading papers, graduating to teaching discussion sections, and culminating in teaching an undergraduate course (with little or no oversight and guidance). Striving for excellence in undergraduate teaching and development of excellent undergraduate teachers of philosophy is not an essential focus of graduate programs in philosophy. Moreover, the teaching and remediation of logical thinking skills is not an essential focus of graduate departments of philosophy.

### 3. Focus of Philosophy at Selective Liberal Arts Colleges

Selective liberal arts college philosophy faculties are, for the most part, made up of individuals who have earned Ph.D.s from graduate programs in philosophy. While some graduate programs in philosophy offer training in pedagogy, it is neither a requirement for receiving the degree, nor a requirement for securing the much coveted positions in philosophy at selective liberal arts colleges. Faculty members at selective liberal arts colleges are well aware that their employers expect them to contribute to the overall education of all of the students matriculating at those colleges. Moreover, ads for positions in philosophy at these schools emphasize the need for a commitment to providing a high quality of education to undergraduates. Even though being a talented teacher of philosophy is assumed to be a requirement for such positions, in the hiring process, far greater emphasis is given to the candidate's expertise in his/her areas of specialization and competence. The assumption appears to be that a candidate's depth of knowledge in his/her areas of specialization and competence are indicative of the candidate's capabilities to teach philosophy.

If the sole criterion of obtaining a position at such a school was on the candidate's ability to teach or develop into an excellent teacher of philosophy, candidates would be screened for their teaching ability. It is rare that a candidate for such a position on the faculty is asked to do a "teaching demonstration." Moreover, if any time is spent interviewing the candidate on his/her teaching qualifications, this sort of questioning takes a backseat to the questioning that occurs relative to the candidate's experience and potential as a professional philosopher. For the most part, the letters of recommendation supporting the candidates, usually written by their professors in graduate programs, rarely provide any details concerning the candidate's experience and ability to teach or to develop into a teacher of philosophy. Even if the recommendations contained such details, one might wonder what such a claim is based on given that faculty members rarely observe their graduate students' teaching. The assumption in many candidates' letters of recommendation seems to be that if the person has a deep knowledge of his/her areas of specialization and competence in philosophy, and is able to convey his/her knowledge to colleagues in enthusiastic and congenial fashion, the candidate is or will develop into a good teacher of philosophy.

This lack of focus on pedagogy for candidates for positions in philosophy at four-year colleges continues as one becomes a member of the faculty and as he/she comes up for tenure and promotion. At some colleges the department chair or another member of the faculty observes the junior faculty member's teaching once during the course of the semester or academic year. The purpose of this observation is to provide a documented assessment of the junior faculty member's teaching. It is not required to provide the junior faculty member an opportunity to get feedback to improve one's teaching. There is not much opportunity for a new faculty member to profit from the advice of colleagues with greater expertise and/
or experience in teaching philosophy. There is no forum for canvassing advice on pedagogy and, moreover, there is only downside risk in canvassing such advice. A junior faculty member’s major career concerns are getting tenure and being promoted. Raising pedagogical concerns might only risk the specter that the professor is not discharging his/her teaching obligations in a satisfactory manner. In addition, many senior-level professors, even among the best teachers, don’t feel qualified to dole out advice on how to improve their teaching.

The most available method of getting feedback to improve one’s teaching is via a survey of one’s students. However, students are not in the best position to give professors feedback concerning their pedagogical techniques. Often student feedback is based on personal likes and dislikes related to the course material, the method of presentation, and sometimes on the students’ satisfaction with the grades that they receive on work in the class. In addition, these comments often reflect the learning styles of the individual students. Better prepared students seem to be able to learn regardless of the pedagogy. Their evaluations reflect their level of learning or interest in the subject matter rather than the teaching methods of the instructors. Less well prepared students are unable to discern the difference between difficult material and bad pedagogy.

The students at more selective four-year liberal arts colleges, for the most part, are the better prepared students. These are the students who are going to learn regardless of the professor’s teaching expertise. The professor’s level of knowledge of the subject, rather than his/her teaching expertise, creates the environment in which the students learn. Student engagement in the class is a given because of their motivation to get good grades. In addition, they are able to learn the subject matter of the course on their own.

While undergraduate teaching is a criterion on which faculty members are hired, and de jure, a factor in reappointment, tenure and promotion decision, de facto, it is a minor consideration at many selective four-year colleges. The reputation of the college is maintained not by the quality of their instruction (which admittedly is very difficult to assess), but by the reputation of the department. The reputation of the department is determined by the success of the students in admission to graduate school, professional schools, and employment. In the case of philosophy departments, employment is a minor factor in determining the department’s reputation, if it is a factor at all. Admission to professional schools is largely determined by the quality of the graduating students, measured by their college grade point average and their performance on standardized admission tests like the LSAT, GMAT, and MCAT. This factor in the department’s reputation is probably more closely linked to the admission standards of the entering students and to the rigor of the courses than any issue concerning pedagogy. The one area where a philosophy department can gain reputation is in the admissions of their graduates to graduate programs in philosophy. This part of the department’s reputation is a function of two factors: the reputation of the faculty members and the track record of success for graduates of the department who have pursued graduate degrees, primarily Ph.D.s in philosophy.

A junior member of the faculty quickly learns that presenting philosophy content outweighs skilled pedagogy. Faced with the reality that one only has a few years to establish one’s credentials for earning tenure, a junior faculty member must focus on either researching philosophy or pedagogy. Researching and writing philosophy is something that he/she has spent the last eight to twelve years working on. Teaching philosophy is a means for maintaining one’s existence while one continues to work on completing his/her dissertation. As a result, the new faculty members have developed greater expertise and comfort in writing philosophy than in teaching. Teaching is often viewed as a means to a living that will provide opportunity to continue the research and writing. Given the limited amount of time that one has to build up one’s dossier for gaining tenure, the safe choice is to work on one’s writing over one’s pedagogy. In addition, the junior member of the faculty has found that presenting philosophy to a class in the manner that he/she writes usually results in the students learning the material. Many an excellent teacher has failed to get tenure as a result of not being able to demonstrate their reputation in philosophy. Few individuals with an excellent track record of publications and presentations in philosophy have been passed over for tenure because of their evaluations as teachers. Moreover, it is much easier to evaluate one’s philosophy scholarship than one’s teaching.

Finally, many of those who obtain positions in four-year colleges were also candidates for positions in departments with graduate programs in philosophy. It is not uncommon for an individual philosopher to begin a career at a four-year college and work his/her way up to securing a position in a graduate program. The path upward is usually paved with a list of publications rather than through the development of one’s skill as a master teacher of philosophy. Teaching philosophy, even at selective four-year colleges, is a necessary evil to keep one afloat in a career in philosophy.

Given the role of teaching philosophy at the best liberal arts colleges, the content and focus of courses is on what I would call philosophy content (to be contrasted with philosophical method or skills). Essential to a course in the history of philosophy in such colleges is the philosophical content, i.e., a focus on the work of the major figures in philosophy during the historical period covered. Essential to a course in ethics are the philosophical theories proposed and their solutions to ethical problems. The content of these courses is to build up a well-rounded basis of expertise in the problems of philosophy and the positions of major figures in philosophy. The ultimate goal of philosophy courses is to prepare the student for scholarship in philosophy, i.e., to complete a major or a minor concentration in philosophy. The goal of philosophers at four-year colleges is to ensure that students majoring in philosophy are prepared to continue on in philosophy scholarship—the kind of scholarship that one would undertake as a candidate for an advanced degree in the graduate program in philosophy. A side benefit of developing such skills is that philosophy majors often do well on professional school admissions tests and gain admittance to professional schools.
Thus, the goal or outcome of philosophy courses at four-year colleges, especially the selective colleges, is to ensure that students are well versed in the problems of philosophy and the solutions that have been proposed to these problems by philosophers over the history of the discipline. Another way of putting this is that the goal of philosophy courses is to provide the students with a good base of "philosophical" knowledge.

4. PHILOSOPHY AT TWO-YEAR COLLEGES OR COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Two-year colleges or community colleges are different than four-year colleges. The role of a community college may be viewed as a "halfway house" to a four-year college education or to a technical vocation requiring post-high school education certification but less than a bachelor’s degree (e.g., law enforcement, paramedic, nursing, maritime technology and management). Community colleges generally provide the first two years of college education to high school graduates and holders of graduate equivalency diplomas, many of whom are not prepared to do college-level work. Community college programs seek to remediate the educational deficiencies in parallel with the student completing two-year college credit. As a result, it often takes the students more than two calendar years to complete the program. The goal, which many community colleges are successful in meeting, is for their graduates to be prepared to successfully complete their upper-division classes at four-year schools or to enter the workforce in their chosen vocation.

Students at two-year colleges are more educationally heterogeneous than at four-year colleges. Many, if not most, community colleges have open enrollment, i.e., the only requirement for admission is possession of a high school diploma or graduate equivalency diploma (GED). They often require the student to demonstrate competency in English and math skills and enroll students who are not proficient in remedial courses. The remedial courses prepare students who did not perform well in high school academics, who attended high schools that failed to academically prepare their graduates for college-level studies, and students for whom English is their second language. A significant percentage of students are the first generation in their families to attend college, who often have no educational role models, nor ready access to ongoing advice to help them develop the study skills required for succeeding in college. In addition, many of the students are impoverished and who do not have the luxury of viewing education as being intrinsically valuable, but view education as a ticket to a good job and career, i.e., upward socio-economic mobility.

It is easy to misjudge the academic heterogeneity of the typical two-year college academic class. At many urban community colleges, for example, those of the City University of New York, a professor will find a typical philosophy class filled with students from the entire spectrum of academic abilities and preparation, including one or two (graduates of some of most selective and rigorous academic schools in the U.S., e.g., New York City’s specialized high schools such as Stuyvesant High School, Bronx High School of Science, Brooklyn Tech) who would do well in an Ivy League College alongside students who barely made it through high school. The challenge facing the philosophy professor in that class is keeping students on all ends of the educational spectrum engaged and learning new skills.

Many of the students at community colleges, especially those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, require financial aid to be able to attend school. To maintain their financial aid, these students must take courses for which they will receive college credit, while simultaneously taking non-college credit remedial courses to remediate their educational deficiencies. As such, community college philosophy courses must concentrate on the development of student skills in addition to building knowledge of philosophical content.

In order to meet this objective, the professor’s philosophy scholarship must take a backseat to the development of excellence in teaching and philosophy pedagogy. Community colleges are well aware of their unique educational mission and strive to achieve this objective. This is evidenced in their faculty hiring, promotion, and tenure practices. Even at community colleges which require publication for tenure and promotion. Many, if not most, community colleges do not have a "publish or perish" requirement for tenure and promotion. Even at community colleges which require publication for tenure, publishing on pedagogy is considered on a par with publishing in one’s field.

Community colleges, for the most part, strive to hire faculty members to teach philosophy, rather than publish philosophy. Evidence of teaching competence and an interest in teaching is a requirement for securing a position as a community college philosophy professor. A teaching demonstration is a standard part of the hiring process. The brilliant philosopher who is unable to relate the subject to an average person will not be a good candidate for a position at a two-year college.

The goal of teaching community college students philosophy is not to prepare students to major in philosophy at the undergraduate level. This is especially true today when college is regarded as preparation for a career. The vast majority of community college students have matriculated in order to “get a good job.” Philosophy courses, for the vast majority of community college students, are taken to satisfy a general education graduation requirement rather than as a ticket to a dream job or career. For the vast majority, this course will be their one and only (or one of two) philosophy courses that they will take.

What, then, do philosophy courses have to offer the typical community college student? What compelling reason do they have for taking a philosophy course or two? Bertrand Russell’s explanation of increasing the greatness of the mind through studying the questions or problems of philosophy themselves hardly seems convincing or compelling. It would seem that this could be accomplished in a less expensive way than taking relatively expensive college credits to study the questions of philosophy. One could accomplish this by reading the writings of famous philosophers, reading books on philosophy, or studying
the wealth of information about philosophy available on
the internet, including YouTube videos, Khan Academy,
online encyclopedias of philosophy, etc.

Some philosophers suggest that the value of studying philosophy is its effect on the kind of person that you will become as a result of the study. That is, that studying philosophy, perhaps like practicing transcendental meditation, makes you a better person. I am somewhat skeptical of these claims and would like to see some evidence supporting them. However, even if they are correct, this would be at best an intrinsic value of studying philosophy. It is hard to see how this would provide any practical value to the student, i.e., how this helps to prepare the student for a well-paying career. Moreover, this sort of indoctrination does not appear to be an essential part of a well-rounded education.

Some professors suggest that the value of studying philosophy, like the other liberal arts, is the development of reading and writing skills, thereby hopping on the current "Writing Across the Curriculum" and "Reading Across the Curriculum" pedagogical bandwagons. Focusing on these skills certainly contributes to preparing community college students to undertake upper-level college courses in many disciplines as well as developing skills that are fundamental to securing a good career upon graduation. Professors have justifiably incorporated the development of reading and writing skills into the learning outcomes for their philosophy classes and have designed their courses to meet these objectives.

The downside to this approach is twofold. The first is that other studies in the humanities might be better choices for developing these skills. Using the study of philosophy as a means to this end complicates the process of developing reading and writing skills. The philosophy student must exercise these literary skills, which are difficult to develop, but must do so with an abstract subject matter, philosophical problems, which is difficult to comprehend and requires considerable work to gain the comprehension required to read and write. This added difficulty may be understood in light of Bloom's Taxonomy of learning, which highlights the hierarchy of the development of cognitive skills. The college student, according to this taxonomy, must master the lower-level cognitive skills on the way to developing higher-level skills. The questions addressed in philosophy courses tend to be at the high end of Bloom's Taxonomy. First- and second-year college students are in the early stages of developing the skills required to address questions of these sorts. "Writing intensive" or "reading intensive" philosophy courses not only require students to work to develop reading or writing skills, but also to work on the cognitive skills required to tackle philosophical issues. Other subjects in the humanities may focus on disciplinary issues that do not require higher-level cognitive skills. To meet the objectives of reading and writing intensive courses, significant time must be devoted to the course to the development of these literary skills. To accomplish this, course time devoted to learning the discipline in non-reading/writing intensive sections of the course must be reduced and devoted to developing the reading and writing skills. This means that there is less time in the reading/writing intensive sections that can be devoted to philosophy content and skill development. Understanding philosophy requires devoting time to comprehending the problems addressed, i.e., to the development of the higher-level Bloom's Taxonomy skills. Therefore, disciplines whose study does not require the mastery of these higher-level skills may be as good or better candidates for developing community college reading and writing skills.

