

George Yancy (ed.)

Reframing the Practice of Philosophy: Bodies of Color, Bodies of Knowledge.

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In 1995, Leonard Harris published an article for which he received death threats, exposing the white supremacist underpinnings of institutionalized philosophy in the United States:

“There are those [...] who doubt that the Ku Klux Klan created American Philosophy [...] However, even without [that] belief [...] there are reasons to think that American Philosophy is compatible with the wishes of the Klan” (*Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 68(5): 1995, 135).

If more tempered in tone, *Reframing the Practice of Philosophy* testifies to the abiding white dominance and white solipsism of the discipline. In the latest of “the indefatigable George Yancy’s collections,” contributors make effective use of autobiography to “articulat[e] the *lived interiority*” of experiences of exclusion, marginalization, and tokenism reflected in statistics which reveal the “paucity of African Americans and Latinos/as in the field of philosophy in the United States”--which remains a “predominantly *white* and *male* field” (45, 4, 1, 2). Fifteen years ago, 1% of U.S. philosophers were black; still today only 1% are. Less than 30 are Black women, “doubly disadvantaged in the profession by the intersection of race and gender” (49). Only 3.8% of graduate students in philosophy are Latin@, and only “half a dozen” are “established professional philosophers” (169). As Grant Silva writes in his review published in the *APA Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy*, “more honest conversations like [those staged in *Reframing the Practice of Philosophy*] must take place in order for our field to reinvent itself along more equitable lines, assuming that this is indeed a collective goal” (2012, 8). The unbearable whiteness of academic philosophy, means, as Charles Mills puts it, that transforming the discipline is “going to be a long haul” (65).

I will first summarize the seventeen contributions by luminaries and emerging voices in the areas of philosophy of race and gender, Africana philosophy, Latin American philosophy; then, I will briefly offer two critical suggestions.

In “Alien and Alienated,” Linda Martín Alcoff attributes the non-representation of Latin@ and African diasporic philosophies in academic curricula to the fact that “Africa and Latin America are alone among the continents of the globe that engender an alarming level of disrespect, ignorance and contempt in north America” (25). Martín Alcoff questions the possibility and desirability of assimilation as an ostensible solution to the problem of alienation facing Latin@ philosophers: “If assimilation requires self-alienation from one’s own hermeneutic horizon, for whom is it a solution?” (24). She posits integration as an alternative model to assimilation; the former eschews forcible absorption in favour of a “combinatory process that desegregates in order to produce a newly unified system” (34).

In “Philosophy Raced, Philosophy Erased,” Charles Mills decries the “whiteness of philosophy” and the “conceptual tokenization” of Black philosophers (54), critiquing Kwame Anthony Appiah’s racial eliminativism (52-53); John Rawls’ and left-Rawlsians’ ostensibly raceless ideal theory (54); Philip Pettit’s white solipsism (61-63); and reflecting on his own philosophical production and reception, particularly of his book *The Racial Contract*. Mills argues that whiteness is “more structurally central to the very self-conception of the field than in other subjects,” making it harder to transform philosophy as a discipline (45).

Ofelia Schutte identifies three major obstacles to “Attracting Latinos/as to Philosophy”: “the problem of the [Anglo-Eurocentric] canon, the problem of prestige, and the problem of the ‘we’ [or, the “plural subject”] of philosophy” (81). As Schutte writes, “the recent backlash in U.S. politics against ‘illegal aliens’ (undocumented workers) places Latino/as in the category of Abject in the social imaginary of a very vocal segment of native-born white Americans” (78). Jorge J. E. Gracia argues the role of tradition--“a continuity of practices”--in canon formation explains why Latin American philosophy is excluded from both the canon of western philosophy and world philosophy as these are understood in the U.S. (94, 88). Jesús H. Aguilar argues the case for a “distinctive Latin American philosophy” should be a metaphilosophically internalist one, which acknowledges the distinct “styles of thought” shared by Latin American philosophies (109, 113).

John H. McClendon III situates “mundane and institutionalized academic racism” within the context of a “bourgeois social division of labor,” examining the relegation of Black scholars to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (122). He offers a compelling critique of the assumption that “passive behavior” and “gradualism” are the most practical strategies to address racism, and of the notion that “Black inclusion is predicated on white approval and acceptance” (128). After all, “the institutional character of the color line takes priority over the position of individual African Americans” (127). Eduardo Mendieta’s essay, “Migrant, Migra, Mongrel: The Latin American Dishwasher, Busboy, and Colored/Ethnic/Diversity (Philosophy) Hire” lends further support to McClendon’s argument that mere inclusion does not constitute a transformation of institutionalized power relations. Mendieta explores the exploitative “situation of the minority hire,” the “Mexican handymen of the U.S. academy,” who, he argues, like the “34 million Latinos of Mexican descent in the United States,” is “indispensable and yet totally disposable” (161-162).

