Kelly Oliver, Hanna Kiri Gunn & Holly Longair (Eds.). *Gaslighting: Philosophical Approaches*. SUNY Press 2025. 290 pp. $120.00 USD (Hardcover 9798855801309); $35.95 USD (Paperback 9798855801316).

Gaslighting: Philosophical Approaches (2025) is an anthology of eleven academic articles in the style of Anglo-American, analytic philosophy on the concept of gaslighting. It is intended for anyone interested in an introduction to gaslighting, though readers may get more out of this collection if they already have some grounding in feminist social epistemology.

Previous analyses in philosophy have centred on gaslighting as a dynamic between individuals, where one agent, a gaslighter, intentionally or unintentionally gaslights a target or victim, the gaslightee, by manipulating their beliefs to achieve some other end (2). Editors Kelly Oliver, Hanna Kiri Gunn, and Holly Longair's curation extends this framework to forms of gaslighting that occur at a broader, structural level across groups and institutional entities, keeping with the common feminist aim of moving beyond the interpersonal to the structural underpinnings of oppression. While the collection of voices successfully showcases the concept's "elasticity" as a prospective tool in the theorizing of social justice and moral responsibility, for me the volume highlights a need to create a shared conceptual footing to enable actionable ameliorative projects moving forward.

The editors bring together thinkers whose lived and theoretical perspectives are notably varied, including racialized contributors and one trans author. Not all authors occupy the same social position as philosophy faculty members. One works as an independent scholar, one as an early career researcher, and another as a postdoctoral student. There are no authors who identify as men in the volume, and the majority are either from the U.S. or based there.

Editors Gunn and Longair have authored a chapter which serves as an excellent overview to gaslighting for newcomers to the field, students, and other academic philosophers. It captures the concept's historical antecedents in psychoanalysis, its rise in popular culture alongside political movements such as #MeToo, and the current debates in analytic feminist philosophy within and outside of the volume (7). They situate their anthology in a lineage starting with Abramson (2014) and most recently in *Hypatia* (2020), which features five articles on gaslighting all viewed through the lens of injustice.

The first section of the collection "What is Gaslighting?" launches into arguments in favour of broadening this initial definition from the paradigmatic interpersonal case, that of an individual gaslighter and gaslightee, to a more structural one covering collective entities and groups. The first three chapters all defend this extrapolation, arguing that structural gaslighting produces population-level harms (Chapter 1), can be distinguished from structural forms of injustice more broadly (Chapter 2), and can be seen as a power struggle over the limits of acceptable beliefs held within a social imaginary (Chapter 3). The subsequent chapters, on moral gaslighting (Chapter 4), affective gaslighting (Chapter 5) and anger gaslighting (Chapter 6), pivot to argue for developments in the paradigmatic, interpersonal case, though each with a view to the tenability of gaslighting's interoperability with the broader, group-based structural account.

The second section features articles exploring a more inductive approach, looking at case studies of gaslighting as experienced by trans women (Chapter 7), racialized Americans (Chapter 8), domestic abuse targets and victims (Chapter 9), medical patients (Chapter 10), and Puerto Ricans impacted by the U.S. governments' response in the wake of Hurricane María (Chapter 11). The twofold division mostly works, though it would have been helpful to see engagement across chapters here, with authors having read each other's work and perhaps explicitly referencing who and where in the volume to find affinities and contrasts with their ideas. I also think Chapter 8, Davis & Ernst's *Racial Gaslighting* (2017), may belong more suitably in the first section rather than the second, as this paper is specifically credited as the first to identify and theorize about structural gaslighting (65).

Throughout the volume, most authors employ the same frameworks from feminist social epistemology, with all but two authors citing and building upon Fricker's *Epistemic Injustice* (2007) and its attendant concepts of *testimonial injustice* and *hermeneutical injustice*. Accordingly, epistemic understandings of gaslighting take centre stage, with most characterizing it in terms of how structures of power, whether they be exercised by an individual or under the aegis of institutional authority, intercede on the epistemic integrity of a knower. Accompanying these terms, many of Kristie Dotson's contributions (2011, 2012) on *epistemic violence*, *epistemic oppression*, *pernicious ignorance*, and *testimonial smothering* also feature in over half of the volume's analyses. Editors Gunn and Longair helpfully contextualize the tensions between these overlapping yet competing epistemological framings, as well as the larger issue of how Fricker's notions have themselves been argued to constitute forms of structural gaslighting (Berenstain, 2020) and epistemic oppression (Dotson, 2012). Notably, the only authors that do not build upon these epistemic approaches are Davis & Ernst (2017), as for them, gaslighting is not a psychological dynamic but rather a sociopolitical technology.