The second and, to my mind, more important downside to this approach is that it neglects the fact that studying philosophy develops logical thinking skills. These skills are exactly those higher-level cognitive skills identified in Bloom's Taxonomy which an undergraduate student needs to develop to be successful in upper-division college courses as well as equipping the student for the challenges that are presented in the type of careers which they are attending college to secure. Moreover, studying philosophy uniquely provides the student the exercise and training needed to develop these very logical thinking skills.

I would suggest that philosophy courses are an essential part of a well-rounded community college education and are not merely a "worldview" broadening experience. Philosophy courses uniquely teach the students to look for, understand, and evaluate arguments given to make beliefs or a set of beliefs rational or reasonable. The student is challenged to comprehend and apply the relevant concepts, to clarify the concepts through a process of analysis. The student is then challenged to synthesize various concepts, combining data to lead to a conclusion, and finally to evaluate the reasoning. In the process, the student exercises all six levels of the cognitive domain, i.e., remembering, comprehending, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating (ordered from low to high levels). The learning exercises associated with the study of philosophy can be scaffolded to emphasize cognitive development, beginning with the lower levels and working up to the highest level. For this reason, philosophy ought to be required of all community college students much in the way that certain math and English language skills are required.

I conclude that greater emphasis in teaching philosophy needs to be devoted to the development of these logical thinking skills. I would suggest that this is the case not only for community college philosophy courses, but in all lower-division college philosophy courses. Moreover, it is important to note that this focus ought to be applied in all college philosophy courses, regardless of whether one is a philosophy professor in a community college, highly selective liberal arts college, or major research university. The vast majority of students taking philosophy courses in college are taking the one or two introductory-level classes in the subject. The number of philosophy majors pales by comparison, not to even mention that the number of graduate students in philosophy is a small subset of these. Academic work in philosophy is funded by students in introductory-level courses. Philosophy professors would benefit from concentrating on providing the general studies students enrolled in these classes the skills development that not only is the essence of work in philosophy, but of considerable practical value to the students.
NOTES
4. There are notable exceptions to this. Edmund Gettier, while not a prolific publisher of philosophical literature, was reputed to be an excellent teacher of philosophy graduate students. As a graduate teacher, he produced students who became prominent professionals who as a prolific contributors to the philosophical literature. It should be noted that Gettier was coaxed into publishing his paper "Is Knowledge Justified True Belief?" in order to gain tenure teaching in the graduate program at Wayne State University. This paper, which, to my knowledge, was Gettier's only published paper, spawned a generation of literature from the most prominent epistemologists, and a half century later the Gettier problem continues to be discussed in the philosophical literature. While Gettier may not have personally been a prolific contributor to the philosophical literature, I am under the impression that he was instrumental in assisting colleagues in their work, which did contribute to the philosophical literature. Providing criticism and assistance to others (profession philosophers and graduate students) in their produce philosophical literature itself constitutes contributing to philosophical literature. For this reason, it would be fair to classify a philosopher such as Gettier as a professional philosopher in the sense that I am using the term.
5. There are four-year colleges where greater emphasis is placed on teaching. In addition, over the last forty years greater emphasis has been placed on the professor's role as teacher of philosophy. Even in many of these schools, the problem of finding an objective way of judging pedagogy is elusive.
7. I have ignored an important caveat here, i.e., that logical thinking is a prerequisite for writing (and probably reading comprehension as well). Put another way, in order to write clearly, one must first have arranged his/her thoughts in a logical order.

Lower Division Pedagogy
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Teaching philosophy at a two-year or community college offers particular challenges compared to teaching it at a university or even a high school. The savvy and caring instructor must be ready to confront those issues in order to truly fulfill a mission of enlightening and challenging minds (or sometimes even just staying employed). This paper will be an examination of some of those challenges as well as some possible solutions to those problems. The focus will narrow on three challenges in particular: lower-division teaching pedagogy and consideration, student demographics, and textbook selection. The reader should keep in mind that I write from the experience of teaching in only two of the fifty states in my nation, and from state to state regulations in education differ, as do diversity demographics, K–12 outcomes, etc.

LIFE ISSUES AND CONSIDERATION
A distinctive feature for most, if not all, community colleges is their accessibility. Prospective university students will be tested extensively to see if they can “make the cut” getting into their first- or second-choice school. They wait on bated breath for a letter either starting with “congratulations . . .” or “we regret to inform you . . .”. There will be schools of which the student will think, “I’d better not waste my time (and money) even trying to apply to that school; I’m not smart and/or wealthy enough for that league.” This is seldom the case for the community college student. They will be tested, but mostly for placement. If you meet the near barest minimum of literacy, the community college likely has a (modest but more affordable) path for you. This means the average community college classroom has a wider range of student academic ability, from the brilliant minds dealing with rough life circumstances, to the fresh-from-high-school student with a modest GPA looking to transfer, to the senior citizen who’s been away from the classroom setting for decades but needs some certification for a work advancement. They haven’t all taken the ACT or SAT or college prep courses, so their quantitative, qualitative, and analytical writing skills may need help. MLA or APA citations are either usually completely new or vaguely familiar, but rarely expertly handled. The important term “plagiarism” is often heard and learned for the first time, and so on.

East Baton Rouge, Louisiana, the parish where my current students overwhelmingly call home, statistically performed a full point less than the national average on the ACT in 2005, and 70 percent of students are classified as “at-risk.” As the “at-risk” population increases, student performance outcomes decrease. The best of this group often finds themselves at LSU, if not out of state completely. Those left who pursue higher education often pursue it at lower cost community colleges like the one I work at.

Beyond academic issues, two-year college students will often deal with “life issues” at a higher rate than their university counterparts, and that could easily be due to the structure of the university versus the two-year college. At the community college where I teach, and every community college I’ve ever seen or been to, access to student resources is vastly limited compared to the university experience. There is no dorm system with resident advisors, no meal plans, no on-site doctors, no access to on-site babysitting (as was done in conjunction with my university’s early childhood development degree program), no extensive gym, and no 24-hour library with free printing. So when a student or child of a student gets sick, or work gets in the way, they have a much harder time dealing with these issues at the two-year rather than at the university. Indeed, work, rent, food, children, commuting, and time management (probably the biggest pillars of concern in modern life) just don’t bear down on the university student as much as the two-year student. Add to that the mere demographics differences: two-year students are more likely to be older, have more kids, be working while in school, and in general be dealing with more “life issues.”
What does this mean to the educator at the two-year school? In sum it means the approach with the student both in terms of the pedagogical (how should I teach this person?) and interpersonal (how should I treat/advice this person?) has to be tailored to the environment. Let's start with the interpersonal, but with a caveat. I do not and cannot speak to how all or nearly all universities and faculties act, so some of what I say must be taken with a grain of salt. If you or your school already do these things or better, great! I will be speaking from my experiences as both student and teacher at both two-year and four-year colleges (from roughly 2002 to present), and the differences I noticed therein. The first is the amount of allowances given to the student. Frankly speaking, as an educator you will hear many more "hard luck tales" from the two-year student than the four-year student, due to the life issues bearing down on that two-year student. At the university level, automatic fails for a certain number of missed classes were common. You would receive only so many excused absences, then you have unexcused, and when a threshold of unexcused absences was hit, you failed the class. Game over. This is too punitive for the two-year student. Without a certain amount of "face time" in the classroom, it’s true the student isn’t likely to absorb all that’s needed to be knowledgeable in their subject; but it’s not impossible that they could absorb what they need. Think of comic book character Peter Parker, aka Spiderman. From the perspective of Parker's teachers, he was not a great student. Constantly absent, tired in class, and even though brilliant, he was missing deadlines, assignments, and even tests. The four-year system would very likely have failed Parker, even if he could prove proficiency in the subject. A hardened professor with an axe to grind could fail Parker and be backed by the college’s administration and higher ups, and Parker had a pretty good excuse. Anger and insult at the very idea of a student succeeding without specifically their direct instruction isn’t beyond some higher education instructors; I’ve seen it firsthand. Let me supplement my comic book example with examples from reality.

A student of mine, who I will call "Mary," once told me how she failed a certain math class. Hers was a sharp mind, and she had skill for math such that she could perform well on homework and tests despite missing lots of classes. It turns out she missed classes not because of laziness or anything like that; she was going through a rough breakup and as a result had an uptick in parental duties (picking up her child from school, etc.) that interfered with her schooling. Her math teacher, unlike myself, had a somewhat arbitrary attendance policy (more than X and you auto-fail), along with a suspicion that Mary was somehow cheating. She was forced to drop the class despite having a B, and was set back in time and money. Stories like Mary’s are seen with startling regularity.

Parker, the absentee hero achiever, will not be a common occurrence. More common will be those struggling with kids or rent or worse, and who won’t be achieving despite it all. This is the moment where instructor intervention, even if just in the form of informing a student about their low grade or directing a student with a clear disability to the proper office, could mean the difference between passing and failing. It may mean taking late assignments or giving ethical extra credit opportunities for the student/class. The obligation to go above and beyond, or to be forgiving, isn’t always built into the job contract or to be expected. A nice quote, questionably attributed to Plato, says, "be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle." It would serve us well to remember and consider the battles of our two-year students before more deserving students (and perhaps some heroes) are dropped due to life circumstances. If we want to better serve our students within the two-year system, it means more than a mere "acknowledgement" of life circumstances; it should mean structural support from the school itself, but it really starts with the professor and the syllabus.

**PEDAGOGY**

As we move to how a consideration for the two-year student should affect pedagogy, we can bring in Platonic quotes and ideas not in dispute (the ideas themselves are disputed, but not the fact that Plato had these ideas), specifically the Platonic idea of learning as recollection in the Phaedo. A brief summation of this idea is simply that every person, having an intelligent soul that has existed longer than their body, does not really learn anything new in life but really just remembers it. As the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy states,

"...Phaedo’s discussion of recollection begins with a remark by Cebes in support of the claim that our souls preexist their incarceration in the body: "Such is also the case if that theory is true that you are accustomed to mention frequently, that for us learning is no other than recollection. According to this, we must at some previous time have learned what we now recollect. This is a possibility only if our soul existed somewhere before it took on this human shape" (72e-73)."

To prove this, Plato has Socrates speak to a slave boy about geometry, asking him questions like "isn’t it true that things that are alike are similar? (A = A. True, right?)" and so on, and from those basic axioms, Socrates "proves" that the boy really knows the basic principles and, by extension, the more advanced principles of geometry. Leaving the metaphysical claims about souls and aspects of this aside, there is a more general lesson educators can take from Plato and Socrates: trust the student to be smart, despite his/her "station in life." There are absolutely subjects that I don’t think general life experience can prepare you for. In medical science, for example, no one is born knowing cause and cure for polio. No one is born knowing the components of a car and how to identify and fix car problems. But here logic and philosophy differ from their academic subject cousins. I regularly tell my students that I rarely teach them anything, but rather impart official names to the concepts they are already (somewhat) familiar with. One needs to have a concept of "A = A" in order to function in society without being run over by a car when trying to cross the street. This is the foundation of logic, and logic is the foundation of philosophy (when properly done, in my humble opinion). In philosophy too students will often say of Hume's or Kant's or Descartes' ideas that they had a similar thought and just didn’t have a name for it and were unaware anyone else ever thought it. There's a positive energy and an element...
of self-fulfilling prophecy when a student believes that the professor believes in them that can raise outcomes. Letting the student know that their work lives and family lives can help them in the philosophy classroom contributes to the chipping away of any inferiority complex lurking in the minds of our two-year students. Many studies and articles have been written about teacher expectations and the effect on student performance. A common theme that has developed in this paper is that the two-year student is often dealing with a lot both in terms of their personal and academic lives, and as such will need more consideration than the usual four-year student. While this is true, the two-year student is essentially the same as every other student in that within any given population there will be a multitude of learning styles. This comes to bear more strongly in the classroom where the teacher is expected to serve and adjust to the student, rather than more traditional settings where the student must adjust to the teacher. If you are concerned with dropout rates and the retention of students, the differentiation of teaching styles in the classroom is an important issue. In college, the lecture is the paramount method of instruction, and yet we know that not every student responds best to a long, dry lecture where they are expected to take notes. The two-year philosophy instructor must take differentiation of instruction into account in order to be the most effective. For example, some students appreciate the PowerPoint, while others want the teacher to lecture directly. Some students love to work in groups, while other students (most, in my experience) hate group work. Sticking with only one style is a recipe for disaster down the road.

**STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS AND TEXTBOOK SELECTION**

The diversity of student populations is taken to be an expected and welcome trait among college communities in general. It’s not uncommon to see a written declaration of a commitment to diversity in a school’s mission statement. However, philosophy classrooms seem to be much less diverse (racially, demographically, and sometimes ideologically) than other general classes like math and English. The philosophy department is often much less diverse than the classroom, and the philosophy canon material less diverse than the philosophy department.

In some ways this is not surprising. Philosophy as a class is seen by most students as a quirky elective to break the monotony of required core classes, not a career path or dedicated passion. Philosophy is often the poster child for “a college major that will not make you money,” and so most students don’t think they can “afford” to major in philosophy, and therefore that minority left to dedicate themselves to philosophy are either materially fortunate or very daring. To be clear, often two-year institutions do not offer a philosophy major; however, it’s still important to talk about the value of philosophy to the student regardless. Philosophy, as a discipline, was formally practiced mostly by European and Western peoples. It would be a mistake to attribute the lack of diversity here and there to overt malice or internalized invisible malice, or gate keeping, or other nefarious motives. It would also be a mistake to assume that a student could only or should prioritize, laud, or learn from works of philosophy done by people “sufficiently similar to them.” There are many problems with the idea that the student and the philosopher must be alike, starting with even the bounds of “alikeness.” The most pressing problem with this idea is that it runs counter to an ideal of philosophy to evaluate ideas and arguments on their own merits absent as much as possible the corrupting influence of personal circumstances and biases. The two-year philosophy student should be exposed to these arguments that conclude that the lack of diversity within a text is not enough in itself to dismiss it or cause grievance to be sure, but even so diversity should be pushed in the philosophy classroom. Let’s explore why that is helpful.