Gregory Fernando Pappas answers his titular question, “Why Are Hispanic Philosophers Marginalized in the American Philosophical Community?” drawing on John Dewey to suggest that “marginalization sometimes functions as a habit” (176). “If all of the prejudices (including the foreign prejudice) [...] function at the level of habits, then the problem is not simply a matter of ignorance [and...] to correct [it...] may require more than argumentation. It may require disrupting habits of the imagination” (177). Bill E. Lawson explores what he calls “Philosophical Playa Hatin,” “the lack of respect shown scholars of color” and the “viscerally racis[t]” disparagement or diminishment by white philosophers of the accomplishments of their minoritized colleagues (194, 196, 183).

Jacqueline Scott, meditating on the “fissures between one’s public identity and one’s lived subjectivity” (212), analyses the states of “cognitive dissonance” and “aporia” experienced by people who, perceiving her ostensibly inconsistent social identities--Jewish Black woman philosopher--in a “monolithically thick way” (as opposed to a “multifariously thin” way), “find [themselves] at a loss about how to deal with [her]”: “As a result, I am looked at and listened to, but not seen or heard” (216, 210-211). Donna-Dale Marcano focuses her critical attention on Black women’s “tragic outsider relationship to philosophy,” embodied in the figure of Alcibiades in

Plato's *Symposium* (226). She concludes that "[t]he very presence of a black woman in a room of predominantly white male philosophers [...] challenges the pretensions of universality and transcendence that have been ascribed to those white male bodies" (232). Oscar Martí analytically defends "gender and ethnic philosophies" against colleagues' reactions of indifference and antagonism (235). Nelson Maldonado-Torres argues that "for philosophy to be useful it [...] must] be decolonized," a task he argues is more feasibly undertaken from the outside than "gradually from the inside" of the discipline (252-253). He draws on Frantz Fanon to articulate a conception of "decolonization as first philosophy": "the *telos* of thinking [...] is the struggle against dehumanization, [...] the affirmation of sociality and the negation of its negation" (261). In his rich essay, "Thinking Through the Americas Today," Lewis R. Gordon reflects on Fanon's continued relevance in the postcolonial "throes of global disruption of a prior age" (276), and on the potential of organizations such as the Caribbean Philosophical Association to expand "[o]ur intellectual horizon" beyond the boundaries of language and nation, to collectively "defy the bullying values of imperial models of globalism" (279, 283).

Finally, in their respective essays, George Yancy, Elizabeth Millán and José Medina critique the systemic disparagement of African American and Spanish languages within white/Anglo-dominated academic institutions, and reflect on the possibilities for linguistic resistance to linguistic hegemony (315, 341).

In his Introduction, Yancy is explicitly critical of the black/white binary which subsumes anti-Latin@ racism under anti-Black racism (3); indeed, one of the strengths of the volume is an examination of the specificities of anti-Black and anti-Latin@ racisms (although little is said of their intersection in the experiences of Afro-Latin@ people; Gordon's essay is exceptional in that regard). I would like to extend Silva's gentle suggestion that "the text would be improved if it went beyond a black/brown binary to include people of Asian and indigenous descent (among others)" (Silva 10-11); including those whose racialization makes them "visible but not legible," in Mendieta's words (152). Arguably, an exclusive emphasis on anti-Black and anti-Latin@ racism (as indisputably urgent as an examination of these virulent forms of racism is) has deleterious effects on other racialized groups (e.g., Muslims, Indigenous peoples) affected by at times competing and at times complementary "pillars of white supremacy," to invoke Andrea Smith's triadic model of racial formation (*The Color of Violence*, South End Press, 2006, 61-73).

My second criticism is that the volume lacks a robustly integrative examination of racial exclusion and oppression; the intersection of racism and misogyny is reduced to an additive concept of "double disadvantage" (49), as, for instance, in the claim that "Latina women are double minorities in the field of philosophy, at a minimum" (78). Numerous contributors cite Kathryn T. Gines' finding that only thirty professional philosophers in the United States are Black women (of 11,000 APA members), yet little is offered by way of substantive analysis of the gendered racism women of color face--the fact that, in Marcano's words, "black women, because of their race and gender [...] are least likely to be considered the conveyors of philosophical wisdom" (226; see Gines, "Being a Black Woman Philosopher: Reflections on Founding the Collegium of Black Women Philosophers," *Hypatia* 26(2): 2011, 429n1). While contributors discuss the activities of the APA and CPA, missing from the volume is mention of the organizing efforts of the Collegium of Black Women Philosophers and the Roundtable on Latina Feminism. Moreover, given that the vast majority of the contributors are male-identified (twelve of sixteen), we might reasonably expect some discussion of how masculinity articulates ethnic and racial identities (and/or, how these identities are inflected by sexuality, gender identity, class, citizenship, and physical and cognitive ability; Mendieta's reflections on the effects of his

documented immigration and citizenship status on his experiences of racialization serve as a guiding example).

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