

Asian and Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies



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WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE A PHILOSOPHER OF ASIAN DESCENT?

Dedicated to the memory of Dr. Jaegwon Kim

FROM THE EDITORS

A. Minh Nguyen and Yarran Hominh

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APA NEWSLETTER ON

Asian and Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies

A. MINH NGUYEN, EDITOR

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FROM THE EDITORS

Editors' Introduction: What Is It Like to Be a Philosopher of Asian Descent?

A. Minh Nguyen, Editor
FLORIDA GULF COAST UNIVERSITY
ATNGUYEN@FGCU.EDU

Yarran Hominh, Associate Editor
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
YDH2106@COLUMBIA.EDU

I. INTRODUCTION AND DEDICATION

Previous issues of this newsletter focus on important topics, historical figures, and emerging trends in the field of Asian and Asian American philosophies.¹ For this fall 2020 issue, we would like to take a different tack and look instead at the other half of this committee's brief: Asian and Asian American philosophers. Hence, our theme is what it is like to be a philosopher of Asian descent.

Asian and Asian American philosophers comprise 6.10 percent to 6.92 percent of the APA's membership who reported their race/ethnicity in recent (FY2016 to FY2018) demographic surveys.² However, that figure may be an overestimation because, aside from the fact that nearly half of APA members did not report those data,³ the percentage of North American recipients of doctoral degrees in philosophy who identify themselves as Asian or Asian American has been no higher than 4.66 percent—in most years, well below 4.66 percent—since the mid-1990s.⁴ Nonetheless, given that wide pool of life and philosophical experience and given the huge diversity within the group that we label "Asian," the editors thought that an issue presenting the stories of some of the members of that group, in their own voices, would be of interest both to those who identify themselves as Asian or Asian American and to the wider philosophical community.

We thus invited a selection of Asian and Asian American philosophers to submit essays on the theme. We provided potential contributors with an extensive list of guiding questions, but contributors were free to address the theme as they saw fit.⁵ We received twenty-nine contributions (without the global COVID-19 pandemic and the attendant unprecedented disruptions to all aspects of life, we would have received at least a dozen more), which together represent a wide—though, of course, incomplete—cross-section of Asian and Asian American philosophers.

Geographically and ethnoculturally, our contributors' or their parents' countries of origin span the majority of the Asian continent, stretching from South Asia (India, Nepal, Pakistan) across East Asia (China, Japan, North Korea, South Korea, Taiwan) to Southeast Asia (Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam). Their work covers topics from justice in Aristotle's moral and political philosophy to Zhuangzi as a skeptic and a fictionalist, from the philosophy of the *Bhagavad Gita* and the Buddhism-deconstruction encounter to virtue ethics and virtue epistemology in the Quran, from the meaning of *if* and the normativity of meaning and content to Du Bois and Fanon on the philosophy and phenomenology of race, from decision theory without representation theorems to microaggression and epistemic uncertainty as a woman of color, from the aesthetics of the familiar to decolonial skepticism about imperial grand narratives. Their academic career and employment status ranges from graduate student to tenured full professor, from part-time adjunct to endowed distinguished chair, across a variety of institutions, including schools of art and design, institutes of health professions, regional public colleges, private research universities, Jesuit higher-educational institutions, and flagship state universities. To read these contributions, then, is to get some sense of what it is to be a philosopher *simpliciter* in North America as well as a philosopher of Asian descent.

This huge internal diversity, coupled with our desire to have our contributors enjoy the space to tell their stories in their own voices, has led to this issue being of longer length than is typical. In our view, that length is balanced out by the benefits of a broad range of stories, histories, anecdotes, reflections, speculations, insights, hopes, and dreams presented here. Our intention is not only to provide a snapshot of what it is like to be an Asian or Asian American philosopher at this time, but also for this issue to serve as a document of sociological and historical interest. We hope at the very least that this issue offers some insight into the many and varied ways in which one can be a philosopher of Asian descent.

We would like to dedicate this issue to the memory of Jaegwon Kim (1934–2019), celebrated for his pioneering work in the philosophy of mind, metaphysics, epistemology, and the philosophy of science and his service as president of the Central Division of the American Philosophical Association in 1988–1989. We had asked Professor Kim to contribute to this issue barely a week before his passing, and we are honored to have in his contribution's stead a memorial notice from the Department of Philosophy at Brown University, where he spent much of his professional academic life.

II. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A PHILOSOPHER OF ASIAN DESCENT?

There are a number of themes that recur throughout these reflections. The first, one that perhaps encompasses all the others, is what it means to be a philosopher of Asian descent. How does one, as a philosopher and as a person, take up that social position and identity, those histories and geographies, and all the large and small vicissitudes and choices that lead one to one's present?

Falguni A. Sheth begins her essay with one challenge of understanding "Asian" identity, namely, that it is one constructed largely by Orientalist administrative categories imposed from above and insensitive to the complexities of lived experience (of "having [one's] comportment and questions met with perplexity or suspicion," for instance). Consequently, for Sheth, "'Asian' . . . remained a term of art designating (and often denigrating) a long-standing 'Other' against a dominant whiteness and a Black Other." How, through what agency, can one reshape and make sense of one's social identity if that is the form that it takes?

This question, essentially one of identity and agency and the relationship between the two, must be read both in the general and in the particular. As Jin Y. Park puts it, "truth might be universal, but when the truth happens in an individual's life and lived events, it happens in context, and the individual understands truth in that specific context." To be a philosopher of Asian descent, she goes on to say, means that "I am keenly aware of the connections between our lived experiences and our philosophizing," that "I base my philosophy on the lived experiences of myself and many others who have experienced discrimination and marginalization of different kinds and at different levels," that "I am thoroughly sensitive to the power structure that is at the core of our philosophizing and the discipline of philosophy."

Celia T. Bardwell-Jones considers a poignant form of the aforementioned general-particular dichotomy. She is, to the best of her knowledge, the only self-identifying Filipina tenured or tenure-track philosopher in the US. What are the historical and ideational causes of what she calls this "singular demographic"? Bardwell-Jones raises this question and her reflections trace quite a few of its consequences in her own personal and professional life, including "the lack of role models," roadblocks to opportunity, "eerie loneliness," self-doubt, and a sense of dread as described in her self-report of "feeling the unbearable weight of my existence in the company of other philosophers."⁶

Julianne Chung writes from another perspective, that of "a multiracial philosopher partially of Asian descent," one whose experience is shaped much more by Ukrainian culture than by Chinese. According to Chung, her work is so related to her background that she has come to see herself as "something of a 'fusion person' racially, ethnically, and culturally who also does 'fusion philosophy'—or, perhaps more aptly, as a deeply multicultural person who also does multicultural philosophy as deeply as [she is] able to." Her research methods (cross-cultural and

interdisciplinary) and research interests (topics at the intersection of epistemology, the philosophy of language, the philosophy of mind, and aesthetics), she says, "are at least as 'mixed' as I am."⁷ The relation between work and background (broadly construed so as to include self-conception) is also dynamic and fruitful in a converse way. In part thanks to her philosophical work, Chung has now come to understand that just as "cross-cultural philosophy is philosophy that weaves together strands from different philosophical traditions," so too multiracial identity is identity that weaves together "strands from different racial, ethnic, and cultural traditions." Practicing the kind of fusion or cross-cultural (and interdisciplinary) philosophy that Chung does, therefore, helps inform her thinking on her own multiracial identity and on multiculturalism and related topics in general.⁸

As for Masato Ishida, attaching 'of Asian descent' to 'philosopher' feels "a little bit like adding ~P after saying P." Readers may hear in this an echo of Ludwig Wittgenstein's aphorism that "the philosopher is not a citizen of any community of ideas; that is what makes him into a philosopher" (*Zettel*, 455). Ishida argues that associating an individual's philosophical contributions with their racial-ethnic-cultural background "seems wrongheaded for the purpose of philosophy" because it may amount to committing a "genetic fallacy." Considering the case of Nishida Kitarō, "the most significant modern Japanese philosopher" in his view, Ishida stresses that Nishida "developed his seminal concept of *basho*, or *place*, through his persistent engagement with Western philosophy." Ishida proceeds to clarify: "I intentionally set aside questions of origin because [instead of searching for racial-ethnic-cultural ingredients in a thinker's philosophy] I find it far more attractive to anticipate powerful thinkers like Nishida coming from all over Asia to impact philosophy. . . . They contribute to philosophy not because they come from particular places in the world." The relation between the larger currents that shape one's lived experience and that lived experience itself, and the relation between those currents and one's philosophy, are explored and exemplified in different ways in the essays in this issue.

III. ACADEMIC PHILOSOPHY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

The second large theme is the relation each of these philosophers has towards academic philosophy, particularly analytic philosophy as it is practiced in North America nowadays, and the broader white, American culture of which academic analytic philosophy is both part of and partially set against. Some found a degree of freedom in the discipline. Prasanta S. Bandyopadhyay writes that his mentors in graduate school at the University of Rochester inculcated in him "the confidence to challenge any argument advanced by any famous philosopher . . . if I thought seriously that theirs was deeply flawed," unlike his earlier education in India, where "no one was encouraged to think on their own on any issue." Anand Jayprakash Vaidya, during his undergraduate studies at UCLA, was "attracted to the content as well as the method of doing philosophy," though later he would, like others, return to his history via cross-cultural and cross-traditional philosophy.

But others found academic philosophy at best stifling and unreceptive to the work they wanted to do and at worst poised to reiterate and exacerbate the racism of the surrounding culture. Ann A. Pang-White's and Saam Trivedi's reflections are touchstones here. Pang-White speaks of the "barrenness" of analytic philosophy with its themes and methods when it becomes "hegemonic" and authoritarian; of the "jarred" and "decisive preference" for the analytic tradition and its ways of doing philosophy in the contemporary academic world; of the resultant devaluation of "other modes of philosophizing—by means of literature, metaphor, analogy, symbolism, or sentiment, for instance"—devaluation, specifically, of "Asian philosophy with its embedded poetic sense, its love of paradox, its non-dualist logic that rejects the absolute demarcation of subject and object." She speaks of the attendant "narrowing" and "exclusivist perspective of what counts and what does not count as philosophy"; and of the "multiple glass ceilings" faced by female philosophers of Asian descent.

The center of Trivedi's piece is a litany of his own experiences of racism, discrimination, bias, and prejudice in the profession, a number of which are repeated with slight variations in other pieces. After warning graduate students and junior faculty members of Asian descent that they "probably will face some typecasting and . . . at least some unconscious bias," Trivedi urges them not to "despair" or "abandon hope" and provides a number of concrete and practical ways in which they can cope with all this and even turn it to their advantage.

Similarly, in a compelling passage, Monika Kirloskar-Steinbach laments her experience of being typecast yet concludes by striking a note of cautious optimism about the future of the profession.⁹ She writes:

My life in Euro-American academic philosophy has many a time felt for me, a female philosopher of Indian descent with interests in non-canonical philosophy, like facing a steep incline. Absent an awareness of practitioner and content diversity, minority scholars tend to be sought out as go-to experts for an antiquated and essentialized understanding of cultural identities. They are solicited for conference presentations to deliver "authentic" accounts of the "Indian mind," "Chinese mind," "Japanese mind," etc. Such problematic interpellations play out against the background of . . . white miscognition. . . . Furthermore, these interpellations set up a close relation between philosophical ability and biographical factors—a relation that seems to hold particularly for those whose bodies are marked out as possessing "divergent" identities. Such interpellations as the philosophical "other" are not isolated incidents; they seem to occur across Euro-America. And yet I am cautiously optimistic that ongoing changes will make the field more inclusive.

What it is like to be a philosopher of Asian descent is that one often feels, in Kirloskar-Steinbach's striking phrase, "like facing a steep incline." And this feeling is likely to

persist in the absence of stable institutional and personal support. In addition to non-canonical philosophy, cultural pluralism, and epistemic decolonization, Kirloskar-Steinbach found "a deep wariness about canon-making processes, as well as the belief that philosophy itself has the tools to resist majoritarian societal tendencies" to be congenial to decolonial and anti-racist commitments.

Likewise, for Yubraj Aryal, key to the intellectual project that critiques and decenters the hegemonic Western knowledge system (which encompasses the creation, construction, transmission, and reception of knowledge) with its claim of universality is "how individuals like [himself, a minority scholar in the United States] create micropolitics, a self-created space for oneself within a dominant politics," that is, "how individuals at the frontier or margin of dominant power relations can self-fashion what they are in their self-creation." By contrast, instead of drawing inspiration from Michel Foucault's idea of self-fashioning as Aryal does, Yoichi Ishida contends that philosophy is improved only by cross-disciplinary pollination. He writes:

I would have been a worse philosopher had I not studied a wide range of philosophy, history, and science. . . . [A] vision of philosophy . . . now permeates both my research and teaching: My goal is to understand something, using whatever insights from others and, hopefully, adding my own. Insights can come from philosophy, history, science, or any other field. So, in my classes, I assign readings drawn from a variety of sources, old and new, and I try to show my students ideas that might expand our horizons in unexpected ways.

For some of us, however, analytic philosophy (like whiteness, perhaps) was just the default. Anthony Nguyen closes his reflections by wondering what his experience as a young Asian American philosopher would have been if the schools he attended had offered not only the standard analytic philosophy canon but also its continental-philosophy counterpart and other alternatives beyond the analytic-continental divide such as courses in Asian and Asian American philosophies. Such a question, while perhaps unanswerable, nonetheless strikes a chord.

IV. RE-ENVISIONING THE CANON AND DOING PHILOSOPHY INTERCULTURALLY

Like Nguyen, a number of contributors advocate re-envisioning the canon, often beyond the analytic-continental divide, for a variety of reasons. Formally trained in both analytic philosophy and Indian philosophy, Anand Jayprakash Vaidya confesses that "I cannot defend the idea that there is a principled reason to exclude [certain thinkers from the Indian philosophical tradition from the canon]: Neither their method nor their intellectual excellence seemed any different from what I had studied." Inspired by pragmatism, Celia T. Bardwell-Jones urges us to consider the practical effects of the canon in terms of how it helps us realize our values and commitments and then conceive and determine the canon by reference to and in accordance with the totality of those effects, writing thus: "Understanding one's relationship to the canon through

the lens of values and commitments shifted the focus away from *who* was writing philosophy and towards the *content* of the philosopher's work and how they represented these values and commitments that I found important . . . [A] value-and-commitment-centered approach to the canon . . . opens up the variety, distinctiveness, and richness of other philosophic approaches to the questions we continue to ask as philosophers." Recalling that "a crucial part of my apprenticeship in German academic philosophy . . . did not involve pondering over canonical texts" and acknowledging her philosophical mentors in both India and Germany for having "helped to instill in me a deep wariness about canon-making processes, . . . [which] philosophical training has proved to be an invaluable asset," Monika Kirloskar-Steinbach champions cultural pluralism and non-canonical philosophy and contends that "there is no reason to hew world philosophies along the parameters set by canonical philosophy. Other people from near and afar have attempted to make sense of their own worlds, albeit in different ways." Lastly, reflecting on her recent three-year "productivity' rut," during which she "felt not only emotionally exhausted but also completely disconnected from 'philosophy,'" Saba Fatima states that "the established canon of the discipline didn't speak to my experiences . . . [and] part of my writer's block had to do with producing a 'philosophy' paper that was deeply disconnected from my identity, my sense of who I was, and my daily experiences."

One form of partial belonging that many of our contributors have found in academic philosophy is in comparative, intercultural, cross-cultural, cross-traditional, or fusion philosophy.¹⁰ For instance, Halla Kim speaks of the kind of "synthetic insight followed by a most concentrated commitment to its theoretical justifications as well as its fruitful practice" that the type of intercultural philosophy that he endorses generates in contrast to the perceived limitations of the analytic tradition such as the mere "hair-splitting analysis" and the lack of "robust practical engagement with reality." Specifically, he develops a position that he dubs "transcendental Confucianism." A cross between Kantianism and Confucianism, "this is the view that the systematic practice of self-cultivation in our communal life must be structured and conditioned by the underlying nature of the heart-mind." For Kim, "the Kantian enlightened reason and the Neo-Confucian familial/communal love (*ren*) are not two separate things but two sides of one and the same coin." Conceiving and practicing philosophy synthetically and interculturally in the manner sketched above, he contends, will enable us to "restore the venerable old tradition of philosophy where philosophers can usher in a sweeping vision of reality followed by appropriate essential tools for manifesting this vision not only in theory but also in praxis."

Some of our contributors, already with a PhD from or an academic position in another country, pursued a (second) PhD at a North American university.¹¹ Bo Mou and Keya Maitra are among these. Mou recalls the feeling of "the aspiring period around the mid/late 1980s in China" a decade after the end of the Cultural Revolution—aspirations that were being felt across the world in different ways at that time—which led him "to give up all the comfortable

things" as a full-time philosophy researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and begin anew in upstate New York and later to develop the "constructive engagement" approach and apply it to various philosophical traditions, from Chinese philosophy and Western philosophy to analytic philosophy and continental philosophy. Maitra begins her reflections with the feelings of excitement and the unknown captured in the image of her flying for the very first time, in a two-week window, from completing one PhD in India to commencing work on another in the US—a process of (re)discovery that would be mirrored years later in coming to teach and then to research in comparative and cross-cultural philosophy of mind.

M. Ashraf Adeel dwells beautifully on a life spent writing on language and underdetermination in Quine and Davidson, on the one hand, and on Urdu poetry and Islamic thought and the "remarkable overlap between the Quranic approach and that of contemporary virtue epistemology," on the other. Adeel's call for a consistent and thoroughgoing pluralism (religious, spiritual, cultural, epistemic, and conceptual, i.e., that of conceptual schemes) is one thematic line of response to a dilemma that is at the heart of many of our pieces: How do we respect the desire to philosophize, the joy of philosophy, given the background conditions of racism and oppression that structure the institutional forms of that activity? What purpose can philosophy serve in a world so deeply organized around these inequalities and hierarchies?

V. OPPRESSION, COMPLICITY, AND SOLIDARITY

Dien Ho is fond of repeating a line from his mother's admonition. No matter who you are and no matter what you do, she warned him, "racist obstacles . . . would be thrown [your] way like so many flaming barrels in the Donkey Kong video game." Ho's mother was "trying to speak [his] language," but the image is apt and the underlying point is one that many of our philosophers make to their students: How can philosophy help you jump these barrels, be "civically engaged . . . by venturing beyond the cocoon of economic comfort and confronting bigoted systems around us," and lead an "authentic and flourishing life" when "the flaming barrels keep coming and there are no safe corners to hide"? Does it help—is it even meant to help—when philosophy throws enough flaming barrels of its own?

The importance of these questions notwithstanding, it is worth noting that this is not the experience of all the philosophers who contributed to this issue. As Kenny Easwaran observes, some philosophers of Asian descent including himself enjoy "the luxury of being able to let [their] minority identities pass unrecognized, and thus unremarked, in many contexts." The ability to let one's minority identities pass in such a manner or, more actively, to pass as a member of a more privileged group is due to various physical and personal characteristics (such as relatively light skin color and identifiability of surnames or lack thereof) and to various other factors like geographical location and institutional subfield (the often mathematical nature of much of the work one does in, say, decision theory or formal epistemology). There is a price to pay, however, because, as Easwaran points out, the aforementioned luxury

“is just the flip side of the isolation I’ve sometimes felt, not being able to see others like myself in the profession.”

The questions, nevertheless, persist. Audrey Yap considers two solutions: fit in or take flight (whether by refusing to conform or by leaving a community altogether). The former is to embrace the position of the so-called model minority—people distinct from the white majority but praised as exemplars of unproblematic assimilation, upward mobility, and traditional family values—perhaps to find a position of power within a system from which one can make positive change.¹² That has a cost, however, for it strengthens and perpetuates the larger systems of oppression that use one’s fitting in to maintain themselves, further entrenches the problematic (typically white colonial) standards to which one is held, and makes one potentially complicit in and hence responsible for the harms perpetuated by those systems. The latter, in Yap’s words, involves “refusing to put ourselves in a position to be used against others with relatively less privilege.” But, the unspoken question remains, where does that leave us? Yap’s reiteration of this dilemma—which, of course, was and continues to be a central tool of colonialism/imperialism (the comprador class), capitalist exploitation (bourgeois upward mobility), and patriarchy (“good” women)—resonates with a number of other pieces that consider upward mobility or assimilation as ways of finding a home, of coming to inhabit a minority position.

Saba Fatima’s reflections also address the questions of complicity and solidarity: complicity within systems of oppression and solidarity with those fighting such systems. For Fatima, the experiences of racism and discrimination she and her family faced in Saudi Arabia as visa-dependent non-Arab Pakistani Shiites were very different from American racial politics, with all the complexities that follow for multiracial coalition building and anti-oppression praxis in those different contexts.

For David H. Kim, a vital part of being a philosopher of Asian descent consists of two elements: first, “regarding being Asian to be a significantly racialized phenomenon”; and, second, “doing philosophy out of Asian American experience so conceived and out of critical sensibilities built up from reflection upon it.” According to Kim, the development and practice of a distinctively Asian American philosophy, which begins with and is rooted in such racialized experiences and critical sensibilities, contends, among other things, with the question of “What does it feel like to be a solution?” (cf. W. E. B. Du Bois’s powerful framing of the Negro existential predicament with the question of “What does it feel like to be a problem?”). All of this, Kim argues, is set against the backdrop of the model minority myth and the deployment of it as a racial wedge between Asians and Blacks. Specifically, Asian Americans are lauded as the model minority and, as such, used politically to suppress Black Americans. Therefore, the solution in question, to put it in Du Boisian terms, is one “to the alleged problem that is Black people” with their alleged “shortcomings and . . . negative social impact on the wider polity.” Against this form of positioning and racial oppression that it only serves to entrench, Kim argues that “being a philosopher of Asian descent in the US is

crucially about refusing this social position of a solution, interrogating the profoundly racist presuppositions of this entire line of thought, and joining in solidarity with Blacks and other people of color.”

VI. HOME, FAMILY, AND THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE: LIVING WITH UNCERTAINTY AND COMPLEXITY

After trying the upward mobility approach by earning a BA in economics and political science and working in tech, financial, and media industries for three years in order to help her family financially, Emily S. Lee returned to philosophy as a gift to herself, as a way of making sense of her world. This gift was in part an act of “solidarity and empathy” with her Black and Latinx customers whom she served throughout junior high school, high school, and college as a cashier at her parents’ fruit and vegetable store in a poor neighborhood in the Bronx, “knowing we occupied similar class levels.” But Lee’s path, as well as the path travelled by the other philosophers in these pages who describe their pursuit of philosophy in similar ways, cannot be unproblematically taken as an exemplar; as Dien Ho remarks, while seemingly commendable, “Follow your passion” can be irresponsible advice to give to his Asian students considering the socioeconomic reality of many Asian families.

Of course, an answer to this dilemma cannot ignore class. Although Asian Americans are lauded as the model minority, wealth, income, education, occupation, and other social factors vary drastically not only among but also within communities of different ethnic backgrounds and national origins, depending on a number of factors including geographical location within the United States and histories of migration.¹³ Kenneth Aizawa recounts his immigrant father’s story of living the American dream, arriving in Louisville, Kentucky from Tokyo, Japan after World War II with little English and by dint of hard work receiving his PhD in chemistry—a model that Aizawa, reflecting on his early education as a “lackadaisical student,” did not immediately follow. By Justin Khoo’s account, his class position as a child of medical professionals allowed him the freedom and the time to come to philosophy after a failed one-year stint at music school, despite his parents’ expectations and exhortations that he would likewise go into medicine and become a doctor.