The editors suggest this volume features some ameliorative approaches to gaslighting (16), where 'ameliorative' here describes a strategy and praxis in philosophy that seeks to improve concepts or the world through their refinement and use. While every author agrees that gaslighting contributes to ongoing wrongs (17), it is not specified what the ameliorative project is for any author, let alone the group. What do we want the concept to be able to do? Explain injuries? Allocate moral responsibility? Reveal power dynamics? It seems an important thing to draw out first, otherwise it is not straightforward to evaluate where we are successful.

One reason why this is not straight forward is the lack of an overlap in how gaslighting is defined in the volume. A rejection of previous definitions — being too ableist (128) and narrow (119) — makes sense given the aim of defending a structuralist account. But this enlarging of scope can create a certain murkiness; where the concept grows a limb it may also appear to lose an eye, and it is often not easy to detect when we are offering descriptive exegesis or tacking on attributes that will later complicate considering gaslighting's sufficient and necessary conditions.

Despite this, there is convergence in other spots. Many authors agree that how gaslighting perpetuates its harms is through concealment (25) disguise (197), and distortion (71). Berenstain's analysis, for example, focuses on the agents of gaslighting, arguing subterfuge tactics are used to

propagate alternative, albeit false, narratives. Yet while she brings up role-reversal as the diagnostic feature of this tactic, both she, Longair, and Ivy also emphasize the complicity of bystanders as well as gaslightees in their account (24, 71, 78, 180). As readers, the picture we are left with of gaslighting is lit not by a steady source of illumination, but rather by a strobe light where in-between pulses in the dark, the shape of what we are looking at keeps changing.

In my view, the most notable explicitly ameliorative analysis, as per Haslanger (2012), in the volume appears in Stark's *Varieties of Gaslighting* (Chapter 9). Stark looks at four paradigmatic cases of gaslighting, analyzes what they have in common, creates a general-use framework, and then re-applies this framework to more controversial cases to evaluate its tenability (214). She argues for there being no essential attribute across cases, presenting something reminiscent of a family resemblance theory of gaslighting. Stark also usefully speculates about five separate potentially unifying features across all cases, such as a gaslighter G denying a view V to try to get a target T who holds V to adopt a competing but not even minimally justified view, typically ~V (220).

One of the best pieces of the collection towards future ameliorative projects for gaslighting comes from Berenstain's *Structural Gaslighting* (Chapter 1), where she claims that "interpersonal gaslighting and structural gaslighting are isomorphic forms of abuse" (23). Yet it is not always clear how to characterize the abuser. Indeed, as she helpfully reads Ruíz (2024), the abuser may take the form of another concept itself, such as the western concept of 'trauma' in how it presents intentionally designed harms as tragic and unforeseeable acts of fate (26). Likewise, Berenstain extends this reasoning to epistemic injustice, arguing that concepts can be structural forms of gaslighting in virtue of how they're designed. The idea that we want our concept to lighten rather than obfuscate harms seems out-of-step with some other authors' inherited preoccupation with the psychologies of gaslighting and the puzzles that come from trying to connect how a concept such as 'unintentional gaslighting' allows for its targets to become complicit in their own gaslighting (127).

In sum, the volume is successful in its rich intersectionality in exhibiting several possibilities for ameliorative projects, though clarity is needed on which accounts of gaslighting are compatible. While I accept the tenability of structural gaslighting as a concept, it often comes at the expense of maintaining an intelligible notion of the interpersonal version. If indeed we want one unified account to work for both, further efforts are needed to answer the questions of what tasks we hope to put it toward. If we decide it is important for it to be just one, then we may need to ask which attributes of our engineered concept of gaslighting can we live with, and which ones we are happy to live without.

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