Not every student is moved by logical arguments, and if students are dropping out because they are not inspired, that’s a problem. If a student is mentally checking out because they feel insulted that no one who looks (or thinks, or acts, etc.) like them is on the syllabus, in the long run everyone is hurt by that. We should be seeking to inspire students, even in the face of the perfectly tenable idea that the student should logically be fulfilled with what’s available. If introducing different and maybe “nontraditional” texts and authors can inspire students while at the same time entailing no real sacrifice in academic rigor or philosophical argument, why not do it? There is a plethora of material out there by a diverse set of authors and sources such that no classroom should be a boring monolith. Although Plato, Descartes, and Kant are near immovable pillars of the philosophy classroom, theirs need not be the only voices heard. A common mistake is to exclude any text not done under the official banner of ”philosophy” as not philosophy proper. This would leave out Confucius, the Pre-Socratics, and maybe others. Although what they did they did not call “philosophy” (the term is attributed to Pythagoras, and from this a reasonable impulse to say anyone before him was not an “official” philosopher), philosophy was still basically what they were doing. There are other borderline cases. A work of fiction or myth may be a great jumping off point for philosophy, but a parable is not the same as a philosophical argument. There are many methods and modes of expression, but we should still be teaching the art of the persuasive essay. Pop culture can often be a student’s easy gateway into a more complex or troubling idea (the Matrix to explain Descartes’ Cogito anyone?), but there’s a risk that the complexities get watered down. The struggle to be an effective teacher is doing this dance with various sources, trying to remain traditional with the likes of Plato, and trying to appeal to the student with pop culture references and newer material. But this dance is necessary if you truly want to reach as many of your two-year students as possible.

Textbook selection may very well be the most important part in the building of your philosophy class. It will largely determine what subjects you tackle and whose perspectives and ideas you will study; therefore, issues of diversity within the class material can be largely handled here. At my two-year college, I teach an introduction to philosophy class. We do not narrow the focus on Aristotle or Sartre or Nietzsche. Instead, we attempt to cover as much ground...
as we can, so I look for a book that covers many different topics, philosophers, and eras. If the textbook does not have a chapter or significant space set aside for Eastern philosophical traditions, that textbook is not used, period. I make other considerations along similar lines, but this is my number one criteria. Any philosophical or historical discussion that cuts off half of the world seems incomplete.

There’s a saying that all of philosophy is merely a footnote to Plato, and this mentality has made it seem as though all important philosophical work has already been done. I cannot over express how appreciative I’ve seen students get for being introduced to writers and thinkers that are real contemporaries with them. They enjoy reading people who are even still alive at the same time they are, imagine that in a philosophy classroom! They can even communicate (limitedly) through social media with living philosophers and their adherents and actively participate in doing philosophy. Showing the student that philosophy is something happening right now can really reinvigorate a class. The mistake is thinking that anything other than Plato and his ilk would be “low brow” and unsuitable. We need to make use of all the materials and techniques we have to reach the two-year student where they are.

CONCLUSION
There are a lot of other issues facing the philosophy teacher at the two-year college that I haven’t even come close to speaking on, but are no less important. Even issues that do not or seldom involve the student directly, such as other job responsibilities getting in the way of teaching effectively, budget cuts, pay cuts, classes making or not making, class guidelines being changed, and office politics still have a bearing on what happens inside the classroom. Many issues will be familiar to other instructors whether they’re tenured at a four-year or adjunct teaching. I choose to focus on what seemed to differentiate the two-year school the most, and that’s the diversity of our students.

The real challenge is being prepared to handle that diversity in whatever form it may take. That may mean being considerate to the struggling student or being sensitive to the student who feels neglected somehow by the material. It means not writing them off as “unprepared, lazy, entitled” and not operating from a tempting position of “I’m the professor, deal with me and my class as is or go home.”

The community college is different from other colleges, and the community college instructor needs to be different from other instructors. As the campus is more accessible, so too should the instructors and their classrooms be. Two-year institutions are sometimes called a community’s “engine of mobility.” Philosophy teachers are part of that engine, so let’s do our best to contribute.

NOTES
6. Mortimer J. Adler, How to Think About the Great Ideas: From the Great Books of Western Civilization (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 2000).

A Tale of Two Professors: A Case Study in Justice at the Community College
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SAN DIEGO MESA COLLEGE

INTRODUCTION
In January of 2016 I was hired full-time as a tenure-track philosophy professor at Mesa College in San Diego, CA. Prior to this, since 2007 I had been working as an adjunct. Having recently made this transition, I am in a unique position to compare my employment situations before and after becoming a full-timer and analyze the morality of a system that tolerates this two-tiered faculty structure. I will begin by highlighting the differences between my life as a “temporary part-time employee” and as a tenure-track member of the Mesa College Community. Then I will examine the ethical implications of the situation through the lens of a Rawlsian conception of justice, with a particular emphasis on the unjust implications this situation has for adjuncts, students, and full-timers.

My purpose here is three-fold. First, I intend this to be a case study that any instructor could profitably employ in an introductory ethics course. Second, by using my own situation, I am able to make a clearer “apples to apples” comparison between full- and part-timers. While one might argue that full-timers deserve their status due to idiosyncrasies not shared with part-timers, one can’t make a similar claim when comparing part-time me to full-time me. Finally, I intend this to contribute to the criticism of the continued reliance by the community college system on what are variously called adjuncts, contingent faculty, or part-timers.
A quick note on terminology: As I use the terms in this essay, “part-timer,” “adjunct,” and “contingent faculty” will be used interchangeably to refer to instructors who teach less than a full load and are not on the tenure track. “Full-time” will refer to faculty who do teach a full load or equivalent and are tenured or on the tenure track. I recognize that these terms may be confusing to some, especially since there are many schools that have full-time, non-tenure track faculty, or full-time visiting appointments that have a limited term of employment,” or some schools that have tenure-track part-timers. However, in this paper I will use these terms as described above since these are the only two job categories for faculty in the Californian Community College system.1

A TALE OF TWO PROFESSORS

In 2015 I taught a total of seventeen classes: seven during the spring semester, two in the summer, and eight in the fall. For this I grossed $67,778.22. As a part-timer I am only paid for teaching, so if we divide this salary by the number of classes taught, we get a per class total of $3,986.95, which can be rounded up to $4,000.

Thus, twenty-five hours out of forty are devoted to teaching with the remaining fifteen for office hours and other work. I am excluding office hours because as an adjunct I wasn’t paid for holding them. So this means that 62.5 percent of my full-timer salary is compensation for teaching (twenty-five divided by forty). Multiplying my annual salary of $72,659.00 by 62.5 percent gives me $45,411.88 per year as my compensation for teaching with the remaining $27,247.12 being my compensation for office hours and other work for the college. Dividing this classroom rate by ten gives me a per class compensation of $4,541.18.

As a full-timer I am contractually obligated to teach ten classes per year (five in the fall and five in the spring for which I gross $72,659.00. Dividing by ten gives a per class compensation of $7,265.90. However, unlike adjunct pay, which just covers teaching, as a full-timer I have other responsibilities outside the classroom. Fortunately, I work in a unionized school, so there is a Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) that spells out my specific duties over the course of the workweek. According to the CBA, I am obligated to work forty hours a week (while most professors work significantly more, this is how much we are contractually compensated). Twenty-five of these hours are to be devoted to teaching (in my discipline each class meets for three hours a week; I teach five classes, so that works out to fifteen hours a week plus ten hours a week of prep-time), five hours a week for office hours, and ten hours a week for other academic responsibilities such as serving on committees, attending department and school meetings, etc.

As a part-timer I am making just over $4,500 a class. This means that as a part-timer I make about 88 percent of what I currently make as a full-timer. While there is a slight difference in pay rates, it doesn’t appear to be as significant a difference as others have claimed exists. However, if we pry into the details of my situation as a full-timer versus my situation as a part-timer, some other significant differences emerge.

Perhaps the most significant difference concerns job security. While our union has negotiated a robust job security program for part-timers, the protections pale in comparison to the security I have as a full-timer. As a full-timer I am guaranteed payment for teaching five classes a semester. As a part-timer I have no guarantee of employment from one semester to the next, and my job security amounts to seniority rights: part-timers with less seniority lose their courses first.

Closely connected to job security is healthcare. As an adjunct I did receive healthcare if I averaged a 50 percent load over the academic year (this means I had to teach a minimum 3/2 or 2/3 load in my district to qualify for benefits. In practice I tended to teach a 3/3 load). Consequently, if I lost a section or two, this impacted my eligibility for health benefits. By contrast, as a full-timer I am guaranteed benefits (under the CBA and the Affordable Care Act) as long as I remain employed.

A further area of difference involves step and column increases. The adjunct salary schedule offers seven salary columns with multiple steps within each column. One’s placement on the columns is determined by one’s level of education, and one moves through the steps based on the number of sections one has taught. As an adjunct I started at the very top of the pay scale because the highest column is for individuals with a Ph.D., and this column had only one step. So, aside from the occasional cost of living increase (COLA), as an adjunct I never saw my pay increase, and never would see any significant increases for the entire time of my professional career. By contrast, as a full-timer I started toward the bottom of the pay scale, and it will take me a minimum of fourteen years to earn the maximum amount of pay. This means that I can look forward to a significant pay increase of around 3 percent per year for the next fourteen years in addition to any additional COLA increases that I might receive. So, while my per class compensation as a full-timer is fairly close to what I received as an adjunct, in ten years I will be making $6,250 per class while my adjunct colleagues will basically earn the same amount that I earned last year.

Another area of difference concerns the degree of institutional support that I received as an adjunct compared to what I receive as a full-timer. Unlike the other differences I discussed above, which are easy to calculate in an objective manner and based on publicly available information, this last area is much subtler and the differences are not as obvious. This issue was made clear to me when I saw how much time and effort the college put into orienting its new full-time hires as compared to its adjuncts. When I was hired as an adjunct, I was interviewed by the department chair and another full-timer in the department. The interview lasted about an hour and I was hired on the spot. Once I was entered into the system by Human Resources and given my keys, I was thrown into the classroom. As a full-timer, once I made it through the rigorous, multi-day interview process, I was given a two-day orientation, assigned a mentor, and enrolled in a more extended year-long orientation for new faculty hires. During this orientation, I learned more about the college and the support services offered for faculty.

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He quickly notes that one of the key assumptions in his theory of justice is that it begins by looking at how citizens are conceived within this framework. “Justice as fairness starts from the idea that society is to be conceived as a fair system of cooperation and so it adopts a conception of the person to go with this idea.” He quickly notes that one of the key assumptions underlying constitutional democracies is a conception of citizens as free and equal. Rawls uses this conception as a framework to derive his two principles of justice, and even working with these basic assumptions underlying citizenship in a constitutional democracy, we can see some significant injustices in the case study described above.

The most obvious, of course, is the discrepancy in pay. As I noted above, full-time me is just as experienced and qualified as part-time me, yet makes significantly more money, and, perhaps more importantly, will earn significantly more income over the total time of my professional career. This is clearly not a “fair system of cooperation” since it violates Rawls’ second principle of justice, which states, “Social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions: first, they must be attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity; and second, they must be to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society.” Examining the inequalities outlined above through the lens of Rawls demonstrates clear injustices. I will take it for granted that federal and state law as well as the Human Resources departments at the various colleges ensure that the first clause of this principle is satisfied. However, it does seem that the current arrangement fails to satisfy the second clause of the principle. To argue that this difference is not an inequity, one must argue that
part-timers or the “least advantaged” benefit from the existing system, an assertion I will debunk in the following paragraphs.

It is worth noting that, as initially conceived, there was a very clear role for adjuncts at two-year colleges. One of the initial conceptions of the community colleges (particularly in California, where the 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education set up a template since adopted by many other states15) was as the primary vehicle for delivering vocational and adult education. Particularly in the realm of vocational education, it makes perfect sense to set up a system where experienced members of a particular field could come in on evenings or weekends to teach a class or two to students trying to get a degree or certificate. In many cases these individuals would not want to take the pay cut that comes with being a full-time instructor (as compared to what they would make working full time in their field). In addition, the reason they are appealing instructors is because they are currently active in their profession, something they would lose if they became full-timers. Given all this, there is clearly a role for part-timers that satisfies Rawls’ second principle of justice, and arguably this was the initial intent behind provisions in the law that allowed for the use of part-timers.

Unfortunately, the role of adjuncts has spread well beyond this important, but limited, role they were originally intended to play. According to the Coalition on the Academic Workforce (the APA is one of the members of this coalition), when graduate students are included, adjunct faculty make up more than 75 percent of college and university instructors.17 Given the differences outlined in the previous section, this is a clear injustice since these inequalities are not to the greatest advantage of the part-timers.

One might respond by arguing that the use of adjuncts is justified because most adjuncts want to be part-time and wouldn’t apply for a full-time position if it became available. Fortunately, there is some data on this question which indicates that between 50 percent and 75 percent of part-timers would prefer a full-time job.18 Thus, while some may be satisfied as part-timers, many would prefer a full-time position and are likely working as adjuncts until a full-time position becomes available (this was certainly my situation). Given this it is not plausible to argue that a majority of part-timers benefit from the status quo, even if some may find it to their liking.

So adjuncts do not generally benefit from the current system, but perhaps it is beneficial to the students. A Rawlsian framework can justify certain inequities if they improve the least advantaged members of society. It might be possible to argue that even though adjuncts are disadvantaged compared to full-timers, this inequality produces better outcomes for students. That is, perhaps some adjuncts can be mildly disadvantaged in order to make the students and thereby all of society better off. However, I don’t need to make that argument because there is a great deal of research that indicates that students are not being given the best chance at success when colleges rely on adjuncts for the bulk of their instruction. This is a complex issue, so I can only highlight some of the significant impacts on student success, but as I will show there are clear ways that students are negatively impacted.