The closely related themes of home, family, and the immigrant experience also recur in these essays, albeit differently for first- and second-generation groups. Gary Mar provides a fascinating recounting of his extended family history and the interwoven family histories that have, in unexpected ways, structured his academic career and his activism for the Asian American community. Mi-Kyoung (Mitzi) Lee speaks of the partial loss of her Korean tongue as a member of the only Korean family in their area and the centrality of family in coping with the alienation experienced from living in a largely white community. Karen Ng, who was born in Hong Kong and whose family immigrated to Canada when she was five years old, shares her “experience of being on the outside looking in, of wanting and failing to fit into the dominant culture and at the same time

cherishing a somewhat secret Chinese way of being," which experience shaped her and her interior life profoundly and was something she struggled with well into her teens. Ng notes that, thanks to the colonial history of Hong Kong, "Chinese identity was complicated for almost everyone in [her] family and everyone [her] family knew, many of whom emigrated in the '80s and '90s prior to the 1997 handover" and "the complicated sense of Chinese identity that many Hongkongers share . . . remains unresolved in the years since the handover." The complicated relation her parents have to Hong Kong, to mainland China, and to their adopted country of Canada is mirrored in Ng's own relation to her cultural inheritance, once one of conflict and struggle but now one of appreciation and cherishment. Lastly, Yuriko Saito writes of the privilege she has in having two "homes," but also of the challenge that is rooted in "feeling not fully 'at home' in either."

Perhaps it is fitting, on this note, to return to the overarching theme of the meaning of being a philosopher of Asian descent, to take notice of the tensions and struggles, productive and painful, that mark each of our attempts as agents to understand and inhabit those meanings. It is these attempts to make sense of this position through autobiographical narratives, which represent choices about what to include and what to underscore, that perhaps most broadly characterize what it is like to be a philosopher of Asian descent. As Emily S. Lee observes, quoting the Vietnamese American poet and novelist Ocean Vuong, "memory is a choice."¹⁴

VII. THANKS AND WELCOME: ANOTHER CHANGING OF THE GUARD

Brian Bruya, Julianne Chung, and Monika Kirloskar-Steinbach finished their three-year terms on the committee on June 30, 2020. We thank Julianne and Monika for their service on the committee, as well as their contributions to this issue, and we thank Brian for his diligent work as chair and his continuing support of the committee's activities. We welcomed Jonardon Ganeri and Dien Ho as new members, who would serve on the committee from July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2023. A. Minh Nguyen began his three-year term as chair on July 1, 2020, having served as associate chair in 2019-2020 and as a member in 2008-2011. This marks the first issue of the newsletter that Minh and Yarran Hominh, a committee member since July 1, 2019, have edited. They have been working together as editor and as associate editor, respectively, since that time.

Jonardon Ganeri is the Bimal K. Matilal Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at the University of Toronto. He is a philosopher whose work draws on a variety of philosophical traditions to construct new positions in the philosophy of mind, metaphysics, and epistemology. He is the author of *Attention, Not Self* (2017); *The Self: Naturalism, Consciousness, and the First-Person Stance* (2012); *The Lost Age of Reason: Philosophy in Early Modern India 1450-1700* (2011); *The Concealed Art of the Soul: Theories of Self and Practices of Truth in Indian Ethics and Epistemology* (2007); and *Semantic Powers* (1999), all published by Oxford University Press. He joined the Fellowship of the British Academy in 2015 and won the

Infosys Prize in the Humanities the same year, the only philosopher to do so.

Dien Ho is Professor of Philosophy and Healthcare Ethics at Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences (MCPHS University) in Boston, Massachusetts. He is also the chair of the Center for Health Humanities. His research focuses on the philosophy of medicine, bioethics, health policies, the philosophy of science, and epistemology. His most recent book *A Philosopher Goes to the Doctor: A Critical Look at Philosophical Assumptions in Medicine* (Routledge, 2019) aims to help clinicians, students, and non-academic readers explore the central role philosophy plays in clinical and research medicine. A contributor to this issue, Dien is committed to making philosophy accessible to the general public in his writings, public engagements, and political activism.

Yarran Hominh is a PhD student at Columbia University. His current research is at the intersection of moral psychology and social and political philosophy, drawing on the wider pragmatist tradition. His latest publication is "Dewey and the Tragedy of the Human Condition," forthcoming in *The Pluralist*, which won the 2020 Joseph L. Blau Prize from the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy. His yet-to-be-completed dissertation is titled "The Problem of Unfreedom" and his other current projects include papers on blame, distrust, and self-knowledge. Yarran is an organizer with Minorities and Philosophy and is committed to the accessibility of a philosophical education for members of underrepresented groups.

A. Minh Nguyen is Professor of Philosophy, Faculty Affiliate of the Center for Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, and Associate Director of the Honors College at Florida Gulf Coast University. Born and raised in Vietnam, Minh began his teaching career as a part-time lecturer in philosophy in 1993 at Columbia University, where he earned a BA in mathematics, an MA in philosophy, and a PhD in philosophy. From 2013 to 2019, he served as Professor of Philosophy, Founding Director of the Interdisciplinary Asian Studies Program, and Associate Director of the Honors Program at Eastern Kentucky University. A specialist in the philosophy of mind and theory of knowledge, he also works in the areas of Chinese thought and Japanese aesthetics while maintaining an abiding interest in ethics, political philosophy, and creative writing. His publications include *New Essays in Japanese Aesthetics* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2017) and, with Nhi Huynh, "First Confession," *Kenyon Review: International Journal of Literature, Culture and the Arts* 34, no. 2 (2012): 79-97.

VIII. ANTI-ASIAN RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

We prepared this newsletter issue at the height of the coronavirus pandemic. We thank each and every one of the contributors for their prodigious patience, painstaking effort, and intimate explorations into subjects that they care deeply about but rarely write about, all accomplished during what has been a most challenging period of time for all of us. Since the committee's responsibilities include "identify[ing] unfair or discriminatory practices and . . .

advis[ing] the board and the members of the association of ways in which they may be rectified,”¹⁵ the APA Committee on Asian and Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies drafted the following statement and urged the Board of Officers to issue it:

In light of increasing reports of pandemic-related cases of xenophobia, discrimination, and racism, including acts of violence, against Asians and Asian Americans, as well as statements by the US President and other high-level government officials that appear designed to incite such sentiments, the undersigned organizations strongly and unequivocally condemn all forms of racism and ethnocentrism, especially recent attempts to scapegoat Asians or Asian Americans for the coronavirus pandemic.

There is a long history in American society of both direct and indirect language demeaning members of some ethnic groups, including unjustifiable stereotypes associating Asian immigrants with disease, in particular. Intentional or unintentional use of such language inflames both explicit and implicit biases against such groups. Terminology such as “Chinese Virus,” “Wuhan Virus,” and “Kung Flu” tend to highlight differences among people rather than making any kind of meaningful designation about an organism or a disease.

Let us support the Asian and Asian American members of our communities by rejecting all forms of xenophobia and racism, treating Asians and Asian Americans with dignity and respect, and encouraging all individuals (especially government officials and leaders within civil society), organizations (especially governmental agencies), and media outlets to use the official designations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization to refer to the virus as SARS-CoV-2 and the disease as COVID-19.

On May 4, 2020, the Board of Officers of the American Philosophical Association issued the above statement condemning racism and discrimination against Asians and Asian Americans in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.¹⁶ The undersigned organizations include not only the American Philosophical Association but also a whole host of other scholarly societies:

- American Folklore Society
- American Historical Association
- American Sociological Association
- American Studies Association
- Medieval Academy of America
- Middle East Studies Association
- Rhetoric Society of America
- Society for Ethnomusicology
- Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study

On behalf of the APA Committee on Asian and Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies, we would like to

thank the APA Board of Officers and its counterpart at each and every one of the above organizations for their joint statement of solidarity and support.

IX. CONCLUSION

To return to the overall theme of our issue: What is it like to be a philosopher of Asian descent? This issue features twenty-nine thoughtful and sustained responses to the question, which range from intensely personal to deeply speculative with the majority exemplifying a mixture of both. Together, to use Maya Angelou’s lovely image, these meditations make for a rich tapestry of perspectives and experiences, with all the threads equal in value no matter what their color or their place in the tapestry.¹⁷ For us, editors, our contribution here is gnomic. Part of what it is like to be a philosopher of Asian descent at this point in time, we submit, is to take seriously one’s obligation to stand in solidarity with victims of injustice, especially racial injustice; to strongly and unequivocally condemn all forms of racism and ethnocentrism; to reaffirm one’s commitment to the highest ideals of justice, freedom, diversity, inclusivity, and equity; to critically examine and reflect on one’s and one’s community’s contribution to injustice and oppression, as well as the injustices and oppressions that one has suffered; to treat each and every individual with dignity and respect; to be kind to oneself and kind to others; to serve as an agent of positive change; and to work toward a better, more just, more free society.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank Drs. Julianne Chung, Masato Ishida, Bo Mou, Audrey Yap, and especially Nhi Huynh and Vivian Nguyen for their helpful comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this introduction. Any errors that remain, of course, are our own. We would also like to thank Dr. Clay Motley, Director of the Honors College at Florida Gulf Coast University, for his support and encouragement.

NOTES

1. The second issue of the first volume of this newsletter, edited by Vrinda Dalmiya and Xinyan Jiang and published in spring 2001, focused on the status and (under)representation of Asian and Asian American philosophers in the profession. It contained pieces on individual Asian and Asian American philosophers (including Hao Wang, Weiming Tu, David B. Wong, J. N. Mohanty, Bimal Krishna Matilal, Anil Gupta, Jaegwon Kim, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Kah Kyung Cho, and Kenneth K. Inada), though not in the mode of autobiography. We gladly return, in this issue, to this foundational concern, in a different mode. See Vol. 1, No. 2 (Spring 2001)—plus Vol. 2, No. 2 (Spring 2003) and Vol. 14, No. 1 (Fall 2014)—of this newsletter. All issues of the *APA Newsletter on Asian and Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies* are available on the APA website at https://www.apaonline.org/page/asian_newsletter.
2. American Philosophical Association, “Demographic Statistics on the APA Membership, FY2016 to FY2018,” https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.apaonline.org/resource/resmgr/data_on_profession/fy2018-demographic_statistic.pdf, accessed June 27, 2020.
3. Ibid.
4. American Philosophical Association, “Minorities in Philosophy,” https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.apaonline.org/resource/resmgr/data_on_profession/minorities_in_philosophy.pdf, accessed June 27, 2020. APA graduation data include percentages of bachelor’s degrees, master’s degrees, and doctoral degrees in philosophy awarded to members of racial/ethnic minority groups from 1995 to 2014. With respect to the percentages of doctoral degrees in philosophy awarded to individuals who identify themselves as Asian or Asian American, the data since 2010 are not clear. Either there was a sudden, dramatic, and sustained drop in doctoral degree recipients identifying themselves as Asian or Asian American, with the percentage hovering between

0.00 percent and 0.44 percent during 2010–2014 (even though there was no similar drop in bachelor's or master's degree recipients) or the data are incomplete or otherwise imperfect. We have chosen, therefore, not to take those data into account. That said, we know of no more complete demographic data for the North American philosophical community. See also Eric Schwitzgebel, "Percentages of US Doctorates in Philosophy Given to Women and to Minorities, 1973–2014," *The Splintered Mind* (blog), January 13, 2016, <https://schwitsplinters.blogspot.com/2016/01/percentages-of-us-doctorates-in.html>, accessed June 26, 2020; and longer-term National Science Foundation data collated by Schwitzgebel at <https://faculty.ucr.edu/~eschwitz/SED.htm>, which show that individuals identifying themselves as Asian comprise 2.46 percent of recipients of doctorates in philosophy from 1973 to 2014. Even if one takes a more recent time frame—from 1995 to 2014, for instance—individuals identifying themselves as Asian comprise 2.53 percent of recipients of doctorates in philosophy. Lastly, there are useful humanities-wide data in Carole J. Lee, "Asian Americans, Positive Stereotyping, and Philosophy," *APA Newsletter on Asian and Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies* 14, no. 1 (Fall 2014): 3–5.

5. The list is as follows:

1. Where did you grow up and what was it like?
2. How did you end up in philosophy?
3. How did your upbringing/early life affect the kind of philosophy you do?
4. Was your family supportive of your philosophical journey?
5. Where did you study philosophy and what was it like?
6. What are some of the best moments you've had in philosophy?
7. What challenges have you faced in philosophy?
8. What mistakes have you made in your life and what have you learned from the experiences?
9. What are some of your successes?
10. What motivates you to philosophize now? Is it different from what brought you into philosophy?
11. What interests outside philosophy do you have?
12. What might you have done if you had not pursued philosophy?
13. How do you see the relation between your academic philosophy and your other interests/the rest of your life?
14. What advice if any do you have for younger philosophers?
15. What would you change about the profession and how might we go about actualizing that change?
16. What do you think is most exciting about philosophy right now?
17. What directions do you think academic philosophy should take in the future?
18. What do you see as the relation between academic philosophy and the public?

6. In her contribution to this issue, Mi-Kyoung (Mitzi) Lee also recalls her personal experience with "a lack of self-confidence," "acute self-doubt," "stereotype threat," "imposter syndrome," and "other self-undermining attitudes." Because of her experience as an Asian American woman in the field, she is keen to mentor students and junior faculty, especially those who are women or members of racial minorities or who otherwise "end up feeling like outsiders in philosophy." Similarly, Keya Maitra, who earned two doctorates in philosophy in two different continents (Asia and North America), describes "a sense of dread, a huge amount of self-doubt, and the feeling of being a perpetual refugee without a home in philosophy" as some of the predominant experiences that she felt during an extended period while in her second tenure-track position. Kenny Easwaran, however, shares a different experience: "I've never had a lack of self-confidence that prevents me from asking questions in philosophical talks. This served me well in many graduate seminars at [UC] Berkeley that, in retrospect, I now realize had participant lists that would intimidate me now! Donald Davidson was attending several seminars I took, and I didn't shy away from asking questions

of visiting speakers like Hilary Putnam in department colloquia. Nevertheless, I did feel a strong impostor syndrome at many points during my graduate education."

7. In his contribution to this issue, Justin Khoo, another multiracial philosopher partially of Asian descent ("7/16ths Chinese and 9/16ths white," by his estimation), recounts a roughly similar transformation. As an undergraduate student at UC Davis, Khoo writes, "I occasionally attended Hapa student groups, but I still felt uncomfortable identifying as mixed—perhaps the fallout of my experiences being rejected from racial groups in my adolescence." As a graduate student at Yale, however, "it seemed that having a mixed background could be an advantage, rather than simply a dilution of multiple 'refined' (cultural or intellectual) practices." Now "hopeful for the future of philosophy, which seems to be headed towards greater diversity both in its methods (including strengthened connections with neighboring fields) as well as among its practitioners," Khoo recommends that "the future of philosophy be mixed!"
8. Compare Anand Jayprakash Vaidya, who in his contribution to this issue characterizes the benefits of doing cross-cultural philosophy as follows: "I remain convinced that we have a lot to gain from a cross-traditional conversation in philosophy. I hope to synthesize an understanding of perception [and other philosophical topics] that cuts through these different traditions and get people to talk to one another. I've come to appreciate that friction is not always bad. Cross-cultural methods improve analytical and experimental methods by providing a kind of *epistemic friction* that takes one outside of one's philosophical echo chamber in an epistemically responsible way."
9. In her contribution to this issue, Keya Maitra likewise laments her experience of being typecast thus: "There was also a curious experience on my academic campus that added to my self-doubt. The more I taught courses with Asian contents, the more I came to be identified as the person who was responsible for all things India-related on our small campus. The inadvertent cost of my being typecast as the 'India person' was the erasure of my expertise in Western philosophy and many years of training in such. It was a rude awakening to the fact that my academic community couldn't seem to hold all the different facets of philosophical identity I was trying to foster."
10. We don't mean to suggest that these terms are synonymous or interchangeable. In her contribution to this issue, for instance, Julianne Chung helpfully draws a distinction between comparative philosophy and cross-cultural philosophy as follows: "Cross-cultural philosophy is philosophy that weaves *together strands from different philosophical traditions*. While comparative philosophy generally contrasts so-called 'non-Western' philosophies and talks about their ideas, cross-cultural philosophy often engages non-Western philosophies directly and talks *with* them." See also the contributions by Halla Kim, Bo Mou, and Anand Jayprakash Vaidya in this issue, especially their respective notions of "synthetic insight," "constructive engagement," and "cross-traditional conversation."
11. As a side note, the editors know of some other academics who began their careers outside Europe or North America with *three* doctoral degrees!
12. For an account of the astounding transformation of Asians in the United States from the "yellow peril" to the "model minority" in the middle decades of the twentieth century, see Ellen D. Wu, *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).
13. See Christian Edlagan and Kavya Vaghul, "How Data Disaggregation Matters for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders," *The Washington Center for Equitable Growth*, December 14, 2016, <https://equitablegrowth.org/how-data-disaggregation-matters-for-asian-americans-and-pacific-islanders/>, accessed June 28, 2020; and Adeel Hassan and Audrey Carlsen, "How 'Crazy Rich' Asians Have Led to the Largest Income Gap in the US," *The New York Times*, August 17, 2018, modified August 20, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/08/17/us/asian-income-inequality.html>, accessed June 28, 2020.
14. Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (New York: Penguin Press, 2019), 107.
15. American Philosophical Association, "Committee: Asian & Asian American Philosophers & Philosophies," <https://www.apaonline.org/group/asian>, accessed June 17, 2020.

16. American Philosophical Association, "APA Board Issues Statement Condemning Racism and Discrimination against Asians and Asian Americans," May 4, 2020, <https://www.apaonline.org/news/news.asp?id=505484>, accessed June 26, 2020; "Statement Condemning Racism and Discrimination against Asians and Asian Americans during COVID-19," May 4, 2020, <https://www.apaonline.org/page/stmt-racism-asian-covid>, accessed June 26, 2020.
17. Maya Angelou famously said, "We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter what their color." See her *Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey Now* (New York: Random House, 1993), 124.

ARTICLES

The Rock on My Chest

M. Ashraf Adeel

KUTZTOWN UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA
ADEEL@KUTZTOWN.EDU

"Only connect...": The epigraph to E. M. Forster's novel, *Howards End*

I grew up at about a two-and-a-half-hour drive from the birthplace of the ancient, and probably the first, grammarian in history, Panini, and at about the same distance from the ancient seat of learning at Taxila in the Hazara region of North Western Pakistan. My birthplace Gandhian is a small village sitting on the edge of a sharp cliff overlooking a beautiful stream called Ichhar that overflowed its banks every monsoon season back then. It is situated at a distance of only five miles from the ancient Asoka rock inscriptions at the town of Mansehra. Today's Gandhian, although inhabited by Muslims only, has a 2,000-year-old Buddhist stupa at a site called Bado Dheri and an ancient Shiv Temple at Chitti Gatti. The surrounding areas of the village are full of archeological sites from Gandharan and earlier cultures. I started my study of philosophy books sitting under poplar trees on the banks of Ichhar or on the surrounding hillocks of Gandhian. The music of the flowing waters and the lush green environs of the valley instilled a sense of rhythm of life in me and, the moment I was able to read and write, I started reading Urdu epic poetry books (brought over from Singapore by my father who had to live through Japanese occupation of that island during WWII) and composing little poems of my own. No wonder, then, that even before I was done with my high school, I started studying the poetical works of Pakistan's national poet Mohammad Iqbal. He is a philosopher-poet and, in my ninth grade, I came upon a book called *Jehaan e Iqbal (Iqbal's World)* written by an author named Abdul Rahman Tariq, which discussed some of his philosophical views, particularly comparing him in one chapter with Nietzsche. As far as I can recall, that was my first exposure to some philosophical ideas.

In Pakistan, college starts after tenth grade. I joined the prestigious Islamia College at Peshawar University after high school where, after studying science for a couple of years, I opted for study of philosophy and literature. My parents were very supportive, although one of my uncles was concerned that philosophers end up being atheists.

These studies culminated in getting a master's degree in philosophy from the University of Peshawar, for which I took such courses as Logic, Greek Philosophy, Modern Western Philosophy, Muslim Philosophy, Ethics, and Twentieth-Century Western Philosophy (including existentialism).

Within a few years, I ended up at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa to study for my PhD where I met the famed logician Irving M. Copi, philosopher of science Larry Laudan, and ancient philosophy expert George Rudebusch among others. They eventually supervised my dissertation, which was focused on the problem of underdetermination in Quine's philosophy of science and language and Davidson's philosophy of language. Working on this dissertation was a fascinating intellectual journey that transformed my philosophic outlook and helped me see eventually the reasons for a pluralistic view of human history, religion, and philosophy.

My wife and I stayed for about six years in Hawaii, completing our respective degrees and raising our two children at the same time. It was a time of great joy and growth for us and the Comparative Philosophy Program at the University of Hawai'i cultivated in us a deep appreciation for diversity of cultures, ideas, and practices. Still, I did not do a degree in comparative philosophy. I kept getting entrenched in the analytic tradition as I developed ideas for my dissertation. Working through Quine and Davidson in close collaboration with Copi, Laudan, and Rudebusch simply enthralled me and I remember spending sometimes an entire day discussing Quine and Davidson with my fellow graduate students in Sakamaki Hall where the Philosophy Department is housed.

All this while I kept myself deeply engaged with contemporary Islamic thought and the challenges that confront Muslim societies in terms of internal spiritual and intellectual growth as well as adjustment to a diverse, dynamic, and technologically innovative world. Deep down I was studying and thinking about the Western thought in order to understand my own Islamic culture and working through Islamic thought to get a grip on the Western philosophies. My inner spiritual and intellectual life is characterized by this dialectic of comparisons with an alert and supportive eye for differences and overlaps.

Of course, my journey as Urdu language poet continued in the meantime. While at Islamia College, Peshawar University I had come in contact with some great luminaries of Urdu literature. The legendary Urdu poets of our time Ahmad Faraz and Mohsin Ihsan were both on the faculty, and it was quite inspiring to sit through their classes and also interact with them on the campus at various literary gatherings. Since they lived on campus, it was possible to visit them at their residences in the evenings as well, and their patient tutelage helped me develop my love for and understanding of both Urdu and Persian poetry. This connection with Urdu and Persian poetry was a great boon for us in Hawaii where we missed our homeland and family dearly and consoled our hearts by reading some of the best contemporary and classical poetry of these languages. Now I keep works of Rumi, Hafiz, Ghalib, Iqbal, Majid Amjad, and Faiz Ahmad Faiz among others close at hand and returning to them occasionally is a source of great joy for me.

In more ways than one, Hawaii's cosmopolitan culture and *aloha* spirit shaped my philosophic and cultural outlook. Today I am a pluralist through and through. I consider underdetermination of theory by evidence to be a regular feature of human knowledge as well as understanding. This allows for a multiplicity of interpretations not only when it comes to understanding language but also science and religion. I had argued early on that Davidson's program in semantics cannot be, for technical reasons, coupled with Davidson's rejection of conceptual relativism. In addition, I think that Tarski's claim about the so-called universality of natural languages is correct and, hence, it is wrong to apply formal methods to natural languages in order to develop a semantics for them. Tarski means two things by "the universality of natural languages": that they contain their own metalanguage and that any other language can be translated into them. In such a situation, we cannot apply formal methods to natural languages and split them into object language and metalanguage in order to avoid paradoxes without imposing artificial restrictions on natural languages and without declaring sentences like the liar as meaningless.

In other words, I do see the indeterminacy of translation as a central thesis in Quine's approach to language and consider it to be allowing for multiple interpretations of languages. In addition, contrary to what Davidson believes, there is such a thing as partial failure of translation between languages and that failure makes room for conceptual pluralism from conceptual relativism through the claim that "everything goes"-type of relativism on the one hand and absolutist realism on the other are extreme positions that can be avoided through some version of Wittgenstein's idea of family resemblance. Not all interpretations of a language will be acceptable while there is also no uniquely true interpretation available for a given language. In between these two extremes, there can be a number of interpretations that have some family resemblance and, because of that, they hang onto some approximate truth. It is this position that I call "conceptual pluralism." I think it is a consequence of Quine's thesis of underdetermination of theory by evidence. The thesis does not advocate disregard of evidence, obviously. Its claim is that we can match the evidence to more than one theory that will inevitably conflict with one another if they are truly different from one another.

Cultures are to be understood similarly. They measure up to the similar evidence about reality, but none of them captures everything correctly. None of them is the unique truth about human experience of reality in different spheres. Neither are they totally isolated from one another. They overlap and have family resemblance. They are different from one another because, despite family resemblance, none of them shares certain aspects with others. To put it in linguistic terms, we may say that not all predicates in them are translatable into the predicates of other cultures.

With this kind of background view, I devoted a lot of time to understand the foundational document of Islamic civilization, the Quran. Since my days in Hawaii, I have been trying to figure out or at least develop some perspective

on the epistemological underpinnings of the Quran. A careful analytical study of all the verses of the Quran involving epistemic concepts like ignorance, knowledge, understanding, and wisdom has led me to conclude that the Quranic epistemology is a virtue epistemology. I have argued for this position in my book *Epistemology of the Quran: Elements of a Virtue Approach to Knowledge and Understanding* (Springer, 2019). I find this remarkable overlap between the Quranic approach and that of contemporary virtue epistemology quite fascinating.

I have made deliberate effort to remain active on the poetry front and have published two anthologies of Urdu poems so far. The second anthology, *Sumundar Raq Karta Hay (The Ocean in Ecstatic Dance)*, opens with the following eponymous poem:

The Ocean in Ecstatic Dance

Forlorn by separation
 The ocean wails
 The wind shrieks in agony on the hills
 The flowers weep blood
 The pain penetrates the blisters on my feet
 An angst enflames my bosom.
 I read your name in the face of the cosmos
 I crash my head
 Against every brick of the citadel of my being.
 From the walls of the world to the walls of the heavens
 I flow in a river of passion.
 I am on the brink of complete submission
 In every vein of mine runs unrequited love
 I remember nothing except the way towards you.
 Dear one!
 The ocean is in convulsions
 The birds inhale agonies
 Floating beyond the limits of the horizon
 Burning with the desire to return;
 The earth says nothing, the sky keeps mum
 Being and non-being both lose sanity
 Everything falls to rise and rises to fall.
 Wonderstruck in the midst of nothingness and being
 The ocean heaves, leaps, and dances endlessly
 In the ecstasy of your love.

[Translated from Urdu by the author]

Poetic experience is obviously different from philosophical quest. The glimpses that one gets in poetic experience point towards another kind of opening on reality and, hence, provide another set of hints for the pluralistic nature of our takes on things.

This kind of diversity of interests that I have pursued in life so far has its challenges. Coming from a different cultural background, it has been a challenge, on occasions, to make others see the (possible) veracity of my cultural, religious, poetic, and philosophical experiences. A lot of the time people around you do not connect things the way you do. They can be perplexed by your way of exploring or connecting experiences and ideas. I have experienced such perplexity on the part of people off and on. I think this might have sometimes unconsciously forced me, like a heavy rock on my chest, to suppress some of the ways

I was thinking about things in analytic philosophy as well as religion and poetry. Being raised in a different culture means that you have plenty of ways of linking things or not linking things that are different from and sometimes even in conflict with the ways of the host culture in which you have arrived. But then this is a kind of universal human condition. At some level, we all arrive at a host's doorsteps because, at some level, philosophy, religion, and poetry all have an aesthetic dimension to them. This dimension opens up on each one of us in certain culture-specific ways just as one's native language depends on a specific set of phonetic articulations out of a large set of possibilities. Where cultures do not overlap, the aesthetic dimension of the life of the people in one culture also may not overlap with that of the life of those in another culture, causing perplexity between the two sides. The challenge in such situations is to keep one's heart and mind open and to try seeing the connections that others see. I must say that this has been a personal challenge for me and I take it to be a challenge for all of us in philosophy today. We have to make a much greater effort, intellectual and spiritual, to see and accept others in their wholeness. This can be done not only at a personal level but also by expanding and entrenching our intercultural, interracial, and international connections at an organizational level. It is time that philosophical effort of humanity becomes truly globalized in its sensitivities and reach. Philosophers can only ill afford to ignore their next-door physical or virtual neighbors in this global village.

The Not-So-Lonely Journey of a Japanese American Philosopher

Kenneth Aizawa

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY-NEWARK
KEN.AIZAWA@NEWARK.RUTGERS.EDU

I was born in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1961. Forced bussing came to Louisville at about the time I was entering high school. I remember applying to the private Catholic school from which my father had graduated, but I was not accepted. I had never been to a Catholic school and I suppose that with bussing there were far more applicants than they could take. As it turns out, when the program was implemented, I would normally have been bussed in my junior and senior years, but since I was Japanese American, I was exempted. The apparent rationale was that I would be part of a very tiny minority whether I was bussed to an urban school or remained in my suburban school.

Through most of primary, middle, and secondary school, I was a lackadaisical student. When the courses were easy, I got good grades; when they were not, I did not. A big turning point for me was getting good standardized test scores in high school. They moved me to think I was underachieving and that I should apply myself much more seriously. I was also motivated to think I should go to the best university I could get in to. My parents paid more for my college than they did for their house, so I was extremely motivated to do my best. During the summers, I worked at the Philip-

Morris cigarette factory in downtown Louisville. I was there the first Monday after classes until the last Friday before. I also worked shutdown over the Fourth of July week. Throughout my college years and into graduate school, I was very diligent, but I do not think I ever recovered from my poor habits in primary, middle, and secondary school.

I went off to college—Case Western Reserve University in 1979–1981 and the University of Chicago in 1981–1983—hoping to major in philosophy, because I thought that it involved a great deal of figuring things out, whereas other courses I took seemed to be a matter of mastering a lot of fixed information. Although I'm sure my parents always worried about me, whether it was what I majored in, why I was going to graduate school, or whether I would get a job, they were always very supportive. I often think that majoring in philosophy was the most rebellious thing I ever did. Sadly, it was only many years later that I came to appreciate how great they were as parents.

My most influential undergraduate professor was Chris Hill. He spent an inordinate amount of time talking to me during office hours and putting up with an earnest, but not great student. At the time, I'm sure I did not appreciate what it meant for an assistant professor to spend so much time with a student.

I was thoroughly lost in graduate school. I took a lot of courses in the Department of History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Pittsburgh, but I never seemed to forge a coherent philosophical picture. It would probably have helped me to have been a bit more outgoing to spend more time talking to the professors. Kind of obvious in retrospect, but being shy and introverted did not help.

By some miracle, as underprepared as I was, I did manage to land a tenure-track job at Central Michigan University. It was by no means a plum job, with three courses per semester with forty-five students each, but it was a tenure-track job. The best academic part of those years was my friendship with Fred Adams. He was super supportive and very keen on collaborative work. So we did some counterexample-type papers on Jerry Fodor's theory of content. That was the first time I really got to focus on a topic. Sadly, I had not done that in my dissertation. The best part of those years was that I met my wife, Angie. Fred has always been right that she is a saint for putting up with me. I have always been difficult and stubborn in the ways that philosophers can be. But, after my parents, she has to be the one thing in my life where I have really had it good. She never complained about the time I spent at the computer or when I went to conferences without her. Aside from Fred and Angie, though, I was generally pretty unhappy in Michigan. I felt too far removed from the philosophical conversation. I remember an IT person telling me that the university needed to get internet access, which I found puzzling, since we did have email.

A year after we were married, Angie and I moved to Shreveport, Louisiana, for me to take up a position at Centenary College of Louisiana. There was a swirl of racial issues there. The city was racially divided by an interstate. While there was obviously a large African American and

Latinx community in the city, I was the only minority tenure-track faculty member at the college. I was accustomed to being the only Japanese American around and one of only a few Asian Americans, but at Centenary I was the diversity in a faculty of seventy-three. And I heard of a life member of the College's Board of Trustees who was apparently very upset to have a Japanese American faculty member. I recall one year we had Ken Taylor and John Perry out to air an episode of the nationally syndicated radio program *Philosophy Talk*. We took them to the Cambridge Club, now closed. Ken observed that, fifty years ago, neither he nor Devon Strolovich, a producer of *Philosophy Talk*, would have been allowed in.

At the time, I didn't know how hard that move was for Angie. She only cried about leaving her family when I was not around. And, while I was still far from the action, I had a bit of travel money and could go to more conferences. I also had a very disciplined work schedule. I was at the office at about 7:00 AM, picked up the kids after school at 3:00 PM, then went back to the office for a second session from 7:00 PM to 10:00 PM. Summers I spent a lot of time with the kids while Angie worked.

Not long after moving south, Fred and I started working on extended cognition. We sent the paper to *Philosophical Psychology* on the presupposition that Andy Clark would review it. I don't know if he did, but he certainly began to talk about the paper and it really got a lot of attention. That helped get me my first conference invitation in 2006. I also spent a lot of time thinking about Fodor's systematicity arguments and why the usual formulations of them did not work. I had written that up for a couple of papers until one night, driving home from work, I figured out how they could be made to work. And, after working through the Fodor and Pylyshyn systematicity paper for the n^{th} time, I could finally see that the way I wanted to get the arguments to work could be found in their paper. It's just that no one seems to have seen it. Once I figured it out for myself, I could understand what they were getting at. Dotting all those i 's and crossing all those t 's was the subject of my first book. A tiny project really, but just getting through it made it so much easier to write *The Bounds of Cognition* (Blackwell, 2008). I felt as though that one had just poured out and even now *Bounds* seems to me a pretty good book.

After eighteen years in Louisiana, I finally got out and made it to Rutgers, Newark. Talk about a cultural shift. The university has been ranked the most diverse in the country for more than twenty years. Most of the students are bilingual. Dozens of different languages are spoken by our students. Most of them have family members who lived or were living some version of the American dream of coming to this country with not very much in order to make better lives for themselves. I sometimes share with them my dad's story. He came to the US after World War II. He had passport number 00000013. It took him two weeks to travel by ship and train from Tokyo to Louisville. He had pancakes and orange juice for breakfast every day, because that was all he knew how to order. But he finished high school, then college, then got his PhD in chemistry. I hope my dad's story resonates with my students and that they take from it that the university can be an opportunity. Maybe they

can finish college, be really successful, and have a son or daughter who becomes a philosophy professor.

Angie cried again when we moved to New Jersey, because we left the kids and grandkids in Louisiana. Still, overall, we both have been extremely happy in New Jersey. Within about two miles of our house, Benedict Arnold was court-martialed for profiteering, George Washington spent the winter of 1779, and Samuel Morse and Alfred Vail held the first public demonstration of the telegraph. We love New York City. There are easy flights to Europe. Great food. There is more philosophy going on here than anyone can possibly follow. There are resources like a library with recent philosophy books and online journal access. One year in Louisiana, when the college budget was particularly bad, the book budget was zeroed out. When we left Louisiana, I spent weeks throwing out books and Xerox copies of articles, since I wouldn't need to have them myself anymore. Raffaella de Rosa and Brian and Judy McLaughlin have been stars in making me feel welcome at Rutgers.

I have read that people are typically happiest in their fifties. They have settled in with who they are and what they have achieved. I think I'm there. I think my attitude toward philosophy has come full circle. As an undergraduate, I found it interesting trying to figure things out. But, for a long time, there was always a drive for recognition, getting a better job, making more money. And at tenure and promotion to professor, I wondered what I wanted to accomplish next, if anything. Now I am working on two books, one on multiple realization and the other on how scientists justify compositional claims, such as that action potentials are due to sodium and potassium ion fluxes. I am writing these books because I am interested in figuring these things out, and it is much more enjoyable. I can take my time to do things as I please. My health is good and I'm still motivated, so I see myself as having a few more good years to work.

What mistakes have I made? Maybe typical ones. I have worked moderately hard at philosophy, but I have not sufficiently appreciated all the support I have received and the burden I have placed on others. Maybe a lot of people make this mistake; I hope it's not just me. Among philosophers, I've mentioned Chris, Fred, Raffaella, Brian, and Judy, but there are important others whom I have not mentioned. There are obviously my parents. My mom once told Angie that if she had known that I would never come home after college, she would never have let me go. My dad might have thought the same thing. He would never let on, though, because he probably knew that if I had known that he didn't want me to go, then I wouldn't have gone. And, of course, Angie. She's a saint.

Fashioning Oneself as a Philosopher of Asian Descent

Yubraj Aryal

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON
YUBRAJ.ARYAL@UTA.EDU

A first-generation college graduate, I was born into a lower middle-class family of illiterate peasants in Nepal, one of the poorest countries in the world. I still recall those bitter moments in which my parents had to sell their best calves and work in the landlord's farm to pay off my and my brother's school expenses. With my parents' unwavering support and my own determination, I was able to receive a graduate education from Purdue University and realize my dreams of becoming a teacher, a writer, and a philosopher. At Purdue, I met great professors such as William McBride, Daniel Smith, and Leonard Harris, who influenced my philosophical interest in practices of the marginalized on the frontier of power relations.

As a master's student at Tribhuvan University, I was interested in critical theory and all types of philosophical thinking. I was really fascinated with Nietzsche and Derrida, particularly their idea of truth as perspectivism. Professors Arun Gupto and Krishna Chandra Sharma helped me understand the complex ideas of contemporary continental philosophers.

Coming to the United States was an escape for me—an escape from the hardship of making a living back home—a forced reality of fleeing my motherland where my life has innermost connections. Many young Nepali students used to hate the US (even now many do) for its imperialism. Some of my friends, therefore, used to think that going to the US to study is surrendering oneself to American imperialism—becoming an imperialized person in a sense. I used to think that way, too, to some extent. But having an American degree would enhance my chances of a better future. Fortunately, I did not find an imperialistic ideology practiced by the White House infiltrating into other parts of the world through learning institutions such as the university. As a result, I did not feel myself required to be complicit in any ideology. Maybe some kind of subtle, invisible ideology works through but not overtly what I used to think. In my view, Indian imperialism with its economic exploitation and political control is far more pernicious to Nepal than American imperialism. The study of Indian imperialism has now become my additional research interest.

My research interest in micropolitics is influenced by my upbringing. I am interested in exploring the concepts of politics, power, and subject based on the slogan "Without The State, But Not Against It" and charting out in texts and societies how individuals like myself create micropolitics, a self-created space for oneself within a dominant politics. In other words, how individuals at the frontier or margin of dominant power relations can self-fashion what they are in their self-creation.

As a teacher and a scholar from an underrepresented community in higher education in the United States, I am aware of attitudinal bias, communication obstacles, the difficulty in forging a successful career path, impediments to obtaining research funding, and the lack of outlets for the publication and dissemination of marginalized forms of knowledge in the academy. Based on such experiences, I always try to develop courses, teaching methods, research projects, and publications that integrate multiple intercultural perspectives for minority students in higher education. For me, being a member of a minority group is an opportunity to make meaningful changes in our society, and that sort of opportunity may not be open to a privileged person.

If a dominant power structure is too coercive, I believe there should still be a way out—a hole, a weak point, a "line of flight" leaking out from those pores. Fashioning oneself within or beyond the existing oppressions or limits imposed on one is an idea that I learned from Foucault and Deleuze, both of whom exerted influence on my philosophical thinking. Foucault's idea of self-fashioning fascinates me particularly. As a member of the Asian American philosophical community, a minority community of philosophers in the United States, I would say: Fashion yourself within the dominant power structure. Don't wait for your salvation or redemption. Don't dream that the power structure will change and that you will be included in the system by the system. Power relations and dominations will remain so long as society exists. Fighting for rights, justice, and autonomy is one strategy, and keep doing that. But the fight itself is not enough. Sometimes justice, freedom, and equality appear to be just statements with no realization. Most of the time, you will not attain them unless you take them as practice by organizing and managing yourself as an individual or collective entity.

I believe we need to envision living in a post-racial society. We need to move beyond a racial ideology. Racism exists as long as human society exists. There is no way to free ourselves completely from it. But we have to behave and act so that we as individuals do not legitimize racism in our thinking. What does it mean to me to be an Asian philosopher in the United States? I do not see any difference between myself and any American philosophers, Latino philosophers, etc. The first and most important thing is to be able to think beyond race. I am first a human being then an Asian, Latino, African, etc. Do others think of me the same way? Maybe not. It's because racism is in us. But its perpetuation is guaranteed if everyone thinks in terms of race and ethnicity. That's why we need to push forward the concept of a post-racial society. Are we already living in a post-racial society? Is our society already post-racial? No. Post-racism is an ethos, a practice that every one of us should live with. The post-racial society puts human beings—their creative power to fashion themselves beyond what is given—in the first place over any stagnant social categories. Our identity binds us in a secured collective. It sometimes limits us, however, and, in order to overcome this limitation, our identity must profess our freedom, humanity, and new individuation.

I served on the Committee on Intercultural Research in Philosophy of the International Federation of Philosophical

Societies (French: *Fédération Internationale des Sociétés de Philosophie*, abbreviated FISP) from 2010 to 2018. I mainly worked on intercultural research creation and facilitated dialogues among different philosophical societies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America through publications and workshops. I also served on the Committee on Asian and Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies of the American Philosophical Association (APA) from 2010 to 2013. Currently, I am serving as secretary for the Committee on the South Asian Diaspora of the Modern Language Association (MLA). I have been learning a great deal from the challenges of working to enhance diversity and inclusion within the profession.

I was fortunate to have interviewed many notable scholars—including Richard Rorty, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Brian Massumi, Marjorie Perloff, Charles Altieri, Charles Bernstein, Robert Young, Lauren Berlant, and Susan Stewart—and published the interviews in *Journal of Philosophy: A Cross-Disciplinary Inquiry*. The interviews would not have been possible without the assistance of Marjorie Perloff (past president of the MLA) and David Schrader (former executive director of the APA).

My primary research interest is a social and political analysis of texts, cultures, and societies. As mentioned above, I am interested in exploring the concepts of politics, power, and subject based on the slogan “Without The State, But Not Against It” and charting out in texts and societies how individuals create micropolitics within a dominant politics. I teach World Literature and Writing in the Department of English at the University of Texas at Arlington, serve as executive editor of UTA’s in-house publication *Global Insight: A Journal of Critical Human Science and Culture*, and coordinate the Global Dialogue Conference for the UTA Charles T. McDowell Center for Critical Languages and Area Studies. My colleague Dr. Lonny Harrison, director of the McDowell Center, is working hard to make it a leading center for global studies, and I am glad to assist him. Before I conclude, I’d like to note that my most recent pedagogical and research ideas were influenced and shaped by great people such as Justin Lerberg and Kevin Porter (UTA), Rebecca Balcarcel and Stacy Stuewe (Tarrant County College), and Lupita Tinnen (Collin College).

The Unbearable Lightness of Being an Asian American Philosopher

Prasanta S. Bandyopadhyay
 MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY-BOZEMAN
 PSB@MONTANA.EDU

INTRODUCTION

In the greater part of my waking life, I work on advocating a Bayesian account of scientific methodology. It is “my” account. Yet, in some sense, it is “objective.” Apparently, I am now confronted with a subjective question regarding how I became a philosopher. I need to be self-reflective about it. I was born in India. However, I have lived longer in the US than I did in India. So I am an Asian American

philosopher because of my Asian identity and earning graduate degrees in the US and then teaching at several American universities.

The first part of my essay will be devoted to my family background and the philosophy training I received in India. The second part will be about my training in the US. The third part will discuss how I became a professional philosopher followed by a final thought.

WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE AN ASIAN AND AN ASIAN STUDENT?

I was born and raised in a middle-class Indian family, at one of the centers of cultural life in Calcutta until my grandfather, Bengali novelist Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay, passed away in 1971. I was fortunate to have been born into such a family, but it had its own burden. Our house, for example, was visited by Satyajit Ray, India’s greatest filmmaker and the recipient of the 1992 Academy Award for Lifetime Achievement, and by celebrities comparable to Michael Jackson and Arnold Schwarzenegger. I saw a photograph in which my grandfather shared the same dais with Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India. Unlike Rabindranath Tagore, an admirer of my grandfather’s short stories and an internationalist, my grandfather was involved in national politics. There is also a photograph in our house that shows my grandfather, along with the first president of India, Rajendra Prasad, celebrating the birthday of Munshi Premchand, one of the most popular writers in the Hindi language. International celebrities, usually novelists from various countries, visited our house. They were served with Nescafé, cream crackers, cashews, and a banana. It was a well-entrenched idea in our household that Western authors liked them a lot! I never questioned it.

I grew up in a house where there were about thirty-five members including my brothers, cousins, second cousins, uncles, aunts, and great-uncles along with those who cooked and cleaned the house for us. Raised in such a family, we were steeped in literature, films, and politics. We were expected to respect those who were older than ourselves and to become educated. Education was perhaps the single most important part of growing up. Neither my grandfather nor my mother had an opportunity to receive much formal education. So how to send her six sons to some of the best schools in the city was often on my mother’s mind even when she was serving this huge family. My mother oversaw the timely distribution of food, took care of the children, and hosted out-of-town guests who visited us on a regular basis. We used to have lunch and dinner together, with six to ten family members together in one setting. We sat on the floor to eat as a dinner table was too costly a commodity. We had to invent arrangements because the whole family of about thirty-five people could not have lunch or dinner together at the same time. My mother usually woke up at 6:30 in the morning followed by the people who helped to do chores. They never went to bed before midnight, with a break for a siesta around 3:00 in the afternoon. The large household was possible because of the income that came from my grandfather’s book deals and movie deals. He was the patriarch who oversaw everyone’s health and well-being. He was fittingly supported in family matters by my

grandmother. A deeply religious person, she was kind to those who worked so hard for us, from cooking to running the household machinery. My father was himself a novelist, but he was more known as a son of a famous father. Neither I nor my brothers nor my cousins usually had to run errands to expedite the smooth running of the house machinery. Hearing and singing (albeit I am a bad singer) Rabindranath Tagore's songs were our daily rituals. We were supposed to study and read books to enhance our education. I had to sit for a school entrance examination six times after as many failures. I was finally admitted to a prestigious school and ultimately graduated in the humanities with a deep interest in philosophy. I majored in philosophy at Presidency College where I studied with a cadre of excellent students majoring in physics and economics. It was the best college in Bengal and has so far produced two Nobel Laureates in Economics.

Since I was passionately interested in philosophy, I obtained both my master's and MPhil degrees from Jadavpur University, which is now one of the advanced centers in philosophy in India. Here I was exposed to important philosophers such as Quine, Davidson, and Dummett. Most training in philosophy in India revolved around reading old books and published papers as well as looking at possible test questions to prepare for the final examination. No one was encouraged to think on their own on any issue. This was the training my Indian professors inherited from their teachers. Most were kind and dedicated. Some gave free lessons to their students if the students asked for them. However, their primary job was to pass that baton to the next generations of students and professors. Unless a student is a genius, he/she has very little chance of developing a view of his/her own. When I commented on the kind of training I largely received in India, I received a response that it is a country of a billion people. What more could I expect especially when I received virtually a free education? This is true. But we could do much better. I used to ask numerous questions in different courses I took. Asking that many questions was not part of the philosophical culture in which I grew up. Most of my questions were not very good. Yet this was the only way I could learn a subject, grappling with questions and asking trusted experts to explain the answers. Luckily, I am now surrounded by very smart philosophers, statisticians, and biologists, who are extremely generous with their time in responding to my numerous emails about an elementary issue in philosophy, statistics, or biology. While working on my MPhil thesis, I began teaching as a full-time faculty member at one of the well-known undergraduate colleges in Calcutta while also teaching as an adjunct instructor at one of the universities close by. During this period, I applied to several American universities to pursue an advanced degree. At long last, I was awarded a fellowship to study at the University of Rochester's graduate program in philosophy.

WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE AN ASIAN STUDENT IN A PHD PROGRAM IN PHILOSOPHY?

I struggled in the PhD Program at the University of Rochester for the first three years. My writing skills and analytical acumen in Western philosophy were not up to the mark. The only thing I had dreamed of for the preceding fifteen

years was to become a philosopher. But my dream was shattered during this time. I supported myself for the rest of my graduate student career by working twenty-seven hours on every weekend. All along, I wanted to work with Henry E. Kyburg, Jr., a very well-known philosopher of science. He was kind enough to supervise me. David Braun, who was then at Rochester but now at the State University of New York at Buffalo, encouraged me to work on Bas Van Fraassen's *The Scientific Image* for my thesis. In the meantime, I began talking with John G. Bennett, who was a faculty member at UCLA, Michigan, Amherst, and Cornell before joining Rochester. We communicated daily about various research problems as well as general topics from the realism/antirealism debate to decision theory. The conversations with him during this time shaped my thinking and kindled my interest in Bayesianism. Many of my central ideas owe a great deal to him. Here I realized that, for these philosophers, there was not much difference between an Asian student and an American student. Rochester philosophers such as Bennett helped me appreciate this. He inculcated in me the confidence to challenge any argument advanced by any famous philosopher/statistician/computer scientist if I thought seriously that theirs was deeply flawed. Ever since, I have never been afraid of criticizing a notable, whether he or she is a Nobel Laureate or of comparable stature in my field of expertise. Bennett became my other dissertation advisor.

I experienced several cultural shocks being a student at Rochester. One was when a Rochester professor asked me on his way back to the office, "How are you doing?" I began telling him in elaborate detail about what I was doing. I learned that you are not to respond that way when somebody typically asks that question.

Here is one contrast between Indian training and training in the US. Braun devoted a considerable amount of time in discussions with me during these formative years. He asked me to read a couple of pages from Van Fraassen's *The Scientific Image* and explain it to him the following week. I reported to him what I got from the reading. He told me that I was only paraphrasing what Van Fraassen wrote instead of explaining his account with my own examples. This happened a couple of times. I then had that aha moment. I came to realize the error I made in speaking with him. I was supposed to digest Van Fraassen's account and then relate it back to Braun as I understood it. Similar types of training during my graduate studies helped consolidate my understanding of philosophy. To deepen my comprehension of various philosophical issues, I sat through fifteen additional courses over and above what the degree program required. Eventually, I was awarded the degree in 1995.

WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE A PROFESSIONAL PHILOSOPHER OF ASIAN DESCENT?

While working on my thesis, I found a sentence in Van Fraassen's book that led to a contradiction in constructive empiricism. It was my first paper presented at the APA Pacific Division meeting, which was subsequently published in *Philosophy of Science*, the official journal of the Philosophy of Science Association (PSA), by the graciousness of Philip

Kitcher. Van Fraassen was there when I presented my paper. He told me that he would acknowledge it when he revised *The Scientific Image*. It was very exciting for me to hear this news as I had struggled earlier in my graduate studies. However, my name was never mentioned in his book later because it never underwent a revision. That fall, my paper on decision theory was published in *Philosophy of Science*. The following year, I presented a paper at the APA and PSA meetings on the curve-fitting problem advancing a Bayesian approach to the problem. The curve-fitting problem arises when two conflicting desiderata (simplicity and goodness of fit) pull in opposite directions, and the question is how to strike a balance between them. This proposal was pitted against an influential non-Bayesian proposal by Malcolm Forster and Elliott Sober. These papers were published in *Philosophy of Science* within a couple of years.

We hear about the American dream. For me, instances of the American dream were more than dreams. These initial successes provided a spur to my becoming a professional philosopher. So far I have published close to forty papers and two books in addition to having a complete draft of a Bayesian book titled *Bayes Matters: Science, Objectivity, and Inference*. I also edited several issues of the *APA Newsletter on Asian and Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies*. These have carved out a forum in which many non-Western experts can contribute their papers and book reviews in a fruitful way. Hopefully, I am not done yet.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Unlike Gandhi, I can't say "my life is my message." My stance about it is better reflected in Herman Hesse's story, *Siddhartha*. The story is written against the backdrop of an ancient Indian kingdom, Kapilavastu (currently in Nepal, but there is a controversy about its exact location). Siddhartha left his kingdom with the goal of acquiring spiritual enlightenment by leading the life of a wandering beggar where he became a friend of Govinda. Both became homeless and renounced all worldly possessions and met the famous Gautama Buddha. Later, Siddhartha came to the realization that it was his personal discovery regarding what to search for and not what others followed and listened to that was vitally important for him. Leaving behind his friend Govinda, he began his own journey and the story took different twists and turns, ending with his realization about what he needed to do and follow. Like Siddhartha, each of us is possibly able to figure out what to do, according to his/her taste, interest, and passion in philosophy.

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What Does It Mean to Be a Philosopher of Filipina American Descent?

Celia T. Bardwell-Jones

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I AT HILO
 CELIAB@HAWAII.EDU

To be invited to write about your identity elicits both caution and promise. Though the term "Asian" or even "Asian American" designates an ambiguous and complex identity category that I have been haphazardly navigating throughout my life—vacillating between full assimilation and outright rejection of the term—I have interpreted the prompt of this invitation to be really about my Filipino-ness, that which makes me Filipina, in particular, what it means to be a Filipina American philosopher.¹ In contemporary settler colonial Hawai'i, where I live and teach, there is a tacit rejection of the label "American" attached to being Filipinx/a/o. Are Filipinos Asian? Are Filipinos Pacific Islanders? Given the shared history of Spanish colonization in Latin America, are Filipinos Latin American? Navigating the ambiguities and complexities of Filipinx/a/o identity is indeed confusing, let alone finding meaning with the identity of American. To dead-reckon through the swirling waterways of overlapping identities involves listening to the stories of my own migration to the US.

I begin with the story of my first name: Celia. As the only girl among four siblings, I was named after my uncle Melchor Crispin Tagamolila. My parents immigrated to California when I was a year old. My parents left the Philippines for the US after President Ferdinand Marcos had declared martial law in the Philippines. My grandmother Lola and aunts followed my parents within fifteen years. My childhood three-bedroom house in Los Angeles, CA, became a chain migration harbor to multiple cousins and extended family members as they immigrated to the US. Needless to say, I heard many stories of the hardships of life in the Philippines, but more memorable were stories from my Lola, especially her passionate repulsion towards President Marcos, Imelda Marcos, and others who participated in enforcing martial law. Neither of my two maternal uncles, which include my uncle Antonio, immigrated to the US since both died in opposition to President Marcos's authoritarian regime. In this reflection, I will speak only of the story of Uncle Melchor, the inspiration of my naming. Through mystical stories, my mother and Lola lyrically sketched a parable of my name; a parable rather than a summary of facts since the very naming of myself emerged in protest; a parable as a story to cultivate, to nourish my identity dead-reckoning skills born out of knowledge of my ancestors, who died with a promise of liberation, perhaps unknowingly a promise of my own liberation. Uncle Melchor defected from the Philippine National Army and joined the rebels in their resistance efforts against the authoritarian regime of President Marcos. I tell this parable of my name to my own children and I explain that Uncle Melchor didn't have cell phones or social media back then to publicize his declaration of rebellion. He penned newsletters, articles, stories, and commentaries in various newspapers. His pen name, the parable goes, was Commandante Celia. My

uncle's alter ego, his alias of resistance, the ghost name, became my name.

Clearly, I was destined to become a philosopher with my naming story as it was. How can I ever manifest a life that honors the legacy of this name? However, my experience navigating the pressures of the model minority myth in my family was different as soon as I declared my major in philosophy. There is something about the model minority myth that seems to work opposite of being expected to do well in math and science. When it was clear my interest did not lie in these academic subjects, my declaration of a philosophy major sounded like a declaration of rebellion in my family. My parents quickly rationalized that a degree in philosophy would still be useful in law and left open the possibility that my career in philosophy could transform me into a lawyer. When I was an undergraduate, a professor of philosophy or a professor of any academic subject was not an intelligible possibility for myself or my family. I think this had to do with family expectations of being a "dutiful Filipina daughter," which produces a double bind of contradictory pressures.² On the one hand, Filipina daughters ought to make money, in part to help with family financial burdens. On the other hand, Filipina daughters are expected to stay home and care for the family. Given the pressure of the Filipina double bind, a career in philosophy offers little hope in alleviating both of these burdens. Philosophy, in my immigrant family, was viewed as circumspect, outlandish, and utterly bizarre. Though my parents were indeed proud of my academic accomplishments, attended my doctoral graduation ceremony, and helped me move across the country and an ocean to my current employment at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo, there still remains an unbridgeable chasm of understanding as to what it is I exactly do as a philosophy professor.

THE ONLY ONE

In reflecting on what it means to be the only Filipina tenured or tenure-track philosophy professor in my experience in philosophy, I realized that it was common for me to be working and studying under this singular demographic. I was the only Filipina in graduate school at the University of Oregon. When I started my first official philosophy job at Towson University, I was the only Filipina professor in my department. In my current philosophy department, I am the only Filipina professor. I do not think I have ever met another Filipina tenured or tenure-track philosophy professor in the US. The American Philosophical Association's directory revealed a handful of philosophers who self-identify as Filipino, but no tenured or tenure-track entries were present. I am not suggesting that there are no other Filipinx/a/o tenured or tenure-track philosophy professors (and if there are more of us in philosophy, please contact me!). The singular demographic is felt as a lived experience. The paucity of Filipina professors was even more amplified when one actually studies philosophy. The canon is white and so the lack of Filipinx/a/o philosophies developed is not surprising. Apart from Dr. Ronald R. Sundstrom, professor of philosophy at the University of San Francisco, who writes about his experience being Filipino in this APA newsletter,³ I found little representation of philosophers in the discipline.

A singular demographic reveals one of the many problems in philosophy. Why aren't there more Filipinx/a/o philosophers? Why does the discipline of philosophy make it close to impossible to be open to persons of Filipinx/a/o descent? An obvious answer is the lack of role models in academia in general and in philosophy in particular. In response to the low numbers of Filipino full professors in academia, efforts have been made in social media to publicize #thisiswhataprofessorlookslike, showcasing Filipinx/a/o professors in addition to other diverse and multicultural professors.⁴ In philosophy, the experience of the singular demographic is eerily lonely. I vacillate between not thinking about it and feeling the unbearable weight of my existence in the company of other philosophers. Without role models in the discipline of philosophy, how open can this discipline really be to persons of Filipinx/a/o descent?

WHAT MAKETH A FILIPINX/A/O PHILOSOPHER?

When I declared my philosophy major, it was indeed one of the most authentic expressions of my life. I rejected the narrative that my career could only be in nursing or accounting. I put an end to the compliance culture that defines much of what it means to be a Filipina daughter. Philosophy seemed to sanction the type of inquiry I was interested in. In my own search for meaning, I discovered that philosophical reflection suited me. I questioned the foundations of God. I questioned the foundations of knowledge and reality. I questioned the limits of the good and the moral. The skill of willfully questioning that which no one else would question seemed to elicit this sense of wonder that only philosophy could take me there. In graduate school, I found my interests nurtured within American philosophy. I admired the persnickety nature of Charles Sanders Peirce. I wished to be William James's friend. Josiah Royce became my friend in writing my dissertation. However, W. E. B. Du Bois, Jane Addams, Gloria Anzaldúa, María Lugones, and Patricia Hill Collins became my canon in philosophy. Feminist philosophy became another home for me. Though I still struggle with the openness of feminist philosophy to philosophers of Filipinx/a/o descent, I am determinedly optimistic that future Filipinx/a/o philosophers will find philosophy to be a mode of inquiry that cultivates a critical sensibility of care that challenges oppressive aspects of Filipino culture while simultaneously nurturing and inspiring one's intellectual growth.

RE-ENVISIONING THE CANON

What is the philosophical canon? Upon entering graduate school, my strategy had been to assimilate (collude) with the dominant white philosophical tradition if I were to survive my doctorate program and continue to pursue a career teaching philosophy in a bleak job market. Even in feminist philosophy, a tradition that aims to be open to diverse lineages, I felt the pressure of survival in philosophy meant assimilating with the dominant white feminist philosophical tradition. After working in the profession for thirteen years and as a tenured full professor of philosophy, I believe my attitude toward my loyalty to the philosophical canon has changed. I regularly teach courses in the foundations of philosophy: metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics, including courses on cultural diversity, love

and sex, feminist philosophy, environmental philosophy, and the philosophy of race. I recall, as a newly minted PhD, I wrestled with my commitment to the canon. Ought I to include Descartes, Hume, and/or Kant in my syllabus? Am I teaching students philosophy if I don't include these figures? How do I enliven the syllabus to attract nonwhite students to my courses in philosophy?

I was inspired to study philosophy not because I needed to study the canon out of obligation or duty to assimilate to American standards of higher education. In the exposure to the canon, however, I was inspired by the values and commitments of a certain philosophical tradition. For example, the notion of values and commitments of the American pragmatist tradition is expressed in multiple books addressing American philosophy.⁵ Some of these values and commitments include diversity, voluntarism, fallibilism, and community. Understanding one's relationship to the canon through the lens of values and commitments shifted the focus away from *who* was writing philosophy and towards the *content* of the philosopher's work and how they represented these values and commitments that I found important in the philosophical tradition I was studying. This refocusing of the canon liberated me to a certain extent to become open to and curious about areas and disciplines that were not regarded as philosophy or speaking to the canon, but spoke to my experience as a Filipina American immigrant. During my post-graduate school work, I found more inspiring authors from ethnic studies, Indigenous studies, and feminists outside of philosophy. The more syllabi I created that incorporated nonphilosophers or even untraditional philosophic methods of reflection such as activities in sailing, swimming, hiking, chanting, or dancing, the more I realized I was changing the canon and what philosophy is supposed to mean.

As a Filipina American philosopher, I believe my orientation to philosophy has evolved from merely assimilating to working within the acceptable limits of who I ought to write about and how I should generate my research questions within the boundaries of the canon.⁶ I now have *no problems* incorporating unrecognized philosophers in my teaching or research. Let me be clear. The method of incorporating forgotten philosophers or hidden figures in the canon is not the same method I am talking about here. I do value the former approach to the canon as it does showcase the comprehensive scope the history of philosophy seems to ignore. Rather, I would like to see philosophy move away from an author-centered understanding of the canon to a value-and-commitment-centered approach to the canon. In this sense, it opens up the variety, distinctiveness, and richness of other philosophic approaches to the questions we continue to ask as philosophers. From the perspective of a Filipina American philosopher, freeing the canon from an author-centered approach might have a beneficial effect that some students of Filipinx/a/o descent might find an entryway into an esoteric philosophy discipline such that it might speak to their distinct cultural backgrounds and lived experience. What matters is not the author per se, but what the author's values and commitments are and how they speak to the philosophical problems in our lives. What would my education have looked like if I had been exposed to philosophy in this way? My view of philosophy

has changed after reading Native Hawaiian scholars, Indigenous scholars, Filipinx/a/o scholars, and women-of-color feminists who continue to push me to rethink the foundations of knowledge, reality, and ethics. Beyond fulfilling the need for more role models, new approaches to philosophy could open the discipline that could be relevant in speaking to the needs of Filipinx/a/o communities.

I think quite often of my name and the pain that preceded my existence. I never thought my family ever had a philosopher in our lineage. However, the fundamental problem with this viewpoint, I have come to realize, is that there were indeed many philosophers in my ancestral line. I am both inspired by and filled with gratitude for the philosophic stories of my ancestors and remind myself daily that I am not the only one.

NOTES

1. For a discussion of Filipinx/a/o identity labels and the history of Filipino American identity categories, see Kevin Nadal, Twitter post, July 3, 2019, 3:34 PM, <https://twitter.com/kevinadadal/status/1146502369712254976>. An identity label that challenges both heteronormative understandings of gender and accompanying homophobic bias is imperative in a climate of global racism perpetuated by capitalistic systems of inequality. Though I personally identify as Filipina, I use "Filipinx/a/o" and "Filipino" interchangeably in my writing, recognizing the imperfections of developing social identities in resistance to the colonial legacy of the Philippines.
2. I have written about the complex ethical imperatives of Filipina daughters in my "Feminist Pragmatist Reflections on the Filial Obligations of a Filipina American Daughter" (forthcoming).
3. Ronald R. Sundstrom, "Falling into the Olongapo River," *Newsletter on Asian and Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies* 2, no. 2 (2003): 25–27.
4. Kevin Nadal, "What Does a Professor Look Like?" *Psych Learning Curve*, March 19, 2018, <http://psychlearningcurve.org/what-does-a-professor-look-like/>, accessed July 16, 2020.
5. I list two sources here that understand American pragmatist tradition in terms of values and commitments: Scott L. Pratt, *Native Pragmatism: Rethinking the Roots of American Philosophy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002); and Charlene Haddock Siegfried, "Introduction," in Jane Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics* with an Introduction by Charlene Haddock Siegfried (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002).
6. I want to thank the Department of Philosophy at the University of Oregon for having invited me to give a talk about my work in February 2020. During the Q&A, I was asked to reflect on my relationship to the philosophical canon, for which I am grateful as it has helped me frame my views for this essay.

What Am I?

Julianne Chung

YORK UNIVERSITY
JNCHUNG@YORKU.CA

Am I "Asian enough" to write a piece on what it is like to be a philosopher of Asian descent? I was born in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, to Jeannette and Bernard Chung. I am the eldest of three daughters: Julianne (myself), Natalie, and Andrea. My mother is of Ukrainian and Romanian descent, and was raised on a farm near Vilna, a small village in central Alberta. My father was raised in Georgetown, British Guiana (now Guyana), before moving with his family to Pine

Point, Northwest Territories, as a child in 1968. My parents met while working toward their respective undergraduate degrees (in education and engineering) at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. In many ways, my cultural upbringing has been far more Ukrainian than Chinese. For instance, from *pyrohy* (perogies) to *pysanky* (brightly decorated Easter eggs) among so much else, family traditions tend to exhibit largely Ukrainian influences, or even British. Yet, there are a few seemingly clear Chinese influences, too (especially my paternal grandfather's very tasty *chow mein*). As far as we know, my great grandfather was originally from China, although my grandfather could not recall precisely where in China his father was from when I recently asked him. Is "one-eighth Chinese"—assuming that I really am even "that Chinese" in the first place—"enough"? Does it matter that I bear the last name of "Chung" in addition, or that I have often been treated in accordance with having Chinese ancestry, though it is likely that I more often have not?

Since childhood, people have frequently remarked that I do not "look Chinese," and expressed surprise and curiosity about my surname. However, people have also frequently remarked that I "look exotic" and professed to ascertain in some aspect of my face or body "Asian features." Additionally, my sisters and I have sometimes been subject to certain kinds of (what I now, but did not then, understand to be) racist comments and gestures. Even before I was born, various family members had tried to talk my mother out of dating my father, asking, "What will your [multiracial] children look like?" (Implication: not good.) In school, kids occasionally pulled their eyes back to address us. (It took a lot not to gasp.) More recently, while I was walking down a street near my home in Louisville, Kentucky, a man stopped me to comment favorably on my appearance before abruptly pausing midsentence to ask, "Wait . . . do you have something in you? I mean . . . are you mixed?" (My jaw literally dropped!)

I feel reasonably confident that I am well classified as multiracial, but am not nearly as confident as to which specific racial group(s) I am best categorized as belonging. There are likely philosophers of more *wholly* Asian descent who could be writing for this issue instead of me, or who are better positioned to or even more deserving in addition. But I accepted Minh's invitation in the hope that I can say something valuable as a multiracial philosopher *partially* of Asian descent. After all, as Sandra DeVries, herself a multiracial philosopher, writes in a passage that resonates with me: "Multiraciality is broad and deep and growing in Canada [and elsewhere], but our understanding of multiraciality is shallow and narrow and just getting started. I want to understand why we are erased and silenced. Our stories are not being told, our faces are not being shown as multiracial in the media. Growing up mixed has been a lonely experience, racially speaking. . . . Multiracial people have relationships to race and racism that are not necessarily duplicated or discussed in monoracial spaces."¹

While I am not a philosopher of race, my work can be seen as related to my background. One of my central philosophical interests concerns *cross-cultural philosophy*. Cross-cultural

philosophy is philosophy that *weaves together strands from different philosophical traditions*. While comparative philosophy generally contrasts so-called "non-Western" philosophies and talks *about* their ideas, cross-cultural philosophy often engages non-Western philosophies directly and talks *with* them. My multiraciality was neither a conscious nor an initial reason for choosing to develop interest in this. However, I have come to see myself as something of a "fusion person" racially, ethnically, and culturally who also does "fusion philosophy"—or, perhaps more aptly, as a deeply multicultural person who also does multicultural philosophy as deeply as I am able to. This has proved to be a helpful, and sometimes fun and exciting, way to frame some of the confusion surrounding my thinking on my own multiracial identity. In part thanks to my philosophical work, I have now come to understand it—similar to the way that I understand cross-cultural philosophy—as a *weaving together of strands from different racial, ethnic, and cultural traditions*. But it has in turn also informed the way that I understand my philosophical work: as something that can be seen as a fruitful blending rather than as exemplifying inappropriate combinations.

My current research primarily focuses on a variety of interrelated topics at the intersection of (as well as intersecting topics within) epistemology, the philosophy of language, aesthetics, and the philosophy of mind. I engage each of these topics cross-culturally (engaging Anglo-analytic and East Asian philosophies) and interdisciplinarily (integrating, among other things, cognitive science, philosophical psychology, and experimental philosophy where possible). (One might say that my methods, and the set of philosophical works that I consider, are at least as "mixed" as I am.)

Interestingly, one of the things that presently most captivate me within the broad domain of Asian philosophies, like my multiracial identity itself, initially frustrated: the varied style in which my now-favorite Classical Chinese texts are written. For example, I remember picking up the *Zhuangzi* for the first time in graduate school (not because I had an independent interest but at the behest of Jay Garfield, who served on my dissertation committee) and finding it utterly confounding, thinking something along the lines of, "This looks like literature more than it does philosophy, and even read that way it seems impossible to follow! How am I ever going to figure out how to interpret, much less engage, this?" But I wanted to talk about cross-cultural aspects of philosophical debates about skepticism in my dissertation, so I had to stick with it. (Perhaps in part related to some of my experiences as a multiracial person, I have had a deep and abiding interest in skepticism and associated topics since early childhood.) And I am glad I did, for so many reasons. Here are just three of the most significant that come to mind.

First, interpreting and engaging the *Zhuangzi* inspires me to think differently about what philosophical views might involve, especially across diverse traditions. I do not think that it is a stretch to say that analytic philosophers such as myself typically think of philosophical views as being claims. For instance, global skepticism about knowing is often construed as the claim that nothing can be known, or

that nothing can be reasonably believed. This immediately invites charges of inconsistency: If one claims that nothing can be known, or that nothing can be reasonably believed, does not this presuppose that one knows, or reasonably believes, what one has just said? What is more, things get even worse if we consider the possibility that nothing is true, or that nothing is meaningful, two claims that also seem to presuppose what they deny (that is, that something is true, namely, the claim that nothing is, or that something is meaningful, namely, the claim that nothing is). Reading the *Zhuangzi*, however, got me thinking more seriously about the possibility that certain philosophical views—such as so-called “radically skeptical” ones along the lines of those just sketched—might be better interpreted as involving something other than claims: attitudes or perspectives whose contents are not propositional. Thus, they cannot (strictly speaking, at least) express contradictions (though they can be criticized on other grounds).