From an administrative perspective, the most important components of student success are those components that can be easily quantified and tracked. These would include measures such as graduation rates (number of students who graduate with a degree or certificate), transfer rates (number of students who transfer to a four-year institution), and persistence or retention rates (students who take classes in their first year and then are “retained” or “persist” into the second year).19

For each of these measures, there is strong evidence that students who are exposed to part-time faculty do worse, and the more exposure to part-timers the worse students do. For example, a 2006 study by Jacoby found that “graduation rates for public community colleges in the United States are adversely affected when institutions rely heavily upon part-time faculty instruction.”20 A 2009 study by Jaeger and Eagan went further in quantifying this impact. They found that “a 10% increase in the overall proportion of credits earned in courses taught by part-time faculty members reduced the students’ likelihood of earning an associate’s degree by 1%.”21 Given that community college students take about 50 percent of their courses from part-timers, this means that “the average student [is] at least 5% less likely to graduate with an associate’s degree compared to his or her peers who only have full-time instructors in the classroom, holding constant all other variables in the model.”22 Turning to transfer rates, in an earlier study Jaeger and Eagan concluded, “Findings suggest that students tend to be significantly less likely to transfer as their exposure to part-time faculty increases.”23 Gross and Goldhaber are then able to more accurately quantify this effect in a 2009 study in which they conclude, For every 10 percent increase in the percent of tenured faculty in the two-year college, holding all else equal, the chance that a student will transfer to a four-year college increases by 4 percent. The effect of tenured faculty is remarkable not only because it seems to have a positive effect on transferring, but also because it has an effect across all students, something not found for the transfer and articulation policies.24

Finally, looking at retention or persistence rates, Jaeger and Eagan concluded, “high levels of exposure to part-time faculty in the first year of college are consistently found to negatively affect student retention to the second year.”25

Taken together this data indicates that students are negatively impacted when colleges rely on adjuncts, and the greater the percentage of adjuncts, the worse students do. There is also a racial and class dimension to this inequity since the problem is most prevalent at the community college level, which is also the primary point of entry into higher education for low-income and minority students. Thus, those students who are most in need of the benefits that higher education can provide are thrust into a system that denies them the tools they need to succeed. This then creates a perpetual underclass that is denied the resources...
needed for upward social and economic mobility, and this is a violation of the first clause of Rawls’ second principle of justice regarding equality of opportunity. It is important to stress that most of this research does not argue that these differences are a result of poor pedagogical skills or lack of preparedness among adjuncts, but are rather a product of the systematic disadvantages that adjuncts face (e.g., not being able to stay around after a class because one needs to rush to another campus to teach another class there). Much of the research cited here concludes that the solution to these inequalities is to either hire more full-timers or significantly increase the resources available to part-timers.

While less a matter of justice, a final group that is disadvantaged by the reliance on part-timers is the full-timers, and this in at least two ways: first, the increase in institutional responsibilities of full-timers, and second, a loss of academic freedom.

Regarding the first issue, there is an enormous amount of behind-the-scenes administrative work that is necessary to keep a college functioning and accredited. While one might argue that much of this work is unnecessary or frivolous, the fact remains that this work must be done if faculty want to continue to offer courses and receive funding. Furthermore, given that very few institutions are willing to compensate adjuncts for this work, the burden for completing it falls primarily on the backs of full-timers. As the number of full-timers has shrunk and workload demands increase, full-time faculty have to spend more and more time on administrative work and less time on classroom prep and research. In addition to negatively impacting students, this also makes the job of a full-timer less appealing as one must devote considerable time to completing tasks that don’t impact teaching and research, the very things that motivate one to become an academic.

This overreliance on adjuncts also negatively impacts the academic freedom of full- and part-timers. The negative impact on part-timers is quite easy to understand. Most part-timers are at-will employees with no guarantee of future employment from term to term. While adjuncts are almost never fired, most are aware that their continued employment depends on maintaining the good graces of chairs and deans. Adjunct faculty who rock the boat or raise uncomfortable questions can easily be pushed out simply by not being given classes during the next term, effectively terminating their employment. This arrangement has a chilling effect on adjuncts who are afraid to speak up or make too much noise.

This also extends to full-timers. In addition to being overburdened with administrative work, full-timers are less able to organize effectively to criticize or question various college policies promoted by administrators. The full-timers are often too busy to reflect on and examine these issues, and even if they are aware, they have less support in their efforts as they can’t ally themselves with adjunct faculty members who are fearful of losing their future classes. As a result, the power of all faculty is weakened and full-timers are less able to mobilize against the many political, economic, and administrative threats to the college.

**CONCLUSION**

Given the analysis above, I think it is clear that part-timers are the victims of inequity and injustice, especially when compared to their full-time counterparts. These injustices impact the adjuncts themselves, their students, and their full-time colleagues. To change this system there needs to be greater awareness of these inequities on the part of adjuncts, students, and full-timers. One way to raise awareness about these issues is to integrate these concepts into our courses. By using my own circumstances as a case study, students and others in the education community can gain clearer insight into the disadvantages adjuncts face. In my own—admittedly anecdotal—experience I have found that students become quite upset and incensed when the situation of adjuncts is explained to them, and often want to know what they can do to help change the situation. By giving students this information and incorporating these kinds of examples into our pedagogy, faculty can go a long way towards forming alliances with other groups to bring about change and correct the injustices that exist within the current system.

And what would this change look like? Ideally, it would involve converting existing part-timers into full-timers. A conservative estimate conducted by my union found that it would cost about $265,000,000 to make this conversion in California. This is clearly a significant amount of money, but in the context of the roughly $170 billion California state budget, it is actually a small fraction. How to raise even this small amount of money is, of course, a difficult political question, and one’s proposed solution will often depend quite a bit on one’s political values. In my opinion, the easiest and most just solution would be to raise taxes on the wealthiest Californians, and to use this money to, among other things, hire significantly more full-time professors. While some might claim this is a pie in the sky dream, it is worth noting that there is a great deal of popular support in California for taxing the wealthy to help out everyone else. While this solution may not be popular with everyone, I think it is the best and most just solution to this problem.

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**NOTES**

1. This is how these positions are defined in the California Education Code. See, for example, CA Ed. Code section 87482.5.
2. Although, increasingly, these “visiting professors” have their contracts renewed indefinitely, essentially making them full-time, non-tenure track faculty.
3. And this is a matter of state law and the education code, which is binding on all public community colleges in California.
4. Surprisingly, this data is extremely hard to find; what data is out there is fairly limited, and there isn’t really any good aggregate information on this issue. This article (Laura McKenna, “The College President to Adjunct Pay Rat,” *The Atlantic*, September 24, 2015, accessed May 17, 2016, [http://www.theatlantic.com/educationurope57x7](http://www.theatlantic.com/educationurope57x7)) gives a pretty good picture of the difficulty of tracking down this information. This is one of the major reasons why I have chosen
to use my own situation to explore this issue. Having just been hired full-time, I am in a unique position to make a clear apples-to-apples comparison.

5. California state laws prohibits “temporary, part-time faculty” from teaching more than 67 percent of a full-time load in any single community college district. See CA Ed. Code, section 87482.5. A typical load for a full-time philosopher is 5/5, so an adjunct philosopher can only teach three classes per semester in any one district (the 67 percent limit primarily impacts language instructors who, under these rules, can generally teach two sections of a language class), forcing adjuncts to work in multiple districts in order to make ends meet.

6. I will also receive additional increases when I get tenure and when I am promoted from assistant to full professor.

7. And this was one of the more robust hiring processes I experienced as an adjunct. Many schools hired me sight unseen based solely on my CV.


9. An anonymous reviewer raises the following objection: “The author should be more clear-eyed about ‘equal pay for equal work.’ If one interprets this literally, one could argue that there should not be steps in a pay scale. Why should a senior philosopher be paid more for teaching an Intro class than a junior faculty? Because of the very suspect idea that more senior faculty are better teachers?” This is a fascinating objection, and a decent response is, frankly, beyond the scope of this essay. That being said, it is a general feature of American labor that one should expect more pay the longer one works in a position. That is, as one advances in his or her career, one should receive more money for the work he or she does. In many academic settings it does make more sense to pay senior faculty more money. They generally have longer academic résumés with more publications and more grants. They clearly add “extra value” to the college to justify their larger salaries in comparison to junior faculty. At the two-year schools where the main emphasis is on teaching, some of these assumptions become more questionable. In this case, one could argue that more senior faculty provide greater service to the college via their work on committees and their institutional knowledge, and are thus deserving of greater compensation.

10. An anonymous reviewer raises the following objection: “The author should at least speak to the worry that the only kind of justice at issue is a field specific one, not necessarily society specific one, or even a more general notion of justice. A yearly pay of $67K puts one about 20% above the median household income in the U.S. (to say nothing of the vast majority of other societies). At the least, one might expect an explanation of why Rawls can reasonably applied to things like, ‘the philosophy professor in the U.S.?” A full answer is obviously beyond the scope of this footnote or this essay, but I would argue that the issues discussed in this essay are a matter of societal justice. Echoing Socrates’ argument in the Apology about the role of the philosopher in society as well as his account of the proper “punishment” for someone guilty of his “crimes,” I would argue that the teaching profession is enormously important to society and that a society that doesn’t value education and intelligence will quickly destroy itself (stay tuned, USA). Given this, I do think it is just that educators make more than the median household income. This increase is justified by their increased education (MA minimum with many Ph.D.s) and the essential role they play in society.


12. Ibid., 232–33.

13. Ibid., 233.


15. That being said, demographic information about the racial and ethnic makeup of full-time faculty might be used to make a case that these positions aren’t really “open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity.” For reasons of space I will not pursue this discussion here.

16. This website, http://www.ucop.edu/acadinit/mastplan/welcome.html, maintained by the University of California Office of the President, provides a nice summary of the details.


18. It is hard to find consistent numbers on this topic. One survey [American Federation of Teachers, “A National Survey of Part-Time/Adjunct Faculty,” American Academic 2 (March 2010)] of 400 part-timers concluded that about 50 percent want a full-time position. Another, larger survey (discussed in Colleen Flaherty, “R-E-S-P-E-C-T,” Inside Higher Ed, May 6, 2015, accessed April 25, 2016, http://tinyurl.com/jox57f1) puts the number at 73 percent (as opposed the earlier referenced study from the Coalition on the Academic Workforce). In either case, it seems safe to say that at least half and as many as three quarters of current adjuncts want a full-time position.

19. I have a suspicion that many of these administrative benchmarks are guilty of some version of the Texas Sharpshooter Fallacy or the Drunkard’s Search. Be that as it may, these are benchmarks that administrators use to evaluate the college and the performance of various programs and departments.


22. Ibid., 186.


26. In California, this fact was established in Cervisi v. Unemployment Ins. Appeals Bd., 208 Cal.App.3d 633. This decision allows adjuncts in California to apply for unemployment insurance during the winter and summer breaks. This can often result in significant additional income for part-timers to the tune of close to $5,000 a year.

27. This “chilling effect” is difficult to quantify, but I encountered it often as a union activist. Faculty would often complain to me about unfair treatment, but would be unwilling to formally pursue the matter out of fear of reprisals and a loss of future employment.

28. Special thanks to Dr. Jim Miller, who has helped me understand the implications for academic freedom of the increased adjunctification in higher education.

29. This calculation was done by the president of my local, Jim Mahler. He found that the average salary of $35,784 per year for the full-time equivalent temporary, part-time faculty member and a modest $70,000 average starting salary (including benefits) of a newly hired tenured/tenure-track faculty member, it would cost ($70,000 – $35,784 =) $34,216 to convert a full-time equivalent temporary, part-time faculty position to a full-time tenure-track position.

30. Using the statewide goal of 75% of all sections being taught by full-time faculty, this would require the conversion of 7,762 part-time positions, or (7,762 positions X $34,216 per conversion =) $265,584,592 to reach the statewide goal of 75%.

31. This analysis comes from a public letter he sent to Governor Jerry Brown on October 14, 2014.

32. In 2012 California voters approved Proposition 30, which raised taxes on the wealthiest Californians (individuals making more than $250,000 and households making more than $500,000). In 2016 California voters approved Proposition 55, which extended this tax for another twelve years.
CALL FOR PAPERS

The APA Committee for Philosophy in Two-Year Colleges invites papers for inclusion in the fall 2017 issue of the APA Newsletter on Philosophy in Two-Year Colleges.

Papers should be devoted to topics of particular interest to two-year and community college faculty, and graduate students who are considering a two-year or community college career path. These include but should not be construed as limited to the following: lower division teaching pedagogy; text and textbook selections including the use of open-access resources; cross-disciplinary initiatives; student demographics and advising; student learning evaluation; program evaluation and program growth initiatives; faculty credentialing and hiring, including concerns for women and minorities; status of adjunct faculty, workload and related issues; faculty scholarship opportunities, research, and writing; and issues dealing with program administration. Co-authored papers are welcome.

All paper submissions should adhere to the following guidelines:

- Deadline: Friday, June 2, 2017
- Papers must be in 12 pt. Times New Roman font, double-spaced, and should be in the range of 3,000 to 5,000 words, including endnotes. Exceptional papers that fall outside this range may be considered, though this is not guaranteed. Authors are advised to read APA publishing guidelines available on the APA website.
- Pay close attention to all APA formatting restrictions. Submissions that do not conform will be returned to their author(s). Endnotes should follow the Word default using roman numerals to number the notes.
- Papers should be sent to the editor electronically and should contain nothing that identifies either the author(s) or her/his/their institution, including any such references in the endnotes. A separate page with the authors name, title, and full mailing address should also be submitted.

Submissions should be sent to the Philosophy in Two-Year Colleges Committee chair and newsletter editor, Thomas Urban, at TwoYearEditor@gmail.com, by June 2, 2017.

The editor, serving in the capacity of a disinterested coordinator, will distribute all papers to an editorial committee of current and past Two-Year College Committee members for anonymous review and evaluation. This committee will report its findings to members of the newsletter editorial board. The editorial board will make all publishing decisions based on those anonymously refereed results, and conduct any further anonymous review(s) deemed necessary. The editorial board includes Kristen L. Zbikowski, Hibbing Community College (kristenzbikowski@hibbing.edu); Anthony Kreider, Miami-Dade Community College (akreider@mdc.edu); Bill Hartmann, St. Louis Community College (bhartmann@stlcc.edu); and Rick Repetti, Kingsborough Community College–CUNY (Rick.Repetti@kbcc.cuny.edu).
Welcome to the spring 2017 issue of the APA Newsletter on Teaching Philosophy. In this issue we present four articles, a book review, and a list of recently published books that may be useful to teachers of philosophy.

Our first and second articles, “How Teaching Matters” and “How Teachers Succeed,” are both authored by Steven M. Cahn (Professor Emeritus at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York). Cahn notes that university philosophy departments that hire instructors to teach the courses that are on offer in those departments rarely require of job applicants that they demonstrate teaching ability (or, in some cases, even interest). Though successful job applicants will earn their university salary by teaching students, their application for a teaching position is, for the most part, assessed by appraisal of prior academic achievements and publishing record and promise. There is, therefore, a disconnect between what is required for being a successful teaching-job applicant and being an effective teacher. Cahn offers our readers specific advice on 1) what graduate programs in philosophy should do to better prepare their students for these students’ eventual teaching positions; 2) the criteria that philosophy departments should employ in evaluating candidates’ pedagogic skills and talents; and 3) fashioning criteria for promotion and tenure that reflect, in addition to scholastic competence, the pedagogic skills that encourage learning on the part of our students.

Cahn’s second article, “How Teachers Succeed,” focuses on the question of what, given the challenges that face us in the classroom, an instructor should do so as to meet those challenges and become a successful teacher. Cahn lists three “strategic concepts” that he claims are the key to effective pedagogy. None of these strategies is arcane and some may even seem obvious, yet we have all witnessed—and perhaps even engaged in—teaching that fails to exhibit them. As Cahn himself notes, the strategies he recommends are necessary not only for successful classroom presentations, but also for the delivery of public lectures in the field. We believe that philosophy students would also be well-served by the adoption of these strategies in the presentation of their own views, whether orally in class or in written assignments.

Our third article is “Didactical Ordering and Emotional Moral Persuasion” by Shlomo Cohen (Professor of Philosophy, Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Israel). Professor Cohen first addresses the question of the order in which it is best to present the topics typically covered in an Introduction to Ethics course. In his own such course, Professor Cohen presents (through readings in Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics, Kant’s Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals, and Mill’s Utilitarianism) what he terms “the three main systems of ethics.” But he has encountered the following problem, one that many instructors of introductory courses in ethics (except, perhaps, those who teach in a religious institution) will recognize: The principles of right conduct that these systems put forth are presented as objective and valid principles, but many beginning students proclaim themselves to be moral relativists or normative egoists. Given their self-identified commitment to moral relativism and normative egoism, though the students may learn to demonstrate how the ethical principles set forth by these systems are to be applied, they will not be able to take them seriously as truly valid options for the moral assessment of conduct. Professor Cohen argues that this problem is to be dealt with by deciding on a particular ordering of class readings and discussions, first attending to the topic of moral relativism and normative egoism, and only afterwards turning to the readings and discussion of the normative ethical principles that characterize Aristotle, Kant, and Mills (and other writers) on substantive ethics. Cohen goes to some length to explain his rationale for ordering his teaching in this way.

The second (and perhaps, for some, most controversial) part of Cohen’s paper is entitled “Moral Persuasion and the Sense of Shame.” Here Cohen describes a method he uses in class to get students to reconsider their self-descriptions as moral relativists and normative egoists. He suggests a way that the instructor can force students to confront the heretofore unrecognized limits that they themselves now believe should constrain the views that they enthusiastically endorsed as limitless before.

Our fourth and final paper, “Teaching ‘Introduction to Women’s Studies’ as a Critical Thinking Course,” is authored by Stephen J. Sullivan (Philosophy Professor in the Department of English and Philosophy, Edinboro University). This article is a detailed description of the course that Sullivan teaches, along with the rationale for constructing the course the way that he does. Issues regarding the treatment of women is, of course, a moral
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ARTICLES

How Teaching Should Matter

Steven M. Cahn
THE GRADUATE CENTER, CUNY

Like other academics, philosophers pay lip service to the importance of teaching, but as a recent report published in Teaching Philosophy demonstrates, practice does not always accord with principle. If teaching is to receive its due, graduate departments need to change how they prepare candidates for faculty positions, while departments seeking new members need to alter criteria for making appointments as well as strategies for encouraging strong performance.

First, graduate departments should require all aspiring faculty members to take a course in methods of teaching. Such courses should involve discussing and practicing all phases of the teaching process, including preparing syllabi, motivating students, clarifying ideas, organizing materials, guiding discussions, constructing examinations, and grading papers. Emphasis should also be placed on the importance and multifaceted nature of a teacher's ethical obligations.

For many years I taught such a course at the City University of New York Graduate Center, and the results were dramatic. As the semester progressed, students began to speak more slowly and clearly, to motivate the audience, and to lead listeners to understand and appreciate issues. The key to this course was that the students did not only talk about teaching; they actually taught in brief segments, then received feedback from others in the class. I should add, however, that when my colleagues sought to enhance the program's national ranking, they replaced comprehensive examinations with papers, eliminated required core courses, and abandoned the course in teaching philosophy. Such steps were thought by the majority to render our department more professionally acceptable.

Many letters of reference, of course, typically contain a sentence praising a candidate's pedagogical skills, yet without including evidence for such assessment. Here's a typical comment: "Although I have never seen Smith teach, knowing her as I do, I am sure she will be highly successful in the classroom." Without personal observation, such remarks should be discounted.

The importance of teaching is likely to be appreciated by graduate programs only if departments making appointments stress quality of teaching in their judgment of candidates. As a start, these departments should state that those candidates who have taken a course in teaching philosophy will be preferred. Once graduate programs receive that message, they will be motivated to include such a course in the curriculum. Publishing in a professional journal is viewed as an asset in obtaining a faculty position, so graduate programs emphasize the importance of publishing. If taking a course in teaching philosophy were viewed likewise, graduate programs would stress its importance and encourage students to enroll.

In addition, first-round interviews should concentrate not only on a candidate's doctoral dissertation but also ask such questions as: 1) If you were to teach introductory philosophy, what texts would you use, which issues would you cover, and how would you evaluate students? 2) How about the same information regarding basic courses in areas in which you claim competence? 3) What do you think of the practice of grading students, and how would you plan to approach this task? The answers would indicate how seriously a candidate regards teaching.

Furthermore, when candidates are invited for campus interviews, they should be expected to present both a research paper and a talk on an elementary topic, organized and presented as if for introductory students. Only those candidates whose performance is proficient should be considered seriously. As anyone who has attended such a talk knows, a candidate's pedagogical ability becomes obvious after only a few minutes. Some individuals display the requisite skills, whereas others mumble and fumble. Just as those who cannot ably defend their research are passed over, the same fate should befall those who cannot ably teach. Years ago when I chaired the Department of Philosophy at the University of Vermont, the head of the philosophy department at a large state university asked me whether at my school, like his, enrollment in philosophy courses had been shrinking. I told him that, on the contrary, it had been growing. Amazed, he wondered how I accounted for this phenomenon. "Excellent teaching," I said. "We try to make sure that everyone we appoint offers both outstanding scholarship and outstanding teaching. What do you look for?"

"Good scholars," he replied. "We never appoint anyone who hasn't delivered a scholarly paper."

"Why not test their teaching, too?" I inquired.

"Never thought of it," he muttered.

If a baseball team hires strong hitters who are inadequate fielders, the result will be many hits and many errors. Likewise, if a department appoints strong researchers who are inadequate teachers, the result will be more papers published and fewer students enrolled.

Furthermore, just as new faculty members should be given permission to observe the classes of senior members of the department, so new faculty members should occasionally be observed, not to be formally evaluated but to be offered suggestions where appropriate. Professors provide one another assistance in their writing; why shouldn't they provide help in their teaching as well?

We would view with suspicion a surgeon who barred all other surgeons from an operation. We should view with equal skepticism any professors who wish to lock classroom doors against knowledgeable observers.
Regarding decisions for promotion and tenure, departments currently care enough about research to undertake an elaborate review of scholarship. Similarly, departments ought to be equally concerned about teaching to undertake an equally elaborate review of a professor’s work in the classroom. Such a review should involve input from departmental colleagues who visit the professor’s classes and examine syllabi, examinations, and test papers to assess teaching performance.

Some suppose that students should have the strongest voice in evaluating teachers, and, admittedly, some instructors who receive unflattering student evaluations deserve them. Other instructors, however, can be victims of their own unyielding commitments to tough course requirements, demanding examinations, rigorous grading practices, or unfashionable intellectual positions. Because these factors and others requiring expertise in the subject may not be appreciated in student evaluations, heavy dependence on them menaces academic standards.

While some educational researchers agree that students can provide useful information, hundreds of studies confirm that student evaluations need to be considered in the context of peer evaluations. Otherwise, as one study concluded, departments are “flying blind.”

One final point. Just as an outstanding researcher may be awarded tenure even with a weak performance in the classroom, so tenure should also be available to an outstanding teacher with weak research. Granted, the ideal candidate excels as researcher and teacher, but if an occasional exception is made so as not to lose a researcher of national stature, so an occasional exception should also be made to prevent losing a teacher of extraordinary accomplishment. Few teachers can attain such a level of excellence, but to lose one who does is shortsighted.

Doing so will also be unjust, for generations of students pay expensive bills for the privilege of attending classes. Any department that cares deeply about education will take all necessary steps to ensure that generations of students receive the first-rate instruction to which they are entitled.

NOTES

How Teachers Succeed

Steven M. Cahn
THE GRADUATE CENTER, CUNY

Imagine trying to explain baseball to a person unfamiliar with the sport. Where to begin? With the roles of the pitcher and catcher? How about balls and strikes? Or the location of the bases, the ways outs can be made, or the structure of an inning? The fundamental difficulty is that all these starting points presume knowledge of some of the others. How, then, can the circle of intertwining concepts be broken and the subject be made accessible?

Philosophy is far more complex than baseball, and rather than a single listener, a class contains many students with varying skills, interests, and backgrounds. Thus, reaching the entire group is a major challenge. Yet some instructors succeed to a remarkable degree, and anyone fortunate enough to have studied with one of them is apt to remember the experience with gratitude.

The crucial question is what do these teachers have in common that others lack?

The answer is not that successful teachers know the subject better than others. Rather, they have mastered pedagogical skills that, surprising to some, are the same whether the students are children, teenagers, or adults.

But what are the fundamentals of pedagogic success? The essence is contained in three strategic concepts.

The first is commonly referred to as “motivation.” Without it a class stagnates. After all, how long will you watch a movie that does nothing to capture your attention? Or read a novel that begins with a situation of no interest? The slower the start, the more difficult to generate enthusiasm. At best, the audience allows you a few minutes without much action. The same with teaching.

Consider the openings of the following two lectures, delivered in the years 1969 and 1970 as the presidential addresses of the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association.

One speaker was Wilfrid Sellars, who began as follows:

The quotation which I have taken as my text occurs in the opening paragraphs of the Paralogisms of Pure Reason in which Kant undertakes a critique of what he calls ‘Rational Psychology.’ The paragraphs are common to the two editions of the Critique of Pure Reason, and the formulations they contain may be presumed to have continued to satisfy him—at least as introductory remarks.

If your interest has not been aroused, be assured that many in the audience shared that attitude, for although the subject matter was relevant to Kant scholars, not one word that Sellars offered motivated his other listeners. What could he have done instead?

One answer is found in the address given a year earlier by Stuart Hampshire. He, too, wished to give an exposition of a text but offered a far more provocative opening:

I want to speak today about a philosophy of mind to which I will not at first assign an identity or date, except that its author could not have lived and worked before 1600. He is modern, in the
Hampshire’s withholding the name of the author was a brilliant stroke, because members of the audience were immediately curious as to whom he was referring. As they looked around, wondering if the subject was there, they also listened carefully, treating Hampshire’s every sentence as a clue. Finally, a few minutes from his conclusion, Hampshire revealed that the author in question was Spinoza, and ended by quoting the passage from Spinoza’s Ethics that had been the unspoken focus.

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Had Hampshire begun by quoting the text he intended to discuss, the philosophical substance would have been unchanged, but doing so would have been a pedagogical disaster, for few would have listened with special care. But by making his talk a puzzle, Hampshire captivated his audience, and, having been present myself, I can testify that the quiet in the hall was striking.

No one can offer a formula for developing effective motivational devices. Yet they are crucial to successful teaching.

Even with a motivated student, however, a successful teacher needs to know how to take advantage of such interest. A key element is organization, presenting material in a sequence that promotes understanding.

Previously I referred to trying to teach the rules of baseball to someone unfamiliar with the sport. Consider the following explanation:

“In playing baseball you try to score runs. Only the team to whom the ball is pitched can score. You run around the bases and try to avoid outs. Four balls result in walks. The game has nine innings.”

This attempt at teaching is a fiasco. Not that any of the statements is false. Each is true, but, unfortunately, not only disconnected from the previous ones but presuming knowledge that the listener doesn’t possess.

The first statement refers to “runs,” but the learner hasn’t been told how a run is scored. The second statement refers to a ball being “pitched,” but the role of the pitcher hasn’t been explained. The remaining statements refer to “bases,” “outs,” “balls,” “walks,” and “innings,” but none of these terms has been put in context. If you don’t already understand baseball, you won’t learn anything.

The crucial point is that a presentation can be accurate yet not pedagogically well organized. To demonstrate this principle, consider the example of teaching beginners how to play bridge. Even if you’re not familiar with the game, all you need know is that it has two parts: the bidding and the play. The bidding comes first and is a prediction of what will happen when the cards are played.

In teaching bridge, which should be explained first, the bidding or the play? Although during the game bidding comes first, understanding the bidding depends on understanding the play. In other words, the logical order of the game—bidding first, then play—is not the best pedagogical order. If you are considering buying a guide to elementary bridge, check the book’s table of contents. If it begins with a chapter on bidding, forget that book, for it will only prove frustrating.

Imagine another experience, common in the days before cars were equipped with GPS. You’re driving through an unfamiliar town looking for the highway, and you ask directions from a passerby who responds: “It’s easy. Just turn right as you approach the supermarket, then turn left at the second light before the firehouse, then turn right at the stop sign near the post office, and you can’t miss it.” The problem is obvious: If you are a stranger and don’t know where the landmarks are, how can you know when to turn?

Poor teachers may not care whether their students understand a presentation, but successful teachers are eager to explain basic points to those who have trouble grasping them. If someone has no interest in offering such help, that person is not cut out to be a teacher and is akin to a surgeon who complains that all the patients are sick.

Every student making an effort to learn should have the opportunity to do so. That aim can be achieved, however, only if material is presented in an effective order.

Even a well-organized presentation, though, will be unsuccessful if the material is not presented with clarity.

One problem is speaking too quickly. No matter what your content, if you speak too rapidly, you won’t be understood.

Indeed, the most obvious sign of a poor lecturer is rushing. When those who are inexperienced come to a podium, they hardly ever speak at a proper pace. Yet when you hear a genuine orator, the sentences come slowly. No student will ever object to your speaking too slowly, but many will complain if the words cascade.

Another problem is using terms the audience doesn’t understand. If I remark that for a year I worked at the NEH, which has a different mission than the NEA but is not connected to the DOJ, Washington insiders will know that I’m referring to the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Department of Justice, but others will be lost. Should they know these acronyms? Maybe, maybe not. Either way, if many are unfamiliar with them, that’s reason enough not to use them without explanation.

Imagine listening to an instructor who says, “To paraphrase the author of The Pastorals, a sparse supply of cognition is a minatory entity.” Few in any class are likely to understand this remark. If the problem is pointed out to the speaker,
the irritated reply may be, "It's obvious that I'm referring to Alexander Pope." "But who," a student might ask, "is Alexander Pope?" At this point the instructor is likely to burst out with frustration: "How can you not know?" Perhaps needless to say, this person is not cut out to be a teacher. And even if the students were told that Pope was a celebrated eighteenth-century English poet, they probably still wouldn't realize that the teacher was paraphrasing Pope's line, "A little learning is a dangerous thing," which, in fact, may itself be unknown to many.

And why use the word "minatory"? Hardly anyone will know its meaning, which is derived from the Latin word minari, meaning "to threaten." Yet, inept teachers proceed in such confusing ways all the time.

Another reason for lack of clarity is omitting steps in reasoning. Suppose an instructor offering an example of mathematical thinking says, "Given that 17-11=3x, we all know that 2x=4." Some students in the class are sure to be lost because the teacher has failed to take the time to explain how the first equation proves that x=2, hence 2x=4.

But can't you omit what seems apparent? The question brings to my mind an incident, reported by a number of witnesses, involving W. V. O. Quine. While his textbook on symbolic logic was widely used, he didn't relish teaching the subject at the introductory level but was occasionally asked to do so. Once in such a course, after he wrote a proof on the board, a student raised his hand and asked impatiently, "Why bother writing out that proof? It's obvious." To which Quine replied, "Young man, this entire course is obvious." Of course, what was obvious to Quine was not always obvious to others, just as what is obvious to a teacher may not be obvious to the students.

In sum, a successful teacher provides motivation, organization, and clarity. If students aren't motivated, don't see how matters hang together, or are confused by the presentation, then regardless of what the teacher may believe, the quality of the instruction has fallen short.

**Didactical Ordering and Emotional Moral Persuasion**

Shlomo Cohen

**Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Israel**

It is a truism that teaching—surely in the humanities—stands better chances of being successful (effective, mind-opening, persuasive, enjoyable, etc.) the more the students perceive the ideas studied as relevant. This arguably gets special importance in teaching ethics: to the extent that ethical ideas seem irrelevant to our lives, it will be hard to understand why they should motivate us, or anyone.

**DIDACTICAL ORDERING**

The first point I wish to make in this respect is that consideration of the order of the topics discussed can and should at times be determined specifically by the goal of enhancing the students' sense of relevance of what is taught.

I teach Introduction to Ethics to first-year philosophy students. The main point I want to address with regard to the syllabus of this course is that alongside studying "the three main systems of ethics" through readings in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Kant's *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, and Mill's *Utilitarianism*, we also learn about normative egoism and moral relativism. Now, in preparing the syllabus, there arises a question about the ordering of the above topics—specifically, about whether to place the discussion of egoism and relativism before or after that of the main systems that aspire to moral objectivity.

The scholastics distinguished between the order of things and the order of understanding (between the *ratio essendi* and the *ratio cognoscendi*); in parallel, we should be mindful of possible differences between the order intrinsic to the ideas themselves versus the optimal order of teaching them (between the *ratio essendi* and the *ratio explanandi*, if you will). Although the two will often overlap, this is not necessarily the case. Specifically, while the first may be neutral with respect to some element of the order, the second may not. Concern with the optimal *didactical* ordering of the topics should not aspire to universal truth, but rather should be tailored to a particular audience.

Let us return, then, to the question of the optimal order of discussion in class between, on the one hand, the three systems of ethics and, on the other hand, the two topics of normative egoism and moral relativism. As far as the order intrinsic to the ideas themselves is concerned, there seem to be equally sensible reasons to teach these two great challenges to objective morality either before the main systems, as major potential obstacles to be addressed, or after, as notable criticisms of the systems we have studied. It is my experience, however, that didactically it is much preferable to discuss egoism and relativism before rather than after the teaching of the main systems. The reason lies with a mindset that, I would argue, is rampant among my students (and, I suspect, among many students in liberal democracies), which tends to view moral objectivism as deeply suspect and, therefore, some unarticulated form of moral relativism as true by default. This mindset is often also associated with the view that egoism represents the sinister truth about us humans—a truth that a good-enough scratching of the surface would reveal. Although these positions are not necessarily fully aware or consciously endorsed, it is my diagnosis that they have enough of a presence in students' minds to serve as "distracting factors" that can potentially undermine receptivity to arguments for any theory that purports to offer objective moral prescriptions. Unless the teacher first "releases these pent up demons," whatever we teach is in danger of being experienced as irrelevant to a degree, as it would seem fatally vulnerable to those disturbing skeptical "truths" that lurk in the background, that are suspected to be "the real trumpeting cards" in the debate, but that have not been addressed.
The teacher must be mindful of the fact that to the extent that students believe they have trumping cards in the debate, the arguments taught, no matter how otherwise convincing, will seem to them of dubious relevance, and their motivation to engage them will drop. Significant learning will then be inevitably compromised. Even if those “demons” were addressed fully satisfactorily at the end of the course, this would be too late, as this would not compensate for the pedagogical loss incurred during weeks of inevitably deficient engagement with material perceived as dubiously relevant. For this reason, I spend six to seven academic hours on the two skeptical positions, during which time I witness the gradual “releasing of the steam” that fuels students’ attraction to them. (See further description below.) The study of Aristotle’s ethics can then be approached with healthy receptivity, without a sense that something Unspoken in class is rolling beneath the surface. Students need not, of course, be convinced that relativism or egoism is false; what is important is that they no longer harbor the sentiment that they are in possession of obvious trumping arguments. Such sentiments are potent distractions to good learning—they should therefore be addressed first.

**MORAL PERSUASION AND THE SENSE OF SHAME**

After I present the *prima facie* allure of normative egoism and moral relativism in class, I turn to the critical assessment of these views. Naturally, I do this first and foremost by providing general arguments against them; yet this is not the entire story. What I want to discuss here is an additional, ancient method of persuasion that I find both important and effective in this case, namely, harnessing the power of the sense of shame. I shall first say a few words about how this works and then turn to discuss the merits of using this teaching method in view of the most obvious criticisms against it.

The *locus classicus* for the method of harnessing the sense of shame in moral persuasion is Plato’s *Gorgias.* In that dialogue, Socrates appeals to his three interlocutors’ sense of shame in order to refute their views. A sense of shame makes Gorgias concede that he could and should teach his students about justice; it makes Polus concede the superiority of justice over injustice; and it makes Callicles concede the wrongness of hedonism. Socrates’ method of persuading by means of eliciting a sense of shame seems to realize its full potential vis-à-vis Callicles, who is forced to renounce his strong hedonist thesis on pain of endorsing pleasures that elicit in him intense shame (notably, the pleasures of the catamite and of the coward). I use the same technique to draw from my students a recognition of the limits of the plausibility of holding either egoism or relativism.

I ask those students who argue forcefully (either sincerely or as devil’s advocates) for either of these two positions what moral positions they themselves would be willing to endorse. The questions refer to cases that are progressively more difficult to swallow. Thus I may ask the proponent of egoism whether she would be willing, for instance, to betray her best friend once she sees that it has become in her interest to do so. I have not yet met anyone shameless enough to declare she would. In a similar vein, I ask the proponent of relativism to affirm that he does not see any superiority of the moral prescription of treating every human being with equal respect over that of turning women of a different faith into sex slaves and beheading them if they refuse (as is done under the rule of ISIS). Again, a sense of shame prevents even students who appear to be die-hard moral relativists from endorsing such a moral equivalence.

What can such a didactical exercise teach us? The reservation that arises immediately is that such an appeal to shame may be no more than a cheap trick of emotionally manipulating one’s interlocutors into agreeing with that which was not independently convincing through rational persuasion. I believe that, to the contrary, the appeal to shame need not be merely manipulative but can be a valid tool for serious moral exploration. I thus agree with Plato’s insight. In this space I can make but a few salient remarks about the true pedagogical and didactical benefits of the appeal to shame, as I see them.

In forcing my students to confront the limits set by their own sense of shame on the positions that they hold, I help them restrict their arguments to what, from their own perspective, falls within the boundaries of reasonableness. This is important, since once an intelligent person adopts any principle, he or she can, with enough shrewdness and imaginativeness, find ways of holding on to it against almost any objection. Even logical limits, at which we supposedly must balk, can with enough ingenuity be circumvented—as in making extra conceptual distinctions to circumvent a contradiction. If we had infinite time in the classroom, maybe we could gain some minor benefits from pursuing such tedious dialectical exercises. We do not have infinite time, however, and it is important pedagogically (especially for first-year philosophy students) to learn that interesting intellectual explorations are normally limited to pursuing those objections that seem to the objector at least, at all relevant. (The alternative would turn the philosophy classroom into unbearable hell.) The appeal to shame sifts out hyperbolic moral skepticisms that students do not really hold, except under the guise of combative philosophy students who play the game of universal doubting. It is important both pedagogically and materially (i.e., for the successful clarification of the issue at hand) that students learn to distinguish between what they really doubt and what they merely claim to doubt when playing the game of doubting. Students’ sense of shame sets limits that help them realize this difference.

People, including the most sophisticated, often do not know which arguments they truly stand behind and which, on the other hand, they advance merely because they sound like they could be right (either in general or in a particular context). Not even the wisest and most experienced have clear internal inventories of all the beliefs they really hold versus those they merely toy with or acknowledge as possible. A fortiori this applies to young students. Socrates was, of course, a master in exposing the uncertainties behind the presumed experts’ façades of sound convictions. When a person recoils with shame from endorsing a position, that person then learns that he or she does not really hold it, even if he or she argued for it just a moment before, on the grounds that its general...
formulation seemed to “make sense” and one had enough intellectual power to continue arguing for that position without succumbing to self-contradiction. Eliciting one’s sense of shame can help one realize that what is carried forward by the force of intellectual power alone can take one where one does not intend to go.

But isn’t this appeal to shame a form of ad hominem reasoning? Yes, it is. And isn’t ad hominem reasoning problematic? It can be, but I believe that at other times it can be a very good and helpful tool. I want to make two main claims regarding this point. Firstly, the challenge mentioned before of not knowing where one stands with regard to a deep philosophical question (as egoism and relativism each is) is not merely the epistemic challenge of having clear enough introspection into the right container of beliefs “inside” one’s mind, so to speak. Rather, in the absence of personal conviction, there is normally nothing to be known. Correspondingly, the justification of the appeal to shame rests not merely on its legitimacy as a potent tracker of good reasons but on its important role in helping to determine which reasons one finds to be good reasons. The argumentative exercise that appeals to a sense of shame is thus integral to real moral persuasion: when the issue is not one of knowledge of truth but of constituting truths (regarding one’s beliefs), the run-of-the-mill objection to ad hominem reasoning arguably loses its essential ground.

The second point, which complements the first, is as follows. It can be plausibly argued that the sense of shame—one can alternatively refer to it as a sense of self-respect—is basic to being human. The more a feature is essential to (our conception of) our humanity, the more plausible it is to view its influence on us as non-contingent. Hence the influence of the sense of shame on human moral judgment is arguably not contingent. Charles Kahn writes: “Shame reflects a Platonic conception corresponding to our own notion of an innate moral sense, but which Plato describes as a universal desire for what is good.” It is thus not surprising that Socrates tells Polus, “I do believe that both I and you and all other people think committing injustice worse than suffering it, and not paying the penalty worse than paying it” (474b). Socrates is convinced that what he reveals to Polus is not restricted either to himself or to Polus. Plato (if Kahn is correct) had in mind a moral sense that tracks a metaphysical truth. I, on the contrary, am speaking of a moral sense that is an essential feature of humans and may be unique to the human perspective. For some discussions in metaethics and moral theory this is not an insignificant difference, but for my current point on the legitimacy of ad hominem reasoning in moral education the upshot is similar. Basic moral intuitions (whether they refer to eternal cosmic truths or “merely” to truths for humans) cannot be argued for, because they do not rely on reasons, but are, rather, the source of reasons. In this sense we rely on our interlocutors to see the truths once we provide the right stimuli. This process can then ideally be repeated with each and every interlocutor, indeed with each and every student. This is a unique way to show general validity: instead of providing universal arguments, we provide ad hominem arguments that can ideally be repeated universally (as they target an attribute that all humans share). In this way, eliciting a sense of shame with respect to certain moral positions can help uncover non-contingent moral truths, be that in the Athenian agora or in our classrooms.

**CLASS ATTENDANCE**

Lastly, the preceding discussion helps explain why I make class attendance mandatory. Studying moral philosophy is not restricted to moral persuasion by means of the cognitive assimilation of abstract arguments; it is also a matter of openness to undergoing a process of elicitation of moral sentiments. And it is unlikely that this process will be set in motion by reading other students’ notes.

**NOTES**


2. The full development of the place of shame (and possibly other emotions) in moral education and moral justification would touch on many complex issues in moral psychology as well as metaethics, which naturally cannot be dealt with in this piece. Some relevant weighty issues that may affect the precise form as well as strength of the argument include the nature of moral judgment, of moral motivation, of practical reasoning, the status of moral intuitionism, the right philosophical account of emotions, the definition and ethics of manipulation, etc.

3. A successful (not fallacious) ad hominem argument shows that the particular person targeted cannot consistently argue for _p_ because his own previous arguments have already committed him to non- _p_. In a strict logical sense, ad hominem refers to the relation between propositions, and a sentimental stance, as that of shame, is indeed not a proposition. However, I use _ad hominem_ in a rhetorical sense (which I see as the most basic): it is sufficient that the target person has clearly _committed_ himself to non- _p_, even if it was by emotional expression and not by uttering pervious propositions. For views sympathetic to ad hominem arguments, see Lawrence Hinnman, "The Case for ad hominem Arguments," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 60, no. 4 (1982): 338–45; Alan Brion, "A Rhetorical View of the ad hominem," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 63, no. 1 (1985): 50–63; Andrew Aberdein, "In Defence of Virtue: The Legitimacy of Agent-based Argument Appraisal," *Informal Logic* 34, no. 1 (2014): 77–93.


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**Teaching “Introduction to Women’s Studies” as a Critical Thinking Course**

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**SECTION I: PRELIMINARIES**

At my university, any member of the interdisciplinary Women’s Studies Program may teach Introduction to
Women's Studies, subject, of course, to administrative approval and (relatedly) considerations of academic supply and demand. There is no blueprint for the course, just a generic catalog description. Consequently, it may be taught in very different ways, depending on the discipline, knowledge, and pedagogical proclivities of the instructor (among other factors). I am a member of the Department of English and Philosophy and emphasize critical thinking in all of my courses: mostly philosophy but also women's studies and research writing courses. I write this paper with the hope that my pedagogical approach to Introduction to Women's Studies will be of interest and use not only to faculty who teach introductory courses in women's studies or feminist philosophy but also to faculty who include gender issues in their critical-thinking courses. I especially have in mind faculty who, like me, teach at a university with a largely working-class demographic and many first-generation students.

I should note initially that this lower-level course has no prerequisites and so is open to freshmen, and that enrollment is currently capped at fifty-five (rather than, say, the educationally preferable twenty-five that applies to the version of the course that I have taught for our First Year Experience Program). In my experience, it readily has an initial enrollment of around fifty (mostly women); presumably this high enrollment exists mainly because it enables students to meet the Cultural Diversity and Social Pluralism requirement of our General Education Program. The result, of course, is that many (perhaps most) students who take the course lack any serious initial interest in the subject matter—a familiar fact in many introductory philosophy courses as well. Rather than let that fact discourage me, I try to take it as a challenge—as I'm sure many other faculty do in comparable situations. In the case of Introduction to Women's Studies, it helps that there are always some students who are already genuinely interested in gender issues and may even think of themselves as feminists.

The course is divided into four units, covering the following topics: What is feminism?; the case for feminism in the United States (to be explained below); the relationship between feminism and other social-justice movements; and "trivial matters" concerning sexist language, married names, and dating etiquette. Two features of the course design may already stand out. First, it is not a historical course: we do not cover the history of the women's rights movement in the U.S. (though I do talk briefly about the waves of the movement and about racism in the first wave). Second, we focus almost entirely on the situation of American women and girls. I have colleagues, especially in history, who are much better qualified than I to teach women's studies courses with a historical or an international focus. Moreover, the narrower focus of my course allows me to devote more time to Unit II: the heart of the course, as will become clear below.

SECTION II: A DETAILED ACCOUNT OF THE OPENING UNIT

As indicated above, the topic of Unit I is the nature of feminism. I make no assumption at the outset that my students have a clear or roughly accurate understanding of what feminism is. I begin by calling on individual students and asking them to tell me (if they're willing) what the word "feminist" means to them. I have noticed in recent years that fewer and fewer of my students seem to view feminism as mainly a vehicle for bashing or subordinating men; the "man-hating lesbian" stereotype rarely emerges, though the "feminazi" one does sometimes. Typically the answers I elicit in this early class make some kind of reference to gender equality, often with the suggestion that a feminist is an activist for women's rights. When I ask how many students consider themselves to be feminists, generally only a smallish minority raise their hands (though it is a larger percentage than in my similar-sized Introduction to Moral Issues classes in which we spend a week or so on gender issues).

I then offer the following preliminary definition. A feminist is someone who (a) believes that women and girls in at least some parts of the world are systematically subjected to unfairly unequal treatment due to their gender, and (b) is opposed to such treatment. (The second clause, as I tell the class, is included because I once had a student who informed me that he held the belief expressed in (a) but just didn’t care about unfairly unequal treatment of women and girls.) Then I ask the class, in effect, how many students fit the definition, and typically a large majority raise their hands. This leads us smoothly into a discussion of why relatively few students are willing to apply the "f-word" (as some of my women's studies colleagues are wont to call it) to themselves. Even students sympathetic to feminism may say they don’t accept the label because they aren’t activists for gender equality. Other students express concern about the anger (especially, though not only, toward men) they perceive in feminism; it’s at this point that the term "feminazi" may be used, invariably by a male student.

I tell the class that the definition isn’t carved in stone on some feminist mountain: they can take it or leave it, though it will serve as a working definition in much of the course. But I stress that it seems to fit the overwhelming majority of self-professed feminists and that it is quite flexible. The definition tells us that you needn't be a woman—much less a lesbian—to count as a feminist. (I am careful to add that I am not implying there’s anything wrong with lesbianism; it is so easy to be misunderstood. We return to LGBT issues in Unit III.) You needn’t be an activist, though if you willingly accept or demand female subordination in your own life, then your satisfaction of clause (b) is negated. If you are a woman, you needn’t shun traditionally feminine modes of appearance. And so on. One at least potentially controversial feature of the definition is that it allows someone to count as a feminist who holds that women and girls no longer face systematically unequal treatment in First World nations such as the U.S. I call such an individual a “conservative feminist,” giving Christina Hoff Sommers as a likely example, but acknowledge that many women's studies faculty may regard that term as something of an oxymoron (and Sommers as an enemy—indeed a “frenemy”—of feminism). In class I distinguish conservative feminists from both liberal feminists and (in a broad sense) radical feminists. On my simplified
account, liberals and radicals agree that women and girls even in developed nations still face systematically unequal treatment; but while liberal feminists believe that this injustice can be largely overcome by means of continued reforms, radical feminists believe that these nations are oppressive patriarchies that must be completely overhauled.

These distinctions are far from precise, of course, and blur important differences—especially among radical feminists (for example, between Marxist and non-Marxist ones). But they do indicate again the flexibility of our working definition of “feminist,” and thereby encourage students to consider a variety of ways that someone might accept and develop the central feminist claim about the reality of unfairly unequal treatment based on gender. Let me note in passing that many students seem initially to find conservative feminism to be the most plausible of the three options.6

A second feature of our working definition that may be at least as controversial as the first one is that the definition doesn’t clearly require support for abortion rights. Though I am a staunchly pro-choice feminist myself, I take this to be a virtue of the definition. We pro-choice feminists—especially those of us in academia—need to offer arguments for the connection between abortion rights and gender equality, not assume it dogmatically. Dogmatism on this issue not only clashes with the critical thinking that is central to the mission of a liberal arts university but also alienates potential supporters of the feminist movement. And indeed the first debate topic in my Introduction to Women’s Studies course is whether a feminist can be both pro-life and anti-choice on abortion.7

SECTION III: THE CONTENT OF THE SECOND UNIT

The theme of this long unit is the question of whether American women and girls systematically face unfairly unequal treatment because of their gender; it is in that sense that we explore the case for feminism in the U.S. The specific issues we cover include the following: gender-role socialization; workplace discrimination (especially the significance of the gender gap in wages); sexual harassment (in the workplace and in school, but also online and in the street); sexual violence (society-wide, on campus, and in the military); partner violence and stalking; female subordination in religion and ethics; and gender privilege. Sexual violence—especially against students—is, of course, the most sensitive issue, though harassment and partner violence may also hit close to home. At the start of the unit I warn the class about the grimness of much of the material: a “trigger warning” of sorts, though students should know in advance that we will be talking about sexual violence, partner violence, etc., and when (from the syllabus class schedule and my own routine reminders) we will be doing so.8 I make sure that we begin Unit II with less grim material: gender-role socialization, the wage gap, etc. Indeed, the first thing we do is to watch a DVD of Jean Kilbourne’s excellent “Killing Us Softly 4: Advertising’s Image of Women,” a multimedia presentation (2010) that is always thoughtful and sometimes amusing. It generates much lively discussion and helps set the stage not only for our coverage of gender roles but for our examination of sexual violence, partner violence, and gender privilege. We end the unit with an exploration of gender privilege: female as well as male, for balance and comparison. This examination helps the class to pull together the other topics of the unit and is independently interesting to most students.

There are five debates in Unit II, on the following issues:

- Are there any good feminist reasons for disapproving of full-time homemaking as a choice for women to make, or for regarding it as less than ideal?
- Is California’s “affirmative consent” law concerning campus rape and sexual assault a good idea?
- Are Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin right to claim that opposition to pornography should be central to the feminist movement because porn so deeply and harmfully influences male and even female sexual attitudes and behavior?
- Which of the following views of religion makes the most sense from the standpoint of commitment to gender equality? (a) God is male. (b) God is female. (c) God is beyond gender, i.e., neither male nor female. (d) God is both male and female. (e) There are two or more Gods, and at least one is female. (f) There is no God. (g) It doesn’t matter which of the foregoing views is correct. (There are usually only three or four debate teams for this topic!)
- Which of the following positions on gender privilege in the U.S. makes the most sense? (a) Men are more privileged by our society. (b) Women are more privileged by our society. (c) Neither gender is more privileged. (Option (b) is rarely chosen. Students often focus on earlier material in Unit II concerning workplace discrimination, sexual and domestic violence, etc.)

SECTION IV: THE LAST TWO UNITS OF THE COURSE

By the time we have reached the end of Unit II in Week 12, the class is understandably rather tired: the material in and the pace of that nine-week unit have been demanding, and the course is 80 percent over. Consequently, the last two units of the course are much shorter and less intense. But students know that they will need to return to the topics of Unit II on the final-exam essay, which I will describe in the next section.

In the two weeks that make up Unit III (Feminism and Other Social-Justice Movements), we consider the connection between the feminist movement and racial justice, and then the connection between the feminist movement and LGBT rights. This is the part of the course in which students learn—often for the first time—about the “intersectionality” of unequal treatment of women and other historically
disadvantaged groups. I bring in two guest speakers: one an African-American feminist who talks about the concerns of black feminism, the other an LGBT feminist who talks about the relationship between feminist and LGBT issues. In my own discussion of these matters, I focus especially on Patricia Hill Collins’ views on the stereotyping of black women and on the relationship between homophobia and traditional gender roles. (In the future I would like to spend some time in the course on the conflict between transgender rights and some forms of radical feminism.)

In Unit IV (“Trivial Matters”), which is confined to the final week of the term, we talk about some gender issues often dismissed as trivial (especially by nonfeminists but even by some feminists): sexist language, the custom of women taking their husband’s name, and heterosexual dating etiquette. The emphasis here is on discussion linked to students’ personal experiences and preferences, and on the possible social origins and moral grounds of those preferences.

SECTION V: COURSE READINGS AND REQUIREMENTS

Going without a textbook
I used to assign a valuable anthology called Feminist Philosophies (Kourany, Sterba, and Tong, 2000); I appreciated its diverse perspectives and its inclusion of practical as well as theoretical selections. But even then I supplemented it with many articles and handouts, placing them on electronic reserve. Now that the latest edition of this anthology is out of print and somewhat dated, I have taken to using e-reserve resources exclusively, organized by topic: What is Feminism?, Feminism and Abortion, Gender Role Socialization, Sexual Violence, Feminism and Religion, Feminism and Race, Feminism and Sexual Orientation, etc. These readings retain the pluralism and variety of the text selections while enabling my students (many of whom are struggling financially) to forego the cost of buying an expensive book.

Varied assignments
There are three tests in the course: two short-answer tests (worth 20 percent each) at midterm and late term and then a final essay exam (worth 30 percent) consisting in one elaborate question that is explained initially in the syllabus, giving the class the entire semester to prepare for it. The exam is closely tied to Unit II, which I have already described as the heart of the course, and the central question (as formulated in the syllabus) is this:

According to the working definition of “feminist” with which we began the course in Unit I, feminists claim that women and girls are systematically treated unequally in unfair ways. Using at least five issues from Unit II, evaluate this claim in connection with American society. That is, using these issues, answer the following two questions: (a) Is the claim that American women and girls face such treatment correct and reasonable? (b) Why or why not? You will be permitted to bring in one page of notes to the exam.

Every student must participate in at least one of the six debates mentioned earlier. Members of each debate team prepare together using classnotes, online readings, and any other sources they care to consult. I grade individual debaters separately (their letter grade counting for 10 percent of their course grade), but the winning team—as determined by audience vote—earns extra credit points for its members. The audience is told it is duty bound to vote based on which team defended its case most effectively rather than on which one they agree with. The moderator is always a student, who earns extra credit by playing this role.

The remaining 20 percent of students’ overall grades is determined by the seven one-page “reaction responses” they write over the course of the semester on the following topics:

(1)(a) Do you believe that women and girls in at least some parts of the world face unfairly unequal treatment—and not just in isolated cases—because of their gender? If so, give an example. If not, why not? (b) Do you consider yourself to be a feminist? Why or why not? (c) Given your understanding of what a feminist is, can someone be a feminist if that person is male? Against abortion rights? A homemaker? Christian? Heterosexual? Fond of pornography?

(2) What are the more important points that Jean Kilbourne makes in the “Killing Us Softly 4” DVD we viewed in class (or that you viewed on YouTube)? Do you think she defends those points persuasively? Why or why not?

(3) Do you think there is anything morally objectionable about the practice of cat-calling or wolf-whistling at a stranger on the street? Why or why not? Be sure to indicate whether you would be offended if a stranger of the opposite sex did this to you, and also if a stranger of the same sex did so.

(4) Identify the thesis or main point of Ellen Goodman’s short essay “What is the Real Cost of the Gender Tax?” (Be sure to make clear what she means by “gender tax.”) Do you think she defends her point persuasively? Why or why not?

(5) Do you agree with the difference-feminist claim that women and men differ significantly in psychological ways, that is, in how they think and feel? Why or why not? Give at least two examples to illustrate your position, and be sure to indicate whether you believe (with Carol Gilligan) that women and men differ in how they think and feel about morality.

(6) What are the most important points made by our guest speaker on feminism and race? Do you think the speaker made them effectively? Why or why not?

(7) What are the most important points made by our guest speaker on feminism and sexual orientation? Do you think the speaker made them effectively? Why or why not?

Only the top five responses’ grades count for each student, but she can get an A+ overall only if she does all seven.
SECTION VI: CRITICAL-THinking EMPHASIS
In accordance with university policy, the course objectives for Introduction to Women’s Studies are given in the syllabus. Here is an abbreviated account:

This women's studies class is being taught by a professional philosopher, and so, like virtually all philosophy courses, it is a critical-thinking course designed to promote clear thinking and careful, thoughtful reasoning. In particular, the course is primarily intended to help you to clarify your own views about gender issues and to defend them in informed, intelligent judgments.

I immediately add the following assurances about professorial neutrality:

The course is in no way designed to convert students to my own views about feminism or about the various specific issues we explore; and no one's grades depend on sharing those views, nor on accepting the label “feminist” or on being a feminist. I will generally remain neutral on the relevant issues, but I will feel free on occasion to express my own opinions. But if you ever think I’m being unfair to some point of view, you should tell me so, inside or outside of class.

The foregoing statements from the syllabus are by no means pro forma. First, the promotion of critical thinking is undeniably central to a liberal arts education in general (as mentioned in passing earlier), and also—arguably—to philosophy in particular. Second, it is my conviction that teaching critical-thinking skills in a philosophy course is incompatible with indoctrinating students: that is, with demanding that they reach preconceived conclusions about controversial issues such as the reasonableness of feminism. Women’s studies courses have often been accused of indoctrination. Third, I believe that pedagogical neutrality on those issues is especially desirable when all or most of one’s students are freshmen or sophomores. But I don’t deny that colleagues who abandon neutrality can with due effort avoid indoctrination, nor that perfect neutrality is impossible.

There are two specific ways that I emphasize critical thinking in Unit II of the course.

First, I emphasize from the start the importance of reliable information about such issues as rates of sexual violence, domestic violence, etc. I share government statistics whenever possible, without, of course, treating them as infallible. I let my classes know that data from advocacy groups (even ones to which I have made donations!) are inherently suspect, though sometimes—as in the case of street harassment—they may be the best we can get. Relatedly, I correct common misconceptions about gender data, such as the idea that the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ well-known wage gap between women and men gives information on equal work done by equally qualified women and men.

Second, I stress the importance of supplementing data on victimized women with corresponding data on victimized men. For example, Center for Disease Control data on sexual violence against women and men indicate a huge gap in vulnerability (roughly, 1 in 5 vs. 1 in 71); the gap concerning serious partner violence is much smaller (roughly, 1 in 4 vs. 1 in 7), though still, of course, disturbing. Such contextual details are crucial to understanding information about the mistreatment of women, especially when the overarching issue is unequal treatment based on gender.

No doubt there are many legitimate and effective ways to teach Introduction to Women’s Studies. I have offered an approach that highlights the importance of critical thinking and that, for this and other reasons, may have distinctive appeal to philosophers (perhaps especially those of an analytic bent).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
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NOTES
1. An anonymous referee wonders what makes the course worthy of the name “philosophy.” The answer, it seems to me, is primarily the ethical/political normativity of its central issue: whether American women and girls are systematically subjected to unfair treatment because of their gender. (There is more on this issue in Sections II and III, especially.) Roughly speaking, this is a course in social ethics, and thus in applied or practical ethics. Fortunately, the traditional exclusion by Anglo-American linguistic philosophers of practical ethics from “philosophy proper” is rarely taken seriously anymore.

2. The definition has been influenced by Janet Radcliffe Richards, according to whom feminism requires the belief that “women suffer systematically from social injustice because of their sex” (Richards, The Sceptical Feminist: A Philosophical Enquiry, 1). One page later she adds that this involves “opposition” to this injustice, a proviso that excludes my indifferent male student.

3. I say “in effect” because I generally phrase this question more carefully: “How many of you believe that at least in some parts of the world, women and girls are systematically subjected to unfairly unequal treatment because of their gender?” (pause for show of hands); “and how many of you are opposed to this treatment?”

4. According to former students of mine, a Women’s Studies faculty member at the university they were attending used to tell her classes that a woman can’t be a feminist if she wears makeup. An inaccurate report? If so, this was an unfortunate misunderstanding. If not, what a foolish and counterproductive thing to say.

5. Among Sommers’ books are Who Stole Feminism? How Women Have Betrayed Women and Freedom Feminism: Its Surprising History and Why It Matters Today. My own view of her work is that although she is generally wrong on major feminist issues, such as campus rape and the extent of gender equality in the U.S., she performs a valuable service to the feminist movement by continually challenging other feminists to defend their claims and to show more care in making them.

6. I also distinguish in class between equality feminism and difference feminism in relation to the question whether women and men are psychologically as well as physically different. In Section II we talk about Carol Gilligan’s moral-voices version of difference feminism.

7. As I see it, the answer is yes, though I believe anti-choice feminists are confused about abortion or gender equality or both. I do not dictate this answer to my students, leaving it to each of them to work out their own answer. There is much more on critical thinking in Section VI.
8. In some versions of the course, I have also offered reassurance that the unit is not about “male bashing” but about an important ethical/political issue concerning the nature of contemporary American society. In recent years there seems to be less need for such reassurance.

9. See, e.g., Sommers, Who Stole Feminism?, and Patai and Koertge, Professing Feminism: Cautionary Tales About the Strange World of Women’s Studies; Martha Nussbaum offers a thoughtful, often incisive reply in Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education, Ch. 6.


11. Regarding street-harassment data, see Kearl, “Unsafe and Harassed in Public Spaces: A National Street Harassment Report.” Regarding the gender gap in wages: the 79-cent figure, for example, concerns median annual wages of full-time working women and men; that’s it. (In class I note that according to many economists, a significant gap in wages persists even after adjusting for hours worked, qualifications, etc. I try to keep abreast of the latest information about this issue, and to share it with my students in non-technical articles from such sources as the Washington Post; see, e.g., Samuelson, “What’s the Real Gender Pay Gap?” Regarding sexual and partner violence, see CDC, “National Data on Intimate Partner Violence, Sexual Violence, and Stalking” Fact Sheet, 2014.

WORKS CITED


BOOK REVIEW

The Stone Reader: Modern Philosophy in 133 Arguments


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There are exceptional times, times which the Germans call “Sternstunden,” when philosophy shapes the cultural and intellectual life of a society. We might think of Socrates’s impact on Athens, Voltaire’s influence on France, or the role Idealism played in the cultural life of Germany. Unfortunately, these times do not seem to occur often. During many historical periods, including our own, outstanding philosophical work seems to happen without affecting the broader cultural life and without having much impact on how ordinary people think of life, meaning, and religion.

Peter Catapano and Simon Critchley are on a mission to change this. Since 2010, they have edited the popular New York Times’ philosophy series “The Stone,” which tries to show that “well-wrought and jargon free philosophical essays” (page xx) can help a broader audience think differently, and presumably deeper, about current events and society. In The Stone Reader Catapano and Critchley present 133 essays from the New York Times’ series in one volume. The book does not present the essays in the chronologic order in which they appeared in the Times, but divides them into four broad sections: Philosophy; Science; Religion and Morals; and Society. The essays reflect a wide variety of different philosophical perspectives and methods. Some of them, for example, Galen Strawson’s “Your Move: The Maze of Free Will” and Laurie Shrage’s “Is Forced Fatherhood Fair?” are concise presentations of particular philosophical arguments. Other essays, such as Andy Martin’s “Sartre and Camus in New York” and Avital Ronell’s “Stormy Weather: Blues in Winter?” resemble biographical reflections. Still others provide succinct introductions to particular philosophical positions, such as David Sosa’s “The Spoils of Happiness,” which introduces readers to an objective conception of happiness, and Graham Priest’s “Paradoxical Truth,” which introduces the basic idea behind dialetheism. Finally, a good number of essays reflect on contemporary phenomena, and some essays reflect on the current state of academic philosophy. An example of the former is J. M. Bernstein’s analysis of the Tea Party in “The Very Angry Tea Party”; an example of the latter is to be found in Rae Langton’s “The Disappearing Women” and in Justin Smith’s “Philosophy’s Western Bias.”

Despite this diversity of content and orientation, all essays have some features in common: they are all short (nearly all are between three and seven pages long); they are all accessible; and they are all clearly written and a pleasure to read. With this the editors achieve what they set out to do, namely, show that “philosophy and journalism are a natural fit . . . and complement each other” (Introduction page xvi).

Given these features, it is clear that the book is perfectly suited for introducing a wider audience to current philosophical thinking. It is the ideal gift for somebody with a busy life who would like to get a quick impression of what philosophy is and what philosophers have to say about current issues.

Is the book also suited for teaching philosophy in the academy? My answer here is mixed. In my view, the book is not an optimal choice for teaching a course in Introduction to Philosophy. The short essays in the The Stone Reader are no substitute for reading classical pieces like Plato’s Apology or Bertrand Russell’s The Value of Philosophy. Indeed, the brevity of the essays becomes a disadvantage when what is called for are explanations of a particular
philosophical position and development of arguments for those positions.

However, there are other, more promising and more exciting, possibilities for using the text in the academy. For example, for courses in informal logic/critical thinking and for courses that introduce students to ethics, The Stone Reader provides a rich resource of short, engaging, and well-argued essays which are perfectly suited for learning about argumentative writing in these areas. Here the brevity of the texts becomes an advantage because one can easily read an essay in the classroom together with one’s students in less than five minutes. Reading the essay together with one’s students eliminates the (all-too-common and persistent) problem of having students in the class who have not read and so are not familiar with the text that is being discussed. Moreover, many of the essays deal with contemporary issues such as gun control, race, just war, solitary confinement, and feminism—topics which are likely to spark debate among students more easily than many other topics dealt with in traditional texts.

In addition, The Stone Reader provides the opportunity to introduce students to philosophical dialectic by including essays that are direct critical responses to other essays. For example, “The Dangers of Pseudoscience,” by Massimo Pigliucci and Maarten Boudry, is a direct critical reply to “The Enigma of Chinese Medicine,” in which Stephen T. Asma argues that there are good reasons for being open to the use of acupuncture and other treatment methods of traditional Chinese medicine. I can see a very effective writing assignment emerging from these two texts that requires students to describe and assess these two texts’ opposing arguments. Similar assignments suggest themselves for Philip Kitcher’s response to Thomas Nagel’s essay “The Core of Mind and Cosmos” and Timothy Williamson’s response to Alex Rosenberg’s “Why I am A Naturalist.” Clearly, there are many ways in which these essays could play a useful and enriching role in various college classes. It would be especially rewarding if these essays could find their way into English composition classes so that these well-written philosophical essays could serve as a role model for students who wish to become both better thinkers and better writers.

One reservation I have about The Stone Reader concerns the section on religion. Surprisingly, the essays in this section are, unlike the articles in the other sections, rather uniform and lacking in diversity. Characterizing all of the essays in this section is the narrow perspective that sees all religions belonging to the Abrahamic tradition as reducing claims such that they then fit easily into a humanistic, naturalistic, and ultimately secular worldview.

Moreover, none of the authors who writes in this section is either a full-blown atheist like Richard Dawkins or a committed theist. Instead, most essays are written from the perspective of a benevolent outsider. Simon Critchley’s essay, “Why I Love Mormonism,” for example, explains and defends the basics of Mormonism while ultimately describing it as “a gloriously presumptive and delusional creation from the same climate as Whitman” (454). Clearly, there is something missing in this defense, just as there is something missing in Samuel Scheffler’s belief in an afterlife or in Tim Crane’s defense of the separation of science and religion.

A welcome addition to the anthology would have been inclusion of essays in which authors took some aspect of traditional religion seriously rather than modifying religious claims such that they then fit easily into a humanistic, naturalistic, and ultimately secular worldview.

The Stone Reader is, however, a very worthy and successful attempt to bring philosophy to a wider audience. I recommend it highly to everyone with an interest in philosophy, and I hope that it will be used widely within a variety of different academic disciplines in the academy.

BOOKS RECEIVED

BLOOMSBURY
Allen, Sophie R. A Critical Introduction to Properties.

BROADVIEW PRESS

HACKETT PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC.
Cavendish, Margaret, ed. Observations upon Experimental Philosophy, Abridged, with Related Texts.


Delapp, Kevin, and Jeremy Henkel, eds. and Intro. Lying and Truthfulness.


Tiwald, Justin and Bryan W. Van Norden, eds. Readings in Later Chinese Philosophy: Han Dynasty to the 20th Century.

Williams, Thomas, translation and introduction, with a commentary by Christina Van Dyke and Thomas Williams. Thomas Aquinas: The Treatise on Happiness Treatise on Human Acts.
INDEPENDENT THINKING PRESS
Worley, Peter, ed. The Philosophy Shop: Ideas, Activities and Questions to Get People, Young and Old, Thinking Philosophically.

PROMETHEUS BOOKS

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