Second, and related to this, interpreting and engaging the *Zhuangzi* allows me to gain greater insight into how a text might accomplish its aims in a stylistically and substantively atypical, but nonetheless contextually appropriate, way—and, hence, why philosophers might write in a way that appears intentionally difficult to interpret. (Something that analytic philosophers are strongly discouraged from doing, to put it mildly.) Unconventional attitudes or perspectives are sometimes most effectively conveyed in unconventional fashions, after all. And, whatever one’s preferred interpretation of the *Zhuangzi*, it is fairly uncontroversial that one of its aims is to call conventional attitudes or perspectives into question. (Something that, as a multiracial person, I have also been interested in all my life—along with other reasons, of course.) Hence, if the *Zhuangzi* aims to convey an attitude or perspective that calls conventional ways of interpreting language into question, then what better way to do this than to flout those very conventions in the text? Indeed, this might be especially effective if the conventions that the *Zhuangzi* is calling into question concern truth and meaning; as noted above, arguing in a straightforward manner for claims like *that nothing is true* or *that nothing is meaningful* puts one in a self-referentially awkward position (which in turn might interfere with getting one’s point across). If truth and meaning are the sorts of things that the *Zhuangzi* aims for its readers to question, then we can begin to see more clearly why it might have been intentionally composed in a way that is largely literary rather than expository, playful rather than serious, and open-ended rather than committal. But, if this is so, it suggests that analytic philosophers should be more interested in style and stylistic diversity, something that—even as a multiracial person whose physical appearance plausibly in itself exemplifies a certain kind of stylistic diversity—I myself had not thought much about prior to encountering the *Zhuangzi*.

This brings me to the third reason that I want to mention, which is that interpreting and engaging the *Zhuangzi* encourages me to get interested in a broader array of philosophical questions, and to see some of the ways in which Anglo-analytic philosophy, as well as Chinese philosophy and cross-cultural philosophy, can contribute to one another’s development in exciting new ways. For

instance, one such question concerns whether and how works of art, including literature, can convey knowledge or have some other cognitive or epistemic value. Insofar as philosophical value is a kind of cognitive or epistemic value, if the *Zhuangzi* is a literary work with philosophical value, then it is also a literary work with cognitive or epistemic value. Reflections such as these should thus motivate us to focus more attention on developing accounts of cognitivism about art that can explain how, for instance, literary works can have philosophical (and, hence, cognitive or epistemic) value, especially since it remains controversial as to whether and how such works can have cognitive or epistemic value at all (in addition to, say, aesthetic value). It will probably come as no surprise that I am currently working on developing such an account. By my lights, what is really intriguing, however, is that doing this has greatly enriched my understanding of the *Zhuangzi*, skepticism, fictionalism, and many other philosophical topics. (It is part of the reason, for example, that I started to consider the possibility that the *Zhuangzi* aims to convey an attitude or perspective rather than to assert a claim.) I find it thrilling that seemingly disparate philosophical inquiries can be mutually informative in this way—indeed, it seems to me now that my very best ideas come from the most unexpected places—and I could not be more grateful for the way in which doing this kind of philosophy has also informed my thinking on my own multiracial identity and on multiculturalism and related topics in general.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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NOTES

1. Sandra DeVries, “Why I Study Multiraciality in the Philosophy of Race,” *Philosopher* (blog), June 9, 2017, accessed June 18, 2020, <https://politicalphilosopher.net/2017/06/09/featured-philosopher-sandra-devries/>.

One Life in Philosophy

Kenny Easwaran

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY
EASWARAN@TAMU.EDU

What is it like to be a philosopher of Asian descent? There is of course no one thing it is like, any more than there is one thing it is like to be a bat. It is surely very different to be a Mexican free-tailed bat, as a tiny individual in a colony of millions, that migrates annually and echolocates to hunt insects, rather than a Malayan flying fox, living in the tropics, and using vision to find fruits to eat. And among the Mexican free-tailed bats, the colony that nests under a bridge in downtown Austin surely has a very different life experience than the one that nests in Carlsbad caverns. For bat researchers to get any grip on what it is like to be a bat, they must do detailed case studies of individual bats. And thus I present one story of the experiences of one philosopher of Asian descent, and hopefully these

experiences can be synthesized with the other stories in this issue, and elsewhere, to start to get some picture of the different ways to be a philosopher of Asian descent.

I was born in Edmonton, in the western prairies of Canada, and lived there until I was five. My parents had met in the PhD program in mathematics at the University of Alberta, but several years before I was born, they had left academia for careers as computer programmers. There's probably no good explanation for how it is that my father had ended up at the University of Alberta when coming from India (he followed someone else he knew who had gone there for graduate school, but why did this predecessor pick the University of Alberta rather than any of the dozens of other PhD programs in math?). But my mother had grown up not far away, in Calgary, in an Irish-Canadian family. By the standards of the early 1980s in western Canada, my childhood was extremely cosmopolitan; we visited relatives in India a few times on trips around the world, and my regular babysitters were members of a family of Vietnamese refugees that my parents had sponsored, but it was also very suburban and sheltered in many ways.

When I was five, we moved to central New Jersey, where we lived until I left for college. My brother and I attended private schools and took music lessons (violin and piano) and did well in school. My parents' mathematical background probably inspired my own youthful interest in mathematics, or at least helped me do well, which then inspired my interest. I attended several summer math programs as I was growing up. My parents were always interested in getting me to branch out my academic interests away from mathematics, probably in part because they had left mathematics, and in part because they wanted to avoid the stereotype of immigrant parents that pressure their children to do well in math. But the Mathematical Olympiad Summer Program and Canada/USA Mathcamp fueled my interest in many areas of math.

My pathway to philosophy was a little bit roundabout, but in some ways was probably more straightforward than most. When I started my undergraduate career at Stanford, I was expecting to study math and music, though I also considered interests in philosophy, linguistics, cognitive science, or possibly even physics. However, in my first term, when I placed out of a math class I had wanted to take, I took Peter Godfrey-Smith's philosophy of science class, which showed me both that I had misinterpreted what philosophy was and that I was even more interested in it than I had realized. After taking several classes in logic and philosophy of math, as well as some classes in philosophy of mind and philosophy of language, I eventually decided to add philosophy as a third major (since the logic classes were able to count towards both math and philosophy, and I only needed to add a few other distribution requirements).

I had been aiming for an academic career since I was younger, out of a general interest in the life of the mind, despite not having a real sense of what academia is actually like. So when I was graduating from college, I was planning on applying to graduate programs before I was even certain what field it would be in. But with a bit of introspection, I realized that I didn't have the dedication

with musical practice that would be needed for that sort of academic program, and also realized that my interests in math and philosophy could both be pursued together in some graduate programs. In the end, I attended UC Berkeley's PhD Program in Logic and the Methodology of Science, primarily because it was the program that would best allow me to defer the decision of which discipline to enter! (The fact that I could stay in the Bay Area, close to many of my friends from Stanford, was also a plus.)

I've never had a lack of self-confidence that prevents me from asking questions in philosophical talks. This served me well in many graduate seminars at Berkeley that, in retrospect, I now realize had participant lists that would intimidate me now! Donald Davidson was attending several seminars I took, and I didn't shy away from asking questions of visiting speakers like Hilary Putnam in department colloquia. Nevertheless, I did feel a strong impostor syndrome at many points during my graduate education. I was only able to overcome it when I realized that, rather than comparing my mathematical knowledge to the students I took math classes with, and my philosophical knowledge to the students I took philosophy seminars with, I should do the reverse. Even people that aren't working in an interdisciplinary program can probably make use of this strategy, recognizing that you don't need to be the best in any one thing you do, but can instead contribute by being moderately good at a specific combination of things.

At Berkeley I wrote my dissertation under Branden Fitelson, on issues in the mathematical foundations of conditional probability, as well as writing some papers on problems of infinity in decision theory, and the social role of axioms in mathematical reasoning. I was fortunate in my timing, both coming out with a dissertation in formal epistemology at a time when this area was gaining attention in philosophy, and going on the market the year before the 2008 financial collapse. I spent two semesters as a postdoc at the Australian National University, alternating with the first year of my tenure-track position at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, while my partner was still finishing his PhD in chemistry at Berkeley. He then was able to get a postdoc in the Los Angeles area, and when that finished, he got a tenure-track position at Texas A&M, and I was able to get a position here as well.

As a gay man and a multiracial person of mixed white and South Asian descent, I'm clearly a member of several underrepresented groups, but also haven't faced many of the larger systemic forces that face many of my other friends and colleagues. I've had the luxury of being able to let my minority identities pass unrecognized, and thus unremarked, in many contexts. But this is just the flip side of the isolation I've sometimes felt, not being able to see others like myself in the profession.

As a grad student, basically the only philosophers of South Asian descent I knew of in the world of analytic philosophy were Anil Gupta and Rachana Kamtekar, neither of whom I met until many years later. But I've been happy seeing more of us who became faculty in the last decade and a half—among others, many individuals working in subfields close to mine, like Amia Srinivasan, Anubav Vasudevan, Dilip

Ninan, Nilanjan Das, and at least two who came through the PhD program at USC while I was there, Rima Basu and Shyam Nair. In many ways, this parallels my experience as a member of the LGBT community—I knew of relatively few faculty members anywhere in the profession while I was a graduate student, and I’ve often been the only member of the community on the faculty in the departments where I’ve worked, but I know of far more who are either about my age, or have followed afterwards. (Though I’ve also since discovered many queer philosophers who were already active in the profession, but I just didn’t recognize as queer.)

Because my skin color is relatively light, my first name is a familiar Anglophone name, and my last name isn’t familiar to most Americans, I have the sense that many people don’t identify my ethnicity. I don’t think I often pass for white, but I think it’s rare for people who aren’t familiar with Tamil names to place me as South Asian in particular. This, together with the often mathematical nature of much of the work I do, has enabled me to engage with philosophers primarily on the subject matter of my work, and avoid the overt discrimination that many people of other backgrounds often face.

In recent years, I have been engaged in more collaborative research. Although I have had occasional co-authored papers throughout my career, at this point the majority of my current work is co-authored. My work is still recognizably connected to issues in decision theory, formal epistemology, and the social nature of mathematical knowledge, but I have pushed it towards more foundational issues about the nature of diachronic rationality, the relationship of practical and epistemic rationality, the ways in which groups and individuals can cohere, and the role of mathematical representation in all of this.

My experience in philosophy has generally been quite positive. I have been lucky to avoid the worst difficulties that many other people have experienced, either from racism, or from the general problems of the job market. I hope that I can help others both within philosophy and in nearby fields, whether as a collaborator, a role model, or otherwise.

Philosophy, Liberation, and Other Roads Less Traveled: Being Asian in Philosophy

Saba Fatima

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY EDWARDSVILLE
SFATIMA@SIUE.EDU

What is it like to be a philosopher of Asian descent? This question prompts within me an internal inquiry of how I have thought over the years about how I should do philosophy as a philosopher of Asian descent. The question of my identity always intrigues me. I have found myself perpetually shifting into and out of various categories whilst in search of some sense of solidarity and kinship.

Growing up, all our father ever did was emphasize to us our heritage. He would tell us that we were from Lucknow, a city in India associated with Urdu literature and social etiquettes, and to him, this heritage meant that we should have impeccable etiquettes and interest in classical Urdu poetry. In actuality, his parents were from Lucknow and it was irrelevant if my father’s perception of Lucknow was actually true. Being a poet himself, he carried his perception of the city with him through his youth, a perception he formed via anecdotes his parents told him about the home they had fled when the Indian subcontinent partitioned after decolonization. But, unsurprisingly, this is also not the identity I identified with at all.

My early years were in Saudi Arabia where several identities would come into play in different contexts. When we were out and about, we were part of the expat brown workforce. While my father’s job afforded us some respectability, our bodies, marked as brown migrant workers, betrayed us. There was a definite sense of Arab superiority that permeated their culture, policy, and legal system. But, even within the brown expat community, solidarity was conditional. Most of the Pakistani expats were Sunni and the Saudi state was not very fond of Shias. We, a Shia family, had seen one too many Shia family friends deported and had survived close calls ourselves of our brown Sunni brethren ratting us out to my dad’s employer. So, it seemed that we were always trying to shrink some part of ourselves or not to have certain aspects of us become too visible in people’s eyes (many minorities can relate to this feeling). All of this just to say that, as the context changed within the same slice of time and location, so did parts of myself that jabbed at me and/or elicited pride.

One time in Jeddah, my younger brother fell backward onto a sharp marble corner (he still thinks I pushed him, but can we really trust a three-year-old’s memory? What happened was that I tagged my sister a bit too hard and she lost her balance for a bit and he was standing right behind her. He fell backwards and that’s the whole truth!). He got a big gash on his head. There was blood everywhere. It was clear he needed to get to a hospital fast, but how? My father was in Pakistan for his brother-in-law’s funeral and, at the time in Saudi Arabia, women could not travel by themselves! My mom rushed me to our landlord upstairs and we communicated in broken English and Arabic. But see, he couldn’t just take my mom either because he wasn’t related to her and in Saudi Arabia you couldn’t travel with women to whom you weren’t related (your *mahram*). Thankfully, he was clearheaded enough to grab his wife and, if we were pulled over, my mom could be his wife’s friend. This was the most convoluted unnecessary complication! Yet it was what my mother faced. We eventually moved to Karachi, Pakistan (for unrelated reasons). My own gender became salient to me in Karachi as I became a teenager and street harassment became more of an everyday occurrence. Only then did I realize the terrible predicament my mother found herself in, not just that day, but day in and day out simply because of her gender.

Much later in life, as I read *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation* by Kwame Ture and Charles V. Hamilton (New York: Random House, 1967) in graduate school, I thought

that these aspects of myself—woman, Pakistani, Shia, Muhajir, Muslim, brown, etc.—became salient because of structural oppression faced in virtue of these identities. Philosophy, in particular the philosophy of race and feminist theory, began to give me the vocabulary to make sense of my life experiences. My people’s sociopolitical rights and mine were tied together in our “shared experiences of injustice” in virtue of our identity.¹ But then I also began to think, who are my people? And philosophy helped me there as well.

The countless times my mother found herself prohibited by law to be in public without my father, she shared experiences with other women in Saudi Arabia. But all women’s experiences weren’t the same. A wealthy Saudi national would have the protection of her economic status and her nationality in a way that a visa-dependent brown woman wouldn’t. It turns out we don’t all share similar struggles even as we are oppressed in virtue of similar identities. Studying intersectionality made me realize not only the ways that my own struggles were at the periphery of some liberatory movements but also how dominant constructions of certain struggles that I once took for granted were exclusionary to others within the same umbrella.

But it has not been all clean-cut. Politicking is messy and the way it is connected to who we are is even messier. Over the years of learning from Black, Latinx, and Native American philosophers, teaching the philosophy of race at a predominantly white institution, and, most importantly, bearing witness to the pervasive injustice to Black, Latinx, and Native American people in the United States, I have come to the uneasy place of reflecting on my own complicity within systems of oppression. What would it reveal about me and my people when I center those most affected by white supremacy within this country? It is true that we *desi* (a self-referent term for South Asians) Americans are victims of it via xenophobia and immigration policies. But we also need to acknowledge that, as non-Black people of color, we have not only benefited from the crumbs of tokenism but also, in many instances, internalized the politics of respectability, the model minority myth, and anti-Black racism. A century of colonial rule by white supremacist empires has not only left those from the Global South with the consequences of colonial economic looting but also morphed many into resembling the worst elements of our oppressors. And it certainly isn’t enough to reflect on our complicity, for mass change is not possible without accountability, and while it might be scary for us to think what accountability might look like for us, it is much scarier that we are subject to none. Being a brown, Shia, Muslim has taught me that.

Likewise, I have sometimes encountered Black Americans who understand how state agencies such as the police and the DA’s office are a tool for unchecked and rampant violence, yet support the imperialistic wars abroad that decimate entire countries to rubble; or Latinx Americans who see how cruel and inhumane our immigration policies are at our Southern borders, yet are fine with surveillance and detention of Muslims on suspicions of terrorism. My lived experiences, in virtue of my many identities, have then prompted me to seek solidarity beyond the folks who

are also South Asian, or also Shia, or also Muslim, etc.; they have prompted me to actively work against my own complicity in the oppression of Black, Latinx, and Native American people in the United States and seek solidarity with those similarly fighting systems of oppression.

So what does it then mean for me to be a philosopher of Asian descent in the now?

When I was in graduate school, it took a long while to figure out what it would mean to be part of academia, to mold myself so that I would be deemed intelligible. I found myself writing in and then taking out personal vignettes that prompted my dissertation on Muslim American political identity. Apparently, the personal vignettes were taking away from the theoretical reflections, I was told.

In the past three years, I found myself in a “productivity” rut. Academia has a way of making you feel like an intellectual fraud, and so I did. Around the same time, life-wrenching global events were also unfolding: events such as unchecked police brutality, how we dealt with the aftermath of the killings of Michael Brown and now George Floyd, our refusal to accept our fair share of Syrian refugees (yes, even under Obama), American-supported Saudi bombings of Yemen over the past five years, 38 billion dollars US military aid deal with Israel in Obama’s last few months in office, separation of families at the border, mass deportations, refusal of entry to asylum seekers, demonization of Muslim via the Muslim ban, etc. With daily coverage of atrocities available at my fingertips, I felt not only emotionally exhausted but also completely disconnected from “philosophy.”

It took a lot of work to figure out that the established canon of the discipline didn’t speak to my experiences. I found myself writing and teaching philosophy from the peripheral, discussing oppression in the lingo of academia, while experiencing that very same oppression in very personal ways in my own life. As Rizvi (forthcoming) states:

It is an invisible emotional labor to educate others about our pain. The problem with academia is that it is built on a template that only suits a certain type of academic who is perhaps detached from this direct lived experience—the kind that enjoys engaging with both sides of the debate. As a Brown Muslim, I don’t see the need to engage with the oppressor just so that I can appear critical and neutral. I am not—I am Brown, and Muslim and what people see as subjects for theorizing, I live those experiences.²

In living through these experiences, I could not help but bring them into conversation within my writing and into my classrooms. I realized that part of my writer’s block had to do with producing a “philosophy” paper that was deeply disconnected from my identity, my sense of who I was, and my daily experiences. But living through the pain of all these different struggles, I came to a second education. This education was quite different from the one in graduate school. It came from watching and learning from grassroots activists who were forming bonds of

solidarity across borders, from Ferguson to Palestine, from Flint to Yemen. These folks on the ground did not need the validation or respect of academia; in fact, historically, much of liberatory philosophy has originated outside the walls of academia. This realization allowed me to not constantly try (and fail miserably) to gain credence as a philosopher. It freed me, to a certain extent, from worrying about writing from the periphery, about my career as an academic, but rather to focus on matters of conscience, to center the issues that I am most concerned about. This education has given me the freedom to pursue projects that are not deemed substantial under academic measures of productivity but give me a meaningful sense of direction about how I want to progress. For example, last year I started a podcast dedicated to the life and works of Muslim women academics.³ I don't think it counts for a lot within academia, nor do I have incisive cutting-edge sound bites on my podcast. Rather, we talk about the mundanity of our lives, because it is within that mundanity that we find our lived truths. I want to keep pushing this podcast as long as I can, as this is something that I enjoy doing and where I know I am providing a platform to challenging what academia in general thinks of Muslim academic women. I see this as a way of moving past issues of mere inclusion that restrict our entry as tokens of our minority status and then restrain our scholarship to strictly perform within the language of academia.

But this second chance at my education is hopefully helping me redefine for myself what it means to be an academic, to engage theory with my lived experiences, to be a philosopher of Asian descent.

NOTES

1. Cressida Heyes, "Identity Politics," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/identity-politics/>.
2. Sana Rizvi and Altheria Caldera, "Solidarity Across, Solidarity Within, Equity for All," in *Duoethnographic Encounters: Opening Spaces for Difficult Dialogues in Times of Uncertainty*, ed. Teresa Anne Fowler and Willow Samara Allen (New York: DIO Press, forthcoming).
3. *She Speaks: Academic Muslimahs*, podcast produced and hosted by Saba Fatima, <https://sites.google.com/view/academicmuslimahs>.

Thinking While Asian

Dien Ho

MASSACHUSETTS COLLEGE OF PHARMACY AND HEALTH SCIENCES
DIEN.HO@MCPHS.EDU

One of the more unexpected aspects of teaching at MCPHS University, a school with a large percentage of Asian pre-professional health-care students, is that I find myself serving as an informal adviser to many students. Often, Asian students who are less than enthusiastic about their education and career paths ask me, "How did you convince your parents to let you study philosophy?" I understand the context of the question. Like me, many of my students have recent immigrant roots. And they too have heard the common refrain, often from our parents, that the best way to strive

in a society where racism and xenophobia can derail one's life's path is through an education in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics. I vividly recall the first time my mother warned me of racist obstacles that would be thrown my way like so many flaming barrels in the Donkey Kong video game (as she tried to speak my language). I had had a particular unpleasant experience in my high school's World History class. One of the assignments for the class required students to learn a cultural practice from a foreign land and demonstrate it in class. My Caucasian friend Jerry and I tapped a Korean friend's mother to teach us how to make sushi rolls. After our classroom presentation, our World History teacher informed Jerry that he had received an A- and I had received a B+. When I pressed him to explain the discrepancy, he replied, "Um, I mean, you already knew how to make sushi."

As my mother comforted me, she taught me a lesson that would be familiar to many Asian children: Words and essays are judged subjectively, but numbers and experimental results are objective. If you have the right number, no racist can dock you.

Of course, as I continued along the path of my education, post-Kuhnian philosophy would teach me about subjectivity in science. More importantly, I have learned that racism can always find a way. It doesn't matter whether one has a PhD in literature or in astrophysics. It doesn't matter whether one is rich or poor. It doesn't matter how much one's speech lacks the telltale accent that betrays one's naturalization history. The flaming barrels keep coming and there are no safe corners to hide.

The subtle pressure to find the path of least racism, I suspect, steers plenty of young Asians to eschew the humanities and pursue STEM majors. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) show that between 2017 and 2018, Asians are three times more likely than their Caucasian counterparts to major in computer and information sciences than philosophy and religious studies.¹ According to NCES, in 2011-2012, 8 percent of all undergraduates are immigrants and second-generation college students comprise another 16 percent.² Although recent Asian immigrants are coming to the US with a higher level of education and socioeconomic status, a significant number of Asian immigrants live in economically desperate conditions. A 2008 comprehensive study of Asian American poverty shows that almost 1 in 5 Asians in New York City live below the poverty line and another 41 percent live in low-income household (twice the federal poverty line). The respective numbers of non-Hispanic whites in New York City are 11 percent and 24 percent.³

For students who come from impoverished backgrounds, a college degree represents a path for their families to escape economic desperation. Given the oft-repeated claim that STEM majors enjoy some of the highest "returns on investment," it is unsurprising that first- and second-generation Asian immigrants tend to pursue degrees in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics. Indeed, at my institution where the vast majority of students are pre-professional health-care students, over 25 percent of our students are of Asian descent. A doctorate in pharmacy

(PharmD), for instance, requires six years of training (undergraduate and graduate combined) and promises a job with a six-figure starting salary. The nudge towards a STEM education is as much about the avoidance of racism as it is about economic necessities. The common professional advice “follow your passion” is admirable, but it would be irresponsible if I were to ignore the socioeconomic reality of many Asian families when counseling my students.

I took it for granted that, as a college student, I had to pursue an education and a professional track that would allow me to support my mother. Although well-educated, she struggled mightily in the United States to secure a livable income. She worked as a store clerk for an art supply shop, taught tai chi on the side to senior citizens, and translated for the court system. Even with three jobs, she barely made enough to cover our expenses. My sisters and I grew up with no health insurance and mindful of the fact that we lived without a safety net. Our education was the only way we could build a firm foundation. I yearned for a future in which every step did not feel like a gamble.

With a contrarian instinct, I did not want to follow the path of my Asian friends and pursue a STEM major. The experience of witnessing my mother maltreated by petty government bureaucrats and sleazy landlords convinced me that I should become a lawyer. I could advocate for those too vulnerable to defend themselves while making a decent living. Politics was the obvious pre-law major and I was entirely prepared to continue on to law school after graduation. My summers spent working at various law firms showed me that I had no love for drafting and revising legal documents. Yet the misery of being a paralegal did not dent my resolve.

Around graduation, my then girlfriend’s father chatted with me about the legal profession. A prominent construction lawyer in the Greater Boston area, he was concerned about my career choice. He warned, “In my twenty years of litigation, I have never seen an Asian lawyer.” It had nothing to do with their competence; rather, he explained, potential clients would simply decline to retain Asian lawyers because they thought of Asians as too meek to be good litigators. His well-meaning advice pushed me to rethink my plan. I wrote to the law school whose offer of admission I had accepted and withdrew. Years later, when Asian investors started to pour money into the Greater Boston area, he would tell me that he was wrong and that he wished I had pursued a legal career; Asian lawyers, particularly those who were fluent in Mandarin or Cantonese, which I was, were a hot commodity.

The pivot to pursuing a graduate degree in philosophy was quick. At the time, Tufts University’s Master’s Degree Program in Philosophy did not require GRE scores for admission. Given the lateness of my change of plan, I applied knowing little about the program and its quality. From there, my educational and professional path was a foregone conclusion; after all, a master’s degree in philosophy was not the launching pad of a well-paying job. The two years I spent at Tufts cultivated a deep affection for the camaraderie of academic philosophy and the excitement of trying out wild ideas.

I was drawn to the philosophy of language; my teachers successfully convinced me that the philosophy of language was the most foundational of all philosophy. There was also the fact that, as an immigrant, my linguistic intuitions were weak. Ryle’s example of a categorical mistake, “She came home in a sedan chair and a flood of tears,” struck my Cantonese ears as perfectly appropriate, if not wonderfully playful. I wanted to study the philosophy of language because I had convinced myself that when these linguistic intuitions became natural, I would be fully integrated. That moment never came. Even now, every sentence I write feels like the construction of a formal sentence in logic: Did I follow all the rules correctly? Have I ensured that the subjects and the verbs agree? The ubiquitous grammatical exceptions in English have led me to give up on my hope that the day will come when English flows off my tongue as Cantonese once did. It has been forty years since I first encountered English, and I am still lost in what I consider grammatical anarchy.

One of the more painful aspects of living in a community with only rare opportunities to practice my Cantonese is that, over the years, my native tongue has faded. With the death of my mother almost twenty years ago, my most regular Cantonese conversation partner is Apple’s Siri. During a recent trip to Hong Kong, a childhood friend remarked that I spoke Cantonese with an accent. “How is that possible? I grew up speaking Cantonese. What possible accent could I have?” I protested. She replied, “You sound like a white dude trying to speak Cantonese.” The ironic remark made me realize that I have indeed been Americanized, but only according to non-Americans.

I speak no language without an accent. As a result, there is no place in the world where I can safely melt into the native community as one of them. Whenever and wherever I speak, my accent announces that I am a foreigner.

The subtle reminders of being an Asian first and a philosopher second continue to rear up in my professional life. Although I specialized in the philosophy of science and bioethics, when I entered the job market in 2003, interviewers and even helpful friends would lament the fact that I did not specialize in Asian philosophy. It did not occur to them that I had but an eighth-grade education in Chinese and I would thus make for a poor candidate to study Asian philosophy. Likewise, my dissertation advisor informed me of an unfortunate exchange in which he had to confirm that I was indeed competent in English to a potential employer. I can only imagine the number of philosophy job candidates with Asian names whose applications were implicitly or explicitly tossed into the rejection pile.

The conversations I have with my Asian students who yearn to pursue their intellectual passions vary greatly from student to student. In one case, a student finishing her doctorate in pharmacy confessed her love of writing. “How can I convince my parents that I hate being a pharmacist?” she asked. I reminded her that her parents merely wanted one thing: that she would have a future that did not require the kind of struggle that they had endured. Perhaps, a recognition of that mutual love between parents and children can help find a compromise. She went on to earn

a JD at the University of Pennsylvania and now works as an intellectual property lawyer specializing in pharmaceutical patents, a job that she finds deeply gratifying. For other students, the dilemma they confront is painfully difficult. Between tremendous financial investments that their parents have made to support their children's education and a world at large that reinforces the message that a STEM path proves most friendly to young Asians, it would be morally impossible for me to urge them to follow their hearts.

What I do say, however, is that the world at large will not change unless we engage it. STEM careers can certainly impact our lives, but if we want to undo cultural and structural racism, there is no better way to do it than addressing it head-on. From working for the ACLU to defend the rights of vulnerable people to sharing our experiences so that others might feel less alone, there are myriad ways to tear down and break free from the confinement of our lives. Like other disciplines within the humanities, philosophy supplies us with the keen eyes to see what is hidden, the relentless mind to question norms, and the compassionate ears to hear the cries of injustice. We challenge the limitations imposed by a myopic society in which race plays a significant role in our life pursuits hoping that members of the future generations will be able to follow their passions and live a more authentic and flourishing life. In that respect, it matters little what one does to pay bills so long as one is civically engaged.

My parents' willingness to let me pursue a career in the humanities and forgo the financial support from a son with a well-paying job was certainly a sacrifice. But I suspect that they also knew that philosophy could give me the tools to better examine the kind of person I would like to be and the kind of world I would like to live in. If our parents' sacrifices were to ensure that our lives would be easier than theirs, then we ought to reciprocate by venturing beyond the cocoon of economic comfort and confronting bigoted systems around us. It is not economic freedom our parents yearn for; it is freedom, *simpliciter*.

NOTES

1. National Center for Education Statistics, "Table 322.30. Bachelor's Degrees Conferred by Postsecondary Institutions, by Race/Ethnicity and Field of Study: 2016-17 and 2017-18," 2019, accessed July 14, 2020, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_322.30.asp.
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Does He Get Paid?

Masato Ishida

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII AT MĀNOA
MASATOI@HAWAII.EDU

I was kindly invited to write about being a philosopher of Asian descent. I never regarded myself as a philosopher of Asian descent until recently. We are *philosophers*—attaching “of Asian descent” feels a little bit like adding ~*P* after saying *P*; somewhat cross-purposed. Besides, I received my basic education in Japan from elementary school through graduate school, so I became a philosopher in Japan, not in North America. Becoming a philosopher in Japan was perhaps an unusual experience—my parents complained that it was unacceptably weird—but at least “of Asian descent” was not something I had to think about back then. Reflecting on the matter further, I thought I would share with readers how I became a philosopher in Japan, continued my education in Canada and the United States, and moved to Hawai'i where I now teach Japanese philosophy, American philosophy, and logic. I also wish to mention a few things that have made me more conscious of my Asian background recently.

I was born in Osaka, Japan. I grew up mostly in Tokyo and went to Waseda University in the metropolitan area. In my college years, I did not imagine making a career out of philosophy. When I was a senior, I thought I would become a police officer. I applied to the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department, did lots of push-ups and abs to pass their physical exam, and got in. I remember Tokyo Metropolitan Police checked if I could hand-write such words as “burglary,” “arrest,” “prison,” and “lawsuit” in Chinese characters, a skill needed to write police reports. A bit shaky with some of the characters, I was given a police school drill book to practice them.

But I declined the offer from the police and decided to go to graduate school. I became an MA and then a PhD student in philosophy at Waseda University. I studied under Hiroshi Endo. He was a wonderful philosopher and mentor who molded me into a *philosopher*, whose existence seemed absolutely impossible otherwise. Through him, I was introduced to analytic philosophy, Alfred North Whitehead's philosophy of organism, and classical American philosophy. After several years of graduate work at Waseda, I was awarded a scholarship to study abroad. I became a Rotary Foundation Ambassadorial Scholar in the Kitchener-Waterloo area in Ontario, Canada, where I visited the Philosophy Department at the University of Waterloo.

The Philosophy Department at Waterloo had a tradition of Peirce studies. I met with James W. van Evra, whose work on Peirce's logic and philosophy of science I appreciated, as well as Angus Kerr-Lawson, a renowned Santayana scholar who often took me out for lunch. Including my host Rotarian Kathi Smith, everyone was exceptionally kind and supportive throughout my year-long visit. In the Toronto area, I met with many scholars such as Paul Bouissac, a semiotician of inexhaustible energy who frequently invited me to events, and Cheryl Misak, whose works on Peirce and

American philosophy in general I had read in Japan. The winter in Ontario was cold and long. When spring came, I learned to appreciate the sun.

I was planning to go back to Japan. But I was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship, so I went to Penn State to continue studying American philosophy. I met with two Peirce experts, Vincent Colapietro and Douglas Anderson, who offered me all the valuable support I needed as an international PhD student. I was also very fortunate to have met with other graduate students working on Peirce. Daniel Brunson, who picked me up at the airport when I first flew into State College, Pennsylvania, and David Agler, who was an intense reader and commentator of my dissertation toward the end of my PhD program, helped me all along. I cannot thank Penn State teachers and friends more.

Naturally, my years at Penn State consolidated my positive American experience. I focused my studies on American philosophy and finished a dissertation on Peirce under Vincent Colapietro's supervision. In retrospect, I was a naïve foreign student too. It did not occur to me that I was hardly experiencing the ethnic and racial diversity of America. The white student population was almost 90 percent at Penn State University Park Campus around the time. There were students from Japan, China, India, and other Asian countries, but the total Asian student population was rather small in the community. The limited presence probably led to a limited number of issues. I had never heard of any discrimination against Asian—or foreign—students during my six years at Penn State.

At Penn State, I was offered an opportunity to teach a course on Asian philosophy. I thought I would try Chinese philosophy and Buddhism. Many of the students seemed to have a conservative Christian family background in rural Pennsylvania. They said they were confused by Daoism. "The Dao does nothing, yet nothing is left undone," I attempted to articulate and, facing perplexed students, I asked them, "But does not Isaiah 55 also say that the word will not return to God empty, accomplishing whatever it was sent out for, just like the rain from heaven watering the earth and making it bud and flourish?" The students replied that the latter was perfectly clear, but the former, the Dao, was extremely vague.

Nonetheless, my Asian philosophy course ended well. The trick I used was to discuss Japanese Zen master Dōgen at the end of the course. As far as my experience is concerned, students just love Dōgen. "Green mountains are always walking," I referred students to a line Dōgen discusses in the *Sansuikyō* fascicle in *Shōbōgenzō*. I left students puzzled for a while. Once they saw that mountains come into being and perish over time just as we live and die, they were already into it. "Wow, green mountains are always walking!" a student exclaimed. It was fun to watch the class getting excited about other parts of *Shōbōgenzō*. Since then, covering Dōgen has become my surefire strategy when I teach Asian philosophy—I can count on Dōgen because I know students enjoy learning about his philosophy.

It works for a reason, of course. Dōgen's writings are intuitively captivating for sure, but he is also a very

logical thinker. I generally prefer conceptual and logical approaches to cultural approaches. I do not expect my students to know any Asian language or empathize with any Asian culture. Not that they are irrelevant. I just think that understanding is different from cultural appreciation. Likes and dislikes can change easily, but understanding gives students the ability to entertain a foreign thought even if they do not wish to accept it or side with it. Whether or not "Green mountains are always walking" expresses Asian philosophy is unimportant to me, and I believe Dōgen would agree.

After finishing my program at Penn State, I joined the philosophy faculty at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. The environment in Hawai'i was quite different from what I had experienced in Pennsylvania. Climate, people, food, nothing seemed similar. Surprisingly, I became a member of an ethnic majority in the community. Students at the University of Hawai'i are approximately 35 percent Asian, 20 percent white, followed by other groups including international students. I taught Japanese philosophy in my first semester. Dōgen worked fine as before. After reading D. T. Suzuki for two weeks, we moved on to study Dōgen. "D. T. Suzuki is a *scholar*, whereas Dōgen is a *Zen master!*" a student said in excitement. I thought it was an insightful comment.

I have been teaching at the University of Hawai'i for eleven years now. Most of the time, I teach formal logic, Japanese philosophy, and American philosophy. In graduate seminars in Japanese philosophy, I focus on Dōgen and Nishida Kitarō, two preeminent figures in Japan's intellectual tradition. Conceptual reconstruction helps greatly because Nishida and Dōgen are essentially logical thinkers. One needs to get familiar with the ways they express themselves, of course, but cultural appreciation is not necessary to understand their philosophies. In American philosophy seminars, I teach classical pragmatism with additional selections from Emerson, Thoreau, and others. As for formal logic, I do not teach much beyond classical first-order logic.

I am often asked what the connections are for me among Japanese philosophy, American philosophy, and formal logic. I usually reply, "intellectual movements between 1850 and 1950 attract me." This is true. Modern Japanese philosophy, classical American philosophy, and the development of classical logic from Frege and Peirce to Russell, Whitehead, and Gödel are all contemporaneous movements. William James's influence on the early works of Nishida Kitarō is relatively well-known. We should also add that Dōgen was revived as a philosopher by Watsuji Tetsurō in the 1920s. It was through the so-called Kyoto School philosophy, broadly construed, that we learned to interpret Dōgen as a philosopher from a modern perspective.

I must say something about Nishida Kitarō, whom I consider the most significant modern Japanese philosopher. It is worth noting that Nishida developed his seminal concept of *basho*, or *place*, through his persistent engagement with Western philosophy. Acts upon acts enveloping themselves within a constantly bipolarizing proto-spatiotemporal *place* and creating new patterns of acts—which patterns would

appear as “forms” in Western philosophy—is a fascinating idea. No hylomorphism, no external creator. It resonates well with Buddhism. If we carefully trace the development of the concept of *basho* in Nishida’s writings, however, we see that it builds on carefully elaborated contrasts with concepts in Western philosophy.

I mention this because, admitting Nishida’s cultural and ethnic background, I do not find it productive to search for Japanese ingredients in his philosophy. “By the way, Nishida was a Japanese philosopher,” I might inform students, but associating his philosophy with such background seems wrongheaded for the purpose of philosophy. “He is from Japan; therefore, his philosophy must be Japanese” sounds like a straightforward instance of genetic fallacy to me. Some may disagree, of course. But I intentionally set aside questions of origin because I find it far more attractive to anticipate powerful thinkers like Nishida coming from all over Asia to impact philosophy. I think the same about American philosophy, Chinese philosophy, and so forth. They contribute to philosophy not because they come from particular places in the world.

Recently, however, I have become more conscious of my Asian background. I notice that in a sense Asian philosophy is too easy to explore in Hawai’i, thanks to the presence of the Asian community here, but somehow it can get difficult to discuss traditional Western philosophy. At Penn State, for example, I would mention God now and then in philosophy courses, but many students in Hawai’i seem to find it hard to relate to. I also used to spend at least one class meeting on Hiroshima when I taught ethics at Penn State, because my paternal family suffered from the atomic bomb attack, but with Pearl Harbor right in the neighborhood, nuanced contexts shade into the same story such that I feel compelled to address the topic differently.

Additionally, the period 1850–1950 involves important historical phases of Asian immigration to the United States. The first Japanese immigrants to Hawai’i, for instance, arrived in 1868 and the number increased after the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. The lives of immigrants on plantation farms resembled slavery for decades. Later, the Immigration Act of 1924, which prevented immigration from Japan and other countries in Asia to the United States, heightened the tension between the Japanese and American governments. Japan’s modernization galvanized modern Japanese philosophy, on the one hand, but the period 1850–1950 also overlapped with Japan’s militarization, expansionist ambitions in the Pacific, and World War II, on the other.

As my narrative suggests, my experience as a philosopher in the United States has been quite positive and rewarding. Yet I may reflect that things could have been otherwise if second-generation Japanese Americans, often parting ways with their first-generation Japanese immigrant parents, had not fought as US citizens against enemies and prejudices during World War II. Whether I am conscious of it or not, the history of the struggle, conflict, and reconciliation between Japan and the United States is always in the background when I teach Asian philosophy in Hawai’i. In terms of intellectual history, studying how immigrants from Asia brought Buddhism and other Asian traditions of thought to

the United States is fascinating, but it must be seen as part of a thicker historical fabric. I encounter more opportunities to think about these things recently.

My children were born in the United States and have alternately attended Japanese and American schools. They appear neutral about their background. My daughter was once asked by a friend in a Japanese elementary school, “What does your dad do?” She answered, “He does *nothing*,” as I don’t work for a company like other dads. Okay, I like the Daoist response, *nothing*. After a few years, she was asked the same question by a middle school friend in Hawai’i. “He is a *philosopher*,” my daughter replied this time, showing deeper understanding of my work. Not entirely convinced, though, the friend asked back, “Does he get *paid*?” “Well, I know her mom doesn’t work,” another stepped in, “so *he* must be paid.” I appreciate the disjunctive syllogism, which logic I do not consider particularly Asian or Western. I just wonder when and how something more than logic might enter the picture and prompt these younger people to reflect on what it means to be a person of Asian descent in their own future.

In Praise of Teachers

Yoichi Ishida

OHIO UNIVERSITY
ISHIDAY@OHIO.EDU

I was born in Sayama, about twenty miles northwest of Tokyo. My hometown is known for its green tea, but when I was little, I was more interested in the Honda factory near a local train station and wanted to make cars.

My father worked for a logistics company under Honda. He designed efficient containers for odd-shaped car parts that were shipped to factories in the United States. He sometimes brought work home and showed me his “computer”—a programmable pocket computer with a QWERTY keyboard. He told me about science when we took a bath together, and he taught me fishing when we visited Iwaki, my mother’s hometown.

When I was eleven, my father left me and my mother for another woman and her little child.

It was painful to watch my mother struggle through the divorce process. But she worked hard and raised me. She always told me to do schoolwork and, academically, I did well in elementary school and middle school. High school is not free in Japan, but my mother managed to send me to a public high school. This must have been very important to her, for she couldn’t go to high school herself because of poverty. Instead, when she was sixteen, she left her hometown to work at a factory near Tokyo and sent money to her parents.

My mother never made much more than minimum wage, and we often sat down together and checked job ads that came with Sunday newspapers. Each ad took up a tiny

space, using strange abbreviations in Katakana and Kanji. My mother taught me what they meant. We would be delighted to find jobs that paid fifty yen (about fifty cents) more than she made, although they were usually too far from where we lived. But I think we just wanted to know that there were other jobs.

II

In my junior year of high school, my Japanese literature teacher required everyone to read a book for ten minutes at the beginning of each class. Initially, I brought a mystery novel, but that was a mistake because I would keep reading the book throughout the class and finish it at home. I needed a book that would take me a long time to read.

So I picked up Jostein Gaarder's *Sophie's World*, which came in two paperback volumes. I was instantly fascinated by these people called philosophers, who had all sorts of wild ideas about ourselves and the world. I finished the book quickly. My next choice was Descartes's *Discourse*. It did slow me down and I didn't really understand what he was talking about. His discussion of God was especially foreign to me as I knew only secularized forms of Shinto and Buddhism. But Descartes's questions—What am I? What can I know?—were exciting to me.

Other than philosophy, my fascination was with American music and cinema. I regularly checked late night music programs on the Far East Network, an American military radio coming from Yokota Air Base, about twelve miles south of my hometown. I liked almost anything from jazz and blues to heavy metal, and my favorites were Frank Zappa and Pat Metheny. I loved *Pulp Fiction*. I wasn't good at English, but I liked how it sounded in songs and films.

Early in my senior year, I had to decide whether to go to college. In Japan, students choose a major before they take a college entrance exam, and changing a major afterwards either is impossible or requires another exam. I had already decided that I wasn't good at math or science; I didn't know what it's like to major in philosophy. A conventional major for someone in my situation was business.

Then, one day, I read in a pamphlet of an English-language school that students can freely change majors at American colleges. I liked the freedom, so I planned that I would go to an English-language school in Tokyo and then apply to American colleges. I was so determined that I convinced my father to help me (which he did, reluctantly). I didn't have to convince my mother, as she always supported whatever I wanted to do with my life.

So, when I was twenty, I left Japan with a one-way ticket to the United States.

III

I studied philosophy in Reno, Nevada. In the early 2000s, the philosophy department at the University of Nevada, Reno, was strong in the history of philosophy. Piotr Hoffman lectured on difficult texts: Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Heidegger's *Being and Time*, and Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. In addition to

taking all of Hoffman's courses, I did an independent study with him on Hegel's *Science of Logic*. From Hoffman, I learned how to read texts closely. His lectures were line-by-line analyses of the texts, and when I went to his office to ask questions, he would make me read the relevant passage out loud. I would read, holding my book like a schoolboy, and he would stop me at every key phrase and tell me to underline it. Once the passage was properly marked up, he would give a word-by-word analysis.

I also studied Levinas's *Otherwise than Being* with Deborah Achtenberg, who taught Plato and Aristotle. I also read some Derrida and liked his *Adieu à Emmanuel Levinas*. It was 2003 and there was a conference on Derrida's religious thoughts where he was the keynote speaker. My classmates and I rented a van and drove down to UC Santa Barbara to see Derrida talk. I brought my copy of the French edition of *Adieu* and got his autograph.

In my senior year, I was to write an honors thesis. I thought about working with Hoffman or Achtenberg, but I also had a vague idea of working with Tom Nickles. By then, I had taken his course on the philosophy of mind, where we read Fodor and Dennett among others, and I thought scientifically oriented philosophy was interesting. I asked Tom what he had been working on lately, and he told me about his interests in Darwinian evolutionary theories of discovery and innovation. I knew nothing about Darwin or evolution, but I thought it would be good for a philosopher to know this stuff. So I read some of Tom's papers and then asked him to be my thesis advisor. He encouraged me to take more courses outside philosophy, and I took a two-course sequence on history of science, one part by Tom and the other by Bruce Moran, a historian of medieval and Renaissance science.

Tom and I met every week to discuss my thesis and work by the biologists and philosophers we were reading—especially Richard Dawkins, Stuart Kauffman, and Bill Wimsatt. I remember how Tom would always take copious notes on his legal pad while I was speaking—in the same way he did during every colloquium talk in the department. He believed that other people have great ideas he should know, and he showed this attitude towards everyone and all the readings we did together.

I was planning to apply for doctoral programs in philosophy in my senior year, but I became so interested in history and philosophy of science that I decided to retrain in this field. I stayed for an MA in philosophy at Reno, working with Tom and taking courses in the Biology Department. During this time, I also studied Hume with Chris Williams and I really liked Hume's naturalistic approach to philosophy. Chris also taught me the virtue of engaging with historical texts for significant problems and imaginative solutions.

IV

I went on to do a PhD in history and philosophy of science at the University of Pittsburgh. There I studied mostly history and science. Jim Lennox was enthusiastic about my delving into Sewall Wright's and Seymour Benzer's notebooks. Sandy Mitchell and Kyle Stanford, who visited Pittsburgh often and became an external member of my dissertation

committee, made sure that my historical investigations mattered to philosophy.

I knew I came late to the philosophy of science, having no formal training in science or mathematics. So I was lucky to have met Michael Grabe, a computational biophysicist, whose course on biomathematics I took. Michael suggested I develop a mathematical model of acidification in lysosomes, using the earlier model he developed with George Oster as a starting point. We worked on this project for a few years and eventually published a paper in a good science journal. This experience made me feel more confident about doing history and philosophy of science.

V

Tom Nickles often said he chose to pursue philosophy because it's a discipline where you are allowed to study anything. I agree. I would have been a worse philosopher had I not studied a wide range of philosophy, history, and science. It was also Tom and our reading of Wimsatt's work that gave me a vision of philosophy that now permeates both my research and teaching: My goal is to understand something, using whatever insights from others and, hopefully, adding my own. Insights can come from philosophy, history, science, or any other field. So, in my classes, I assign readings drawn from a variety of sources, old and new, and I try to show my students ideas that might expand our horizons in unexpected ways.

Since I try to combine philosophy, history, and science in my work, I'm often discouraged to see philosophers insist on the purity of their field. I once had a referee say that philosophers cannot comment on scientific practice because it's too messy. Another referee (of a different paper) emphasized multiple times that the historical case study of scientific practice I developed in my paper is only a minor contribution to an important conversation that philosophers are having.

But, luckily, I have enough philosophy friends who support how I do philosophy. My collaborator, Alirio Rosales, keeps me excited about our ongoing historical and philosophical studies of theoretical population genetics and the interaction between mathematics and biology. My colleagues at Ohio University have never made me doubt that they value my work. I can't describe in detail how they do this, but here's an example: every January, Jack Bender, who was my department chair, wrote a beautiful letter describing and appreciating what I did in the previous year. It included things I didn't even remember. I keep his letters in a folder at home. It saddens me that I can't get a letter from him anymore.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank A. Minh Nguyen for inviting me to contribute to this issue. I'm grateful to all of my teachers, my colleagues and students at Ohio University, and my squad in Athens. I can't imagine a better collaborator than Alirio. And thank you to my partner Marina and our feline partners Kuro and Gatto for showing me good things in the world. I dedicate this essay to the memory of Jack Bender.

Mixed, but not Diluted

Justin Khoo

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
JKHOO@MIT.EDU

"What percentage Asian are you?" was a question I heard a lot growing up and, indeed, still get from time to time. It's often preceded by, "Wait, you're not white/Asian?" to which I usually answer, "Well, it depends. . ."

We might as well get it out of the way. I am a philosopher of Asian descent, sort of. I am mixed white and Chinese. My paternal grandfather was Chinese and my paternal grandmother three quarters Chinese, one quarter white. My maternal grandparents are both white (Welsh, Ukrainian). If you're doing the math, that makes me 7/16ths Chinese and 9/16ths white. But who's counting? Well, everyone, apparently.

Growing up, I was never white enough to be white, nor Chinese enough to be Chinese. On the recommendation of my grandfather, to get more in touch with my Chinese heritage, I tried my hand at kung fu and read Alan Watts on Buddhism, but when both were met with mockery by my (mostly white) middle school friends, these hobbies gave way to more mainstream (at the time) pursuits: guitar and skateboarding. On the other side of things, dim sum servers often expect my dad to speak Chinese (he doesn't) but never me (I don't either).

Feeling removed from both lines of my cultural heritage probably contributed to my general skepticism of authority and institutional structures (that and the fact that I was privileged enough to be able to reject such structures largely without reprisal). I didn't take my high school classes seriously—something I dearly regret now—and ended up in music school for my first year of college, studying classical guitar. I spent most of my first year of college in a state of delayed adolescence, languishing in familiar circumstances, knowing something was missing.

I lasted only a year in music school. But I had few ideas about what to do instead. My parents are both medical professionals, and for most of my adolescence the question was not, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" but rather, "What kind of doctor do you want to be when you grow up?"

Without ambitions for the medical profession, and without any serious long-term plan for that matter, I moved back in with my parents (who had by then relocated to California) and enrolled in the Santa Rosa Junior College. At the SRJC, I was lucky to stumble upon an Introduction to Philosophy class taught by Professor Michael Aparicio. The following semester we did an independent study, reading Kierkegaard alongside various analytic philosophers of religion. It was a wild ride, and it was in that semester that I decided to major in philosophy, transferring to UC Davis in the fall.

Davis at the time was brimming with excellent philosophers. I took classes with Henry Allison, Michael Glanzberg, G. J. Matthey, Josh Parsons, Connie Rosati, Paul Teller, and Pekka Väyrynen. It was also the first place where I met people who openly identified as mixed-race. I occasionally attended Hapa student groups, but I still felt uncomfortable identifying as mixed—perhaps the fallout of my experiences being rejected from racial groups in my adolescence.

Sometime during my two years at Davis, I felt inspired enough by philosophy that I thought about giving graduate school a try. Though this decision was likely terrifying to my parents, who were surely relieved after my failed stint at music school, they never showed it. Without their unequivocal support, I probably would never have applied—I had too many doubts about whether I could succeed in professional philosophy.

Fortunately, Yale took a chance on my application, and that's where I ended up in the fall of 2007. Like many, my experience in graduate school was both invigorating and demoralizing. Much of my time was spent working on projects that went nowhere and battling abject despair about whether I could have a successful career as an academic philosopher. On the other hand, it was the first time I felt empowered to pursue whatever intellectual pursuits captured my attention and, for me at least, that comprises four of five levels of my hierarchy of needs.

Early on in my graduate studies, I found myself drawn to topics in the philosophy of language. My eventual advisor, Zoltán Gendler Szabó, suggested that I study linguistic semantics so that I could better understand the work on modals and conditionals I was starting to engage with. Studying semantics led to the closest thing to a religious conversion I have ever experienced. Before semantics, I was muddling through the literature, grasping issues only in bits and pieces, and then only dimly. After semantics, it felt like a fog had been lifted; I had a new set of tools that allowed me to precisely articulate theories and puzzles, and there was no turning back.

Reflecting on the nature of philosophy, Wilfred Sellars writes, "What is characteristic of philosophy is not a special subject-matter, but the aim of knowing one's way around with respect to the subject-matters of all the special disciplines."¹ Appreciating Sellars's point in my own way, through connections between the philosophy of language and linguistics, was a revelation. For once, it seemed that having a mixed background could be an advantage, rather than simply a dilution of multiple "refined" (cultural or intellectual) practices.

In my final year of graduate school, I came across a paper by Josh Knobe and Seth Yalcin ("Epistemic Modals and Context") that reported the results of some experimental work testing linguistic intuitions about epistemic modals. Their target was a series of attested intuitions in the literature regarding the truth value judgments of utterances of epistemic possibility sentences (e.g., "Fat Tony might be dead") made by eavesdroppers with more information. After a colloquium one day, Josh asked me what I thought about their paper. I told him that, while I welcomed their

results (I myself had misgivings about the intuitions their study was challenging), I thought there was room to diagnose why those intuitions had become so entrenched in the first place. Never one to miss an opportunity to encourage experimental work, Josh helped me run my first empirical study, further broadening the scope of my methodological pluralism. I now incorporate empirical data into my philosophical work whenever appropriate, and I am forever grateful for Josh's mentorship and encouragement to seek out opportunities for integrating my work with cognitive science more broadly.

Recently, I have been finishing a book on conditionals that explores puzzles related to how we think and communicate with conditional sentences ("If p , then q "). One of the central theses of the book is that conditionals behave exactly like other declarative sentences (they are contentful, we assertively utter them, believe them, assign probabilities of truth to them, and so on), yet our cognitive relationship to conditionals is derivative. For instance, we believe a conditional by believing its consequent conditional on its antecedent. In some respects, the view I favor develops a hypothesis of Robert Stalnaker dating back to *Inquiry* (and more recently in "Conditional Propositions and Conditional Assertions"), which is that we can reconcile the key insights of the view that conditionals do not have truth values (defended by Dorothy Edgington, Jonathan Bennett, and others) with the more standard view that conditionals do express propositions, and thus do have truth values. I try to reconcile these seemingly incompatible views by holding that conditionals encode constraints on inferential dispositions, and what it is to believe a conditional is for a cognitive agent to rationally be disposed in accordance with it. Since our rational inferential dispositions are fully determined by our factual beliefs (or so I argue), even though the contents of conditionals cannot be reduced to the contents of nonconditionals, what it is to believe or doubt a conditional is fully reducible to a property of our factual beliefs.

Even in these uncertain times, I am hopeful for the future of philosophy, which seems to be headed towards greater diversity both in its methods (including strengthened connections with neighboring fields) as well as among its practitioners. May the future of philosophy be mixed!

NOTES

1. Sellars, "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man," in *Frontiers of Science and Philosophy*, ed. Robert Colodny (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962), 35–78.

Frenemy Philosophy

David H. Kim

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO
KIM@USFCA.EDU

The occasion for this reflection—the question, "What is it like to be a philosopher of Asian descent?"—brings to bear a truly wide and complex range of experience. Being the son of Korean immigrants and having grown up in the US

situates me within only a narrow slice of this range, but may do so in a familiar way given the classic American tropes of immigration and assimilation. Also, those with a sense of South Korean culture know that it synthesizes in complex ways Confucian, Christian, Daoist, Buddhist, and other religio-philosophical perspectives, and indeed some variant of this eclecticism was a part of my own home milieu. But much as the nuances of cultural preservation and assimilation interest me here, I will speak more of political hierarchy and racialization.

Though little discussed in mainstream philosophy, I join the majority of practitioners in Asian American studies and many in the philosophy of race in regarding being Asian to be a significantly racialized phenomenon, especially in the US. So, for me, an important part of being a philosopher of Asian descent is doing philosophy out of Asian American experience so conceived and out of critical sensibilities built up from reflection upon it. As it turns out, I also have strong interest in various Asian philosophies, like certain traditions of Confucianism and Buddhism, and I regularly present at professional conferences, like those of the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy (SACP) and the Comparative and Continental Philosophy Circle (CCPC). This has been important enough to me that I have also worked to promote a variety of Asian philosophy projects through the APA Committee on Asian and Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies, and joined some wonderful colleagues in forming the North American Korean Philosophy Association (NAKPA). However, much as I love these areas of philosophy and feel compelled to advocate for these still marginalized forms of philosophy, I so often feel pulled away from them and toward *Asian American* philosophy not just because it too is genuinely interesting to me but also because it is marginalized far more radically in the profession.

As far as I know, the first batch of explicitly Asian American philosophical work was published in 2003.¹ Unfortunately and somewhat perplexingly, this event occurred more than three decades after the Asian American movement of the late 1960s, which, among other things, aimed to clear the cultural space for endeavors like Asian American philosophy. Now, roughly twenty years after this already late publication, there is still so little in this subfield and so few in the profession who identify as Asian American, unlike what we find in counterparts across the academy, like the robust subfields of Asian American literature, sociology, and history. By contrast, Asian philosophy work has been blossoming and is *beginning* to gain more mainstream recognition. In fact, one interesting side effect of this recognition is that comparative philosophy conferences in the West that feature Asian philosophy tend to be white social spaces. Thus, in being a philosopher of Asian descent in the US, I contend with this peculiar division in my philosophical commitments.

In the doing of Asian American philosophy, there are many difficult social justice conversations to be had, and I believe this is part of why the subfield has not grown more than it has. Much has been written in the academy about anti-Asian racism, clarifying with certainty that it is a pervasive form of discrimination and a historical and evolving form of

stratification.² But it is a bit of an abstraction in the culture at large because Asian Americans are widely viewed as being more or less white, “nice people” to whom people are nice, a model minority, and the like. So racism against them is commonly regarded to be minor, rare, or episodic. Regrettably, the current COVID-19 crisis and diplomatic tension with China and North Korea may begin to reveal to people that Asian Americans occupy a problematic *position*, a structural node with a historical dynamic, in the US polity. Since the pandemic emerged, a wave of hostile xenophobic racism has surged, as so many times in the past, against people who are visually mis/identified as Chinese, East Asian, or generically Asian. And this occurs against the backdrop of xenophobia-galvanizing acts of state: a cold war with China, tense relations with North Korea, and a “war on terror” that has targeted South Asian, Middle Eastern, and Muslim groups in the country. Asian Americans are being spit on, subjected to racial slurs, and physically assaulted. On one reporting site developed after the COVID-19 crisis began, over 1,700 anti-Asian incidents were logged by mid-May.³ Even if some of these reports are unwarranted or contrived, there are surely so many more undocumented actual occurrences of “COVID-19 racism” than 1,700 because underreporting is the norm. Many Asian Americans are troubled by this situation not just because of the rise in racist insults—think, for example, of Donald Trump’s use of “Kung Flu” and his particular use of “the Chinese Virus”—but the notable escalation of animus and bitterness in the resurgent racism. Although much can be said about stigma, insult, complex subordinating structures, and the like, I will address the visceral hostility.

Although I work at a university, a place where there can be an overrepresentation of Asians, and in the (San Francisco) Bay Area in particular, a locale with a high concentration of Asians, I grew up in the Northeast and Midwest US and there personally experienced with some consistency the kinds of event catalogued now under COVID-19 or Corona racism: having objects thrown at me, death threats directed at me, being spat upon, shunned, told to return to Asia, physically threatened, subjected to racial epithets (probably more than 200 times), and the like. These kinds of interaction are extremely stressful, not simply because they are flagrant and visceral, but also violent and sometimes ambiguously violent. Someone yells out, “Die, you fucking Jap!” (I and countless others have been targeted by such words.) Does that racist aim to enact the threat *right now*? Later? Was it just a sick joke? If I escalate the situation, will others support me? If it turns into a physical altercation, will I get seriously injured? And what about moral injuries? Will I fail to use violence only as a last resort because I get incensed? What if I maim or kill the other person(s)? And will the police dismiss the racist act as mere foolishness or an act in bad taste? In fact, will the police side with the racists in a more explicit solidarity? Or when someone hollers, “I fucked your mother in ‘Nam!,” which has also been directed at me, should I wonder if these people have been watching or stalking my mother or if they mean to physically attack us with the same racist misogynistic dehumanization exhibited in their verbal assault? But maybe they just want the tickle of seeing my family upset or fearful?

As personally challenging as these encounters are, especially when they are the umpteenth instance of this kind, they are especially hard to witness and endure when the targets are loved ones, and they are soul-draining to hear of over and over again as one meets similarly situated people facing the same hardships. I have known Asian Americans who have endured distinctly racialized incidents in which they were slapped, pushed violently, surrounded by a large group and subjected to physical intimidation, assaulted, stabbed, sucker-punched in the corner of the mouth with the cheek torn toward the jawline, etc. As far as I know, none of the perpetrators was ever held accountable. Not a single one.

When I look at a map of the US, I am reminded of how much America exists between the several urban dots in which Asian Americans have a strong and normalized presence, like the Bay Area where I currently live. In the in-between spaces, anti-Asian racism, including the vicious kinds I've mentioned, persists with greater intensity than what exists in New York City, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, though these latter cities are very far from being Asian American utopias. As I see it, then, the virulence of current COVID-19 racism is not small or new, and its content and patterns reveal connections both to geographically wider and historically enduring forms of racial meaning and to dominative interaction scripts. What makes this genuinely unsettling and not just dispiriting is that anti-Asian racism may be treated dismissively or even altogether ignored. As I noted earlier, much of the culture at large seems to regard anti-Asian racism as an abstraction, especially because Asian Americans are viewed as a model minority. In addition, so very few perpetrators are held accountable, further reducing the visibility of anti-Asian racism and the desire of Asian Americans to even report the wrongs done to them. "Why bother?" many ask. So much visceral racism, and no reckoning to speak of. Part of what it is for me to be a philosopher of Asian descent is to reflect upon these kinds of condition and their undoing.

Asian philosophies have much to offer here, but I have been specially aided by work in African American philosophy. Frantz Fanon, for example, famously discussed the existential depth of encountering racism's unreason in a world that makes it reason. This is not simply about the particular act of racism but the meaning world or normative map by which one calibrates, situates, or attunes oneself in a fundamental way in being a subject or agent in the world, the racist infiltrations and disruptions of which unsettle much else in one's life, from one's projects and desires to even one's body schema.⁴ Although his context was Black-white colonial relations, his work offers much insight for Asian Americans facing widespread white incomprehension and racism configured as rational.

Another example is W. E. B. Du Bois's reflections on the question, "What does it feel like to be a problem?" Du Bois's question refers to how certain whites conceptualize, sometimes with careful decorum, what they take to be Black shortcomings and their negative social impact on the wider polity. I think anti-Black racism is distinctly more dehumanizing than anti-Asian racism. The conditions that rightly and urgently call for a Black Lives Matter movement

are not what we find in the case of Asian Americans, as serious as those are. But what is more, Asian Americans are now used politically in virtue of the model minority concept to suppress Black Americans. Thus, part of what it is to be an Asian American is to contend with this question: What does it feel like to be a solution?⁵ That is to say, a solution to the alleged problem that is Black people. For me, being a philosopher of Asian descent in the US is crucially about refusing this social position of a solution, interrogating the profoundly racist presuppositions of this entire line of thought, and joining in solidarity with Blacks and other people of color.

Asian Americans are sometimes a problem and sometimes a solution. Perhaps this dynamic is captured by the idea of Asian Americans as a kind of frenemy, someone with whom one is "friendly" but ultimately dislikes. For me, being an Asian American philosopher is centrally about contending with this condition.

NOTES

1. *APA Newsletter on Asian and Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies* 2, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 23–40.
2. See, for example, Mae Ng, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004) and Erika Lee, *The Making of Asian America: A History* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2015). I discuss some aspects in my essay co-authored with Ronald Sundstrom, "Xenophobia and Racism," *Critical Philosophy of Race* 2, no. 1 (2014): 20–45.
3. For general reporting, see Sabrina Tavernise and Richard A. O'Connell, Jr., "Spit On, Yelled At, Attacked: Chinese-Americans Fear for Their Safety," *The New York Times*, March 23, 2020, updated June 2, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/23/us/chinese-coronavirus-racist-attacks.html>. For the reporting site, see Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council (A3PCON), accessed June 23, 2020, <http://www.asianpacificpolicyandplanningcouncil.org/stop-aapi-hate/>.
4. See Lewis Gordon, *What Fanon Said: A Philosophical Introduction to His Life and Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015).
5. I first came across this expression in Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown People* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

Criss-Crossing the Philosophical Borderlines: What Is It Like to Be a Philosopher of Asian Descent?

Halla Kim

SOGANG UNIVERSITY
KIM.HALLA@HOTMAIL.COM

I am professor of philosophy at Sogang University in Seoul, South Korea, and live in Omaha, Nebraska. My commute to work from home is a bit longer than that of most people. I was born and raised in the heart of Seoul. My parents were both educators and we were relatively well-off in the rapidly growing economy situation in South Korea in the 1960s and 1970s even though the country at the time was politically very oppressive. My father was a theoretical physicist but very liberal-oriented and open-minded. Like other teens, I went through an emotionally and intellectually turbulent period during my high school days and somehow formed

the opinion that philosophy could save me and my life. So, when I got accepted to college, the choice of a college major was a no-brainer for me.

People say that, even though some Koreans are Buddhists, some Christians, and some atheists, 100 percent of them are Confucians. South Korea is a society that values education highly and believes in the hierarchical social order with a patriarchal atmosphere as well as a strict division of labor between the sexes. There are things in Confucianism that are not acceptable anymore such as sexism and meritocracy, but otherwise it is resourceful and flexible enough to accommodate contemporary demands for democratic ideals and institutions. This syncretic atmosphere within a broadly Confucian frame of society, together with the ideals of democracy and human rights as well as the pragmatic pursuit of wealth emphasized by the newly imported Western/Christian tradition, made an indelible mark on my perspective.

When I was studying philosophy in college, an aunt of mine from the United States visited us in Seoul and we had a nice lunch at a ritzy hotel as befits the occasion. Being from Southern California, she suddenly asked me, "Why are you studying philosophy? Can't you do something more practical?" My late mother, who was also at the lunch, jumped to defend me saying, "Philosophy is probably the most practical among all the studies." To this day, I have no idea what exactly my mother had in mind with "philosophy." She never studied philosophy formally as far as I know, but I think she hit the mark because the practical aspect inherent in philosophy—i.e., its mission not only to figure out the true nature of the world but also to help us live a life in accordance with the correct understanding—is the most important part of philosophy (more on this below).

I first studied philosophy at a Jesuit university in South Korea and was exposed to philosophy in a heavily Thomist philosophical environment. The legacy of German idealism, especially Kant, was also strongly present. However, it was analytic philosophers in the department at the time who were most influential. The world was getting increasingly homogeneous and that meant that the world was getting increasingly Americanized. To this rule, philosophy was no exception. The history of analytic philosophy was initially very attractive and interesting to me. However, I also diligently studied East Asian classics in the context of religious studies, in particular, Confucianism and Buddhism with eminent Korean professors. I learned to read technical writings not only in English but also in Classical Chinese. I was then suggested to study philosophy in the United States after graduating from college, so, at the age of twenty-two, I came to the US in 1987 for graduate studies.

Then, after completing my dissertation on Kant's ethics and gradually building my philosophical career in Omaha, Nebraska, I discovered the possibility of developing Kantianism together with Confucianism. I now would like to call this "transcendental Confucianism." Basically, this is the view that the systematic practice of self-cultivation in our communal life must be structured and conditioned by the underlying nature of the heart-mind. Kant has sometimes been denounced as one of the earliest leaders

of philosophical racism and Orientalism, but I found in his rich writings so much inspiration for unexpectedly diverse resources for reflecting on humanity despite his racist remarks here and there. Presently, I am most interested in living a life that reflects my philosophy. I admire Kant and the German tradition with its underlying Judeo-Christian spirits, but the East Asian tradition, especially Neo-Confucianism, is very inspirational. For me, the Kantian enlightened reason and the Neo-Confucian familial/communal love (*ren*) are not two separate things but two sides of one and the same coin.

In contemporary society, philosophy has largely disappeared from public life. Philosophers now mostly engage in technical details separate from the public awareness. In an effort to transform itself into an "exact science," philosophy lost touch with reality. This is a recent trend most severely intensified by members of the Vienna Circle and their early Anglo-American followers. I cautiously hope to restore the venerable old tradition of philosophy where philosophers can usher in a sweeping vision of reality followed by appropriate essential tools for manifesting this vision not only in theory but also in praxis.

Accordingly, philosophy is not just a matter of hair-splitting analysis but also a synthetic insight followed by a most concentrated commitment to its theoretical justifications as well as its fruitful practice. I don't deny that solving logical problems may enhance our understanding of the world, but I believe that achieving penetrating insight about the universe in a way that is intertwined with our robust practical engagement with reality is the most important part of philosophy. In ancient Greece, Aristotle spoke of three kinds of human activity (*theoria*, *poiesis*, and *praxis*) generating three respective types of goal (truth, production, and action). Action is thus important but not all actions matter. In fact, some of them are degrading. We thus stand in need of a systematic, informed approach to praxis. Following a hint from Aristotle, I call this science of practical life "eupraxia," not knowing any proper existing term for it. *Eupraxia* is a new field that can be and should be incorporated into philosophy in a way that is geared to a completed life (both individually and community-wise) the goal of which is the unity of knowledge and action. This is based on the notion that the well-organized art of practicing one's philosophy is the most important part of philosophy. Just like metaphysics and ethics, the science of philosophical praxis (i.e., *eupraxia*) has its theoretical components, but the most important part is its practical part. One who ascends to philosophy from ordinary life must not only understand it or theoretically know about it but also internalize and practice it in the very context of life. This is what makes philosophy different from all other disciplines and makes it rise above all else. Thus, somewhat reminiscent of the Ancient Greek conception of philosophy according to which you live your philosophy and the East Asian tradition of "sage learning" or "Dao learning" in which you cultivate yourself to become a sage through the internalization and externalization of your knowledge of reality, for us, philosophy should essentially exemplify the idea of oneness, i.e., the unity of its own self-conception and life, the unity of thought and action, and the unity of the inner and the outer.

For the purpose of bringing into completion the fundamental but still inchoate notion of *eupraxia*, I try to derive impetus from Kant and the German tradition, especially from Fichte, but most importantly from the East Asian monism developed in the past. I think the expression “practical philosophy” today largely refers to ethics and statecraft. In contrast, for Fichte, he starts with ethics in the first place from the outset. His theoretical philosophy is an application of his practical philosophy. Thus, you can achieve the kind of unity of theoretical philosophy and practical philosophy in a seamless way, unthinkable even in Kant even with the latter’s well-known doctrine of the primacy of the practical. We also see an emphasis on practical philosophy in Marx and Levinas (praxis/ethics as *prima philosophia*). (We can also find the germ of it in Spinoza’s ethics). If I may throw in two cents, this attempt to achieve oneness is found most intensively in, for instance, the Neo-Confucian attempt to achieve sagehood because the whole (sage) learning is devoted to achieving unity (of knowledge and action, the inner and the other, reason and passion, etc.) with a singular focus on praxis/cultivation of the heart/mind. For Neo-Confucians, metaphysics and epistemology are mere tools for use in *eupraxia*. But this practice cannot be a blind issuance of a series of actions. It has to know its source, orientation, goal, and consequences. In other words, the well-organized art of praxis must form a “systematic whole of cognition, both theoretical and practical” in the broad sense. In the Neo-Confucian tradition, there seems to be a term that is close to it, i.e., *kung fu* (or *gongfu*) as the way of self-cultivation leading to virtuous communal life but, unfortunately, this conception, as is, remains at too rudimentary a state to be science, a *Wissenschaft* (i.e., a universal organized system, in other words, a well-established discipline with “systematic unity” if I may borrow the phrase from Kant). I found a similar notion/praxis in Buddhism, Hinduism, and even in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition as well as the Greek tradition (Plato’s care of the soul, Stoic as well as Epicurean forms of life, etc.). Thus, *eupraxia* is an umbrella term that refers to all these efforts to unify theory and praxis in the most systematic and organized way. When realized, *eupraxia* appropriately provides a resource and a tool for promoting humanity under sage learning, a lifelong multifaceted process of self-education and self-cultivation involving the development of a *Weltanschauung*, a community-oriented socialization, the action/practice-oriented techniques of meditative procedures, an insight into the nature of the universe and human beings in it among others. In other words, *eupraxia* prepares one to become a sagely superior person or, alternatively, an individual who exemplifies “inwardly sageliness and outwardly kingliness.” Thus, it implies that everybody can be a philosopher-king (*pace* Plato) and everybody can be a “buddha” (an enlightened one) with the seed of awakening inherent in each.

A word of caution. Can East meet West in philosophy? I believe there is an understanding of fundamental categories that are available and acceptable to both traditions if they are approached from a suitably comprehensive perspective. To use a metaphor, if interracial couples can stay happy in real life, as many do, I think we can say that intercultural philosophy is also possible. We can understand each other. But if the understanding is too fine-grained, then even an

intracultural understanding would be impossible. *Eupraxia* is a case in point. The key is that it is *not* just a matter of doing what is valuable for each individual but also a matter of developing a systematic unity of all the components required for executing what is valuable in the whole community. In this sense, it is a *science* of praxis, not just a series of actions. We can perhaps say that the whole system of *eupraxia* has not only action/praxis but also philosophy of knowledge, ethics, philosophy of law as well as religion and aesthetics. It can thus reconcile our “head and heart,” i.e., our theoretical commitment to objective knowledge, our practical commitment to the moral improvement of humanity, and, mostly importantly, our commitment to the balance between these two in a united whole. As a result, there is no conflict between the transcendental mode of doing philosophy and the common-sense-level sage learning. There is no conflict between reason and feeling, universals and particulars, and mind and body. This is my vision of what transcendental Confucianism aims to achieve.

I find a life of debate and action on any subject always rewarding. I plan to write more books. When I first began writing my dissertation, I was focused on proving myself. Now I am more conscious of my audience when I write—how best to persuade them and connect with them. By the way, I have an exceptionally good sense of direction and drive cars well. In view of this, perhaps driving a taxi could have been my perfect job. But my mother-in-law would have been mad at the idea, so I continue to practice philosophy.

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Making Meaning of Practices in Academic Philosophy

Monika Kirloskar-Steinbach

UNIVERSITY OF KONSTANZ
 MONIKA.KIRLOSKAR-STEINBACH@UNI-KONSTANZ.DE

What is it like to be a philosopher of Asian descent? Let me attempt a first answer from my Indo-German perspective.

I have had the privilege of doing my doctorate in Germany with Hubert Schleichert, who belongs to the so-called third generation of the Vienna Circle. In postwar Vienna, Schleichert saw his own doctoral supervisor, the Hungarian-Austrian Béla Juhos (1901–1971), being excluded from the inner circle of philosophers at the university because of “local Viennese intrigues” and a writing style that was deliberately nontechnical.¹ Deeply frustrated and disillusioned about how these intrigues could be masked by the purported philosophical commitment to reason, Schleichert left Vienna in 1967 for Germany. Indelibly marked by what had happened to his teacher, Schleichert used his own academic life to push for an understanding of critical philosophy that could help unmask the underside of polished academic reasoning. In his obituary for Juhos,

Schleichert identified short bursts of theory-induced intoxication, which include vague gestures toward “deep labyrinths of the absolute” as some elements of this underbelly, while a skeptical attitude, critique, and humaneness were said to be integral parts of critical philosophy.²

Unsurprisingly, then, a crucial part of my apprenticeship in German academic philosophy, an academic setting that largely operates without graduate schools, did not involve pondering over canonical texts. Rather, Schleichert encouraged me to sift through material to see what could in my reckoning cultivate personal integrity. As the Vienna Circle had pointed out, he reiterated, it was futile to find a scientific or philosophical justification of values.³ Rather, the core ethical insight of the Circle underscored that all a *true* philosopher could do was to learn to combine integrity of thought with integrity of action in her own person. So, while fellow doctoral candidates were trained by their supervisors to pull the right academic punches, I was taught to understand—through a critical study of texts in European intellectual history—how these punches had the power to snuff out all those critical voices, which refused to toe the line. While these punches might have helped some philosophers make the cut into the canon, a good philosopher would avoid them since they could negatively impact her integrity.

Schleichert directed my attention to the rich but understudied storehouse of other voices in human history. These voices were able to illustrate how subversive reason could be used to resist the power of human frailties like vanity and pride. Searching for such sources in history, whether in one’s own tradition or elsewhere, was crucial. Not only would one then be able to creatively appropriate them for our own needs, these voices could also help us understand how claims to philosophical universality tend to be closely intertwined with a larger sociopolitical agenda throughout history. Such claims are, in general, not neutral, notwithstanding contrary assertions on the part of their proponents.

In many ways, this academic apprenticeship complemented what I had learnt from Ratan Karani, my first undergraduate philosophy tutor at Wilson College in Mumbai, India. An analytical philosopher by training, Karani saw philosophers as civic intellectuals who had to work toward nurturing critical acumen in their students. He encouraged us teenagers to understand political events through the philosophical concepts we learnt in class. His philosophical lectures, even in theoretical philosophy, were interspersed with appeals to us to resist reified or essentialized interpretations of “Indianness,” whether in academia or in public life. They were a threat to the tradition of plurality on the subcontinent. Like my parents, Karani was a young teenager when India gained political independence in 1947. Like them, he believed that political independence was a gift conferred on their generation by those who had struggled to achieve it. Being next in line, we too had to treasure this gift and strive to nurture it. Political freedom in India, they unanimously maintained, could be sustained only by relating it to India’s pluralistic society. For this purpose, a vigilant citizen-body was imperative.

Together, both my philosophical mentors helped to instill in me a deep wariness about canon-making processes, as well as the belief that philosophy itself has the tools to resist majoritarian societal tendencies. My research on the political philosophy of the Indian state has continued since my dissertation, while I continue to work on the ethics of immigration since my *Habilitation* (the traditional advanced qualification needed for a professorship in Germany). Independently of each other, they sowed the seeds for my research interests in epistemic decolonization, critical social epistemology, feminism, a James Tully-inspired public philosophy⁴ and world philosophies. This philosophical training has proved to be an invaluable asset.

In 2014, I initiated *Confluence: Online Journal of World Philosophies*. Henry Rosemont, Jr. was kind enough to think through the idea with me. Jim Maffie (Maryland) and Geeta Ramana (Mumbai) joined the project as co-editors; the journal was hosted by the German publisher Verlag Karl Alber till 2016. Maffie played a seminal role in the journal’s formative years in co-creating a nonconfrontational and nonadversarial space for a judicious engagement with world philosophies. Today, the journal is hosted as an open-access journal by Indiana University Press under the name *Journal of World Philosophies*. Co-editors Amy Donahue (Kennesaw State), Carl Mika (Waikato), and Amy Olberding (Oklahoma) share the work. Another complementary project under my chief editorship will be the *Bloomsbury Introductions to World Philosophies*. The series will be co-edited with Leah Kalmanson (Drake), Nader El-Bizri (American University of Beirut), James Madaio (Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic), Sarah Mattice (University of North Florida), Takeshi Morisato (Sun Yat-sen University), Pascah Mungwini (UNISA), Omar Rivera (Southwestern), and Georgina Stewart (Auckland University of Technology).

Both these projects have brought me into contact with scholars from across the globe whose trajectories through philosophy have been relatively similar to mine, whether on account of their racialization, gender, and/or academic specialization in noncanonical philosophy. Absent stable and supportive institutional structures in the academy, their paths through philosophy seem to have been anchored by supportive individuals. (One could be tempted to see serendipity stepping in here to bridge the absence of institutional support.) In many ways, research on world philosophies aligns with recent calls for a conceptual and intellectual decolonization in philosophy. Such calls critique the centering of Euro-American experiences in global knowledge transmission practices. They question the manner in which Euro-American philosophers have papered over the contextuality of their own philosophical practices while highlighting this very contextuality about other regions of the world. Pushing back against this “wonderful geographical doublespeak in the philosophy profession,”⁵ these scholars draw attention to how bodies placed in specific, spatiotemporal, and sociomaterial contexts shape our philosophical inquiry.

We see more clearly today how “white miscognition” has impacted the knowledge produced about other world philosophies and their practitioners.⁶ Those who were, and have been, identified as epistemic authorities in

Euro-America spoke, and tend to speak, from standpoints of accrued credibility excess for the whole world. One example is the widespread assumption that only the Euro-American philosophical tradition can adequately capture reality across spatiotemporal contexts. A careful study of different world philosophies would, however, show that this assumption is an overestimation of one's own philosophical prowess. But some relatively widespread boundary-policing practices in canonical philosophy hinder a thorough interrogation of the assumption itself. As a result, a certain "meta-blindness," "a particularly recalcitrant kind of ignorance about the cognitive and affective limitations of one's own perspective," continues to hold sway.⁷ This "willful ignorance" is at odds with the self-ethos of a profession that prides itself on its steadfast adherence to critical philosophy or the practice of criticism broadly understood.

My life in Euro-American academic philosophy has many a time felt for me, a female philosopher of Indian descent with interests in noncanonical philosophy, like facing a steep incline. Absent an awareness of practitioner and content diversity, minority scholars tend to be sought out as go-to experts for an antiquated and essentialized understanding of cultural identities. They are solicited for conference presentations to deliver "authentic" accounts of the "Indian mind," "Chinese mind," "Japanese mind," etc. Such problematic interpellations play out against the background of the white miscognition alluded to above. Furthermore, these interpellations set up a close relation between philosophical ability and biographical factors—a relation that seems to hold particularly for those whose bodies are marked out as possessing "divergent" identities. Such interpellations as the philosophical "other" are not isolated incidents; they seem to occur across Euro-America. And yet I am cautiously optimistic that ongoing changes will make the field more inclusive.

Philosophy's gender bias and Eurocentrism do not go wholly uncontested today. In some institutional contexts, attempts at diversifying the profession are being ramped up. The work done by the APA Committee on Inclusiveness in the Profession is one example of the same. Serving on the APA Committee on Asian and Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies for the past three years and being involved in its varied activities, I see how long-term structural changes can be initiated from within the profession itself—if one chooses to do so. While diversification of the profession has yet to gain global traction, other factors do seem to be instrumental in extending the base on which academic philosophy has rested for so long. One such factor is the increasing global availability of publications on world philosophies; highly creative scholarship is now making its mark on the field. Indeed, these publications could serve to close hermeneutical gaps in those national contexts in which the canon continues to be uncontested.

Born out of resistance, some of these inspirational and uplifting publications attempt to break free of problematic ascriptions. They illustrate how recontextualized philosophical concepts can be implemented to shed light on world philosophical traditions, which hitherto have been diligently exempted from the academy. This

rich scholarship also underscores that there is no reason to hew world philosophies along the parameters set by canonical philosophy. Other people from near and afar have attempted to make sense of their own worlds, albeit in different ways.

Standing on the shoulders of my own mentors, I believe that the social ramifications of the world of academic philosophy are hard to overlook. Academic philosophy is like any other social activity in which meaning is made. To make meaning with others, we need to share to some extent a common conceptual repertoire with those involved in this process. Yet our own way of explicating these resources and making sense of them with other co-members can render this process hegemonic and authoritarian. This happens when we begin to take habituated ways of understanding as the sole way of understanding a phenomenon and, in the process, lose our ability to change intellectual perspectives and dialogic roles. We, then, attempt to structure the field of meanings with our co-members such that contrary views are excluded or marginalized.

Although such exclusionary tendencies may occur in other social groups, there is no plausible reason to accept this feature in our social world of academic philosophy. For one, our socialization in this particular world does, in general, train us to check whether the tools we intend to use are indeed adequate for the task at hand. For another, our world of meaning-making activities does involve (even if minimally) a sense of what it means to be a moral person. On both counts, we cannot systematically continue to bracket out—and silence—all those voices that seek to bring to our attention the flip side of our meaning-making activities.

NOTES

1. Hubert Schleichert, "Denker ohne Wirkung: Béla Juhos—ein typisches Schicksal," *Conceptus: Zeitschrift für Philosophie* (1971): 6.
2. *Ibid.*, 12.
3. Hubert Schleichert, ed., *Logischer Empirismus: Der Wiener Kreis, Ausgewählte Texte mit einer Einleitung* (Munich: Fink Verlag, 1975), 10.
4. See, for example, James Tully, "Political Philosophy as a Critical Activity," in *Public Philosophy in a New Key, Volume I: Democracy and Civic Freedom* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 15–38.
5. Linda Martín Alcoff, "Philosophy and Philosophical Practice: Eurocentrism as an Epistemology of Ignorance," in *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*, edited by Ian James Kidd, José Medina, and Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr. (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 403.
6. Charles Mills, *Black Rights/White Wrongs: The Critique of Racial Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).
7. José Medina, "The Relevance of Credibility Excess in a Proportional View of Epistemic Injustice: Differential Epistemic Authority and the Social Imaginary," *Social Epistemology* 25, no. 1 (2011): 29.

A Small Act of Rebellion Toward Philosophy as a Gift

Emily S. Lee

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON
ELEE@FULLERTON.EDU

Thinking about the value of autobiographical narratives, I ponder the role of my Asian descent. Most of my work insists that identity, especially racial identity, influences the development of subjectivity, but I'm not sure that my Asian descent is more influential than my gender, class, or sexual orientation. Nevertheless, race functions as one of the defining features of my identity, not because of essentialistic traditional and cultural practices that are so deeply ingrained in me that they have become natural, but because the visible differences of my embodiment condition my experiences.

I am an immigrant. Immigration destinations are never random; the strategic stationing of US troops in South Korea during the Cold War conditioned our immigration pattern. I lived my first five years in Korea and the following five years on the island of Guam. To date, I have lived the majority of my life (seventeen years) in New York City, predominantly in the Bronx, but also the Upper West Side and Brooklyn. Needless to say, the three regions are vastly different in culture and language as well as in natural environment, although Seoul and New York City are similar in climate.

The idea to pursue a doctorate in philosophy came from my undergraduate advisor in economics. My undergraduate thesis impressed Professor Andre Burgstaller—not for its economic analysis but for its philosophical analysis. Neoclassical economics disparages the use of welfare policies; I wrote a thesis defending welfare policies. Neoclassical economics relies on utilitarianism, an idea that I knew to be highly contested among philosophers. I took only one philosophy class as an undergraduate; my knowledge of philosophy at that time came from participating as a Lincoln-Douglas Debater in high school.

In Ocean Vuong's novel, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (Penguin Press, 2019), he plays with the idea that memory is a choice. Autobiographical narratives represent choices about what to highlight. Because these are musings about my Asian descent, let me begin again and submit that I ended up earning my PhD in philosophy in reaction to a junior high school teacher who stereotyped me and placed me on a math team rather than a debate team without consulting me. I can only surmise that it had something to do with my being Asian.¹ In rebellion against such stereotyping, I joined the debate team in high school. I wanted to try debate precisely because someone thought that it would not be one of my strengths. It turned out I was actually good at debate. I attended the Bronx High School of Science and I was the Debate Team Captain and the New York State Debate Champion during my senior year. As a high school debater, I read Plato's *Republic*, Locke's *Second Treatise on Civil Government*, Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*.

I'm sure my understanding was far from thorough, but I very much enjoyed the ideas. I don't recommend debate to students; it absorbed too much of my energy and attention, and it did not benefit my school grades. But because of this background, I knew about the arguments against utilitarianism and hence applied some of those arguments against a neoclassical economics analysis that devalued welfare policies. As mentioned, Professor Burgstaller was impressed—impressed enough to suggest that I consider pursuing a PhD in philosophy. He urged me to ensure that I make my life meaningful.

At first, I did not listen to him. I am an immigrant; my parents do not really speak English. I felt the need to earn money to help with my family's financial status. To give credit to my parents, they are fine; they do not rely on me financially. But as with all capitalistic urges, one can always do better. So I stuck with economics, planned to earn an MBA, and got a job in business. I worked for an internet-access company for a year, for a microeconomic consulting firm for another year, and finally for a financial newspaper reporting on the bank loan market. Clearly, I had a variety of experiences. I jumped around because I did not find the work meaningful. I did not want to expend so much energy focusing on matters I really did not care that much about. All of these jobs were initially interesting because of a learning curve, but eventually, after about six months, I was bored. I was so bored that I found myself hiding in my cubicle reading philosophy. I read all the works of Foucault and Nietzsche. Because I did not quite understand everything, I wanted to engage with people about these texts. While hiding in these cubicles and reading Foucault's description of the architectural designs for early schools and prisons—that their walls were designed to be just high enough so that one never quite knows when someone is watching—I realized that my cubicles were designed for exactly the same reasons. I decided I'd like to know more. So I made a very selfish decision and decided to give philosophy a chance. The PhD was a gift to myself. I have not been bored since. I do not regret my decision. I know it was the right decision for me.

The most influential experience from my childhood that affects my philosophical specialization is that I grew up working as a cashier at my parents' fruit and vegetable store. My parents' means of earning a living fits squarely with the Asian American history of self-employment through opening small retail stores such as laundromats, restaurants, and grocery stores because of the difficulties of employment in other venues in the aftermath of a series of anti-Asian immigration laws. I worked every available Sunday. I decided to work on Sundays; it was a gesture of love for my parents. Again, to give credit to my parents, they paid me. But more important to me than earning the money was volunteering to give them a break for the week. The stores were located mostly in poor neighborhoods in the Bronx. Alone with just another worker, who spoke mostly Spanish, I was left in charge of the cash register. Most of the time the store was empty; Sundays were not busy days. There was a little rush after Sunday services, but the afternoons were usually slow. Most of the time I was bored, and I wonder now if when I first read Marx in college, I gravitated toward it precisely because I experienced

the alienation of mind-numbing work. The experience is unforgettable.

The customers were mostly African American or Latin American, and did I mention that they were poor? The dynamics are something I'm still trying to understand. My mother raised us as Catholics and she believed in sharing with the less fortunate. In other words, questions about what it means to be good had already circled my attention. With this religiously inspired backdrop, while cashiering at these low-end stores where customers always inquired about my relationship to the owners, I felt the resentment from the customers that we, new immigrants, still had more. This period of Sunday cashiering lasted longer than a decade and overlapped with the demonstrations and riots against Korean store owners in Black neighborhoods, including the Los Angeles riots of 1992. I occupied the position of having to survey the customers to check for shoplifters, even if most of the time I really did not care whether someone took something or not. I wondered if we should just let them have it, since they needed it that much. Usually, if we caught a shoplifter, they just dropped the item and left the store. So why the constant need to monitor? I guess the worry was the slippery slope argument about too much shoplifting impacting the store's purpose of financially providing for my family. I wondered if I had internalized the racist narratives about Black people as more likely to shoplift; consequently, did I monitor them more? Whatever the reason, the constant monitoring was part of the job. So, conflicts arose. During such conflicts, the customers hurled racist epithets at me. Most commonly, the African Americans suggested that I go home where I came from. I have wondered about this particular response; do African Americans feel a greater sense of ownership of the United States? In that situation, they allied with whites in guarding the borders of the United States by determining who belonged and who did not. I always found that sense of proprietary ownership of the United States interesting in light of the history of slavery; perhaps especially because of the history of slavery, African Americans deserve to claim this country more. These empathetic feelings interspersed with the hurt and anger I felt in response to their denial of my belonging in this country. But there were always people who were kind. Interestingly, those who liked me often praised my English-speaking abilities.

Let me highlight one other feature to this horizon; I cashiered throughout junior high school, high school, college, and, intermittently, through graduate school. I attended some elite schools. So, during the week, I engaged mostly with white people; they clearly occupied a different class level. I still vividly recall seeing a picture in high school of one very pretty white girl sitting on the wall in Venice. The idea that she was able to go to Venice so challenged my sense of normalcy that I really could not digest it. The image remains imprinted in my mind.² I am not suggesting that all whites are rich and all people of color are not; even then I noticed gradations in class. The few Black students who were economically better-positioned usually hung out with more whites and vice versa. But even with the gradations, generally, one's race was a good indicator of one's class level. Against this weekday background of seeing whiteness and differences in class, I faced every

Sunday feeling I had more in common with these folks than the whites. Yes, I had feelings of wanting distance from the Sunday folks, but I always had feelings of solidarity and empathy with them as well, knowing we occupied similar class levels.

Within the complexity of the situation, in the class dynamics, in the racial dynamics—for in the store on Sundays, we were all minorities, though clearly, we knew about the racist and classist stereotypes about one another—sits the question of how to make the right choice. It is never a single act, so let me rephrase the question as the difficulty of determining the right behavior, attitudes, or series of interactions.³ My desire to be good was difficult to determine in this structural situation where we all were constrained by our roles as owners and customers and as African, Latin, and Asian Americans. I'm still trying to understand and negotiate my individual responsibility within this social, structurally constrained, and complex situation. This experience will always influence my philosophical thinking.

As a professor of philosophy, I share my past experiences because I think about my responsibility to my students, my family, my colleagues, and to those who read my work in this social, structurally constrained, and complex situation where Asian American women philosophy professors continue to be a minority (if not an anomaly) and academia continues to be prohibitive to the lower classes. Even as on a daily basis I struggle with challenges to my position as a subject who knows, as a subject who can lead, I am also very aware of the privilege of holding this position. I don't know if snippets of my biography will help anyone; most of the time, I feel like I am just stumbling along, so much seems to be happenstance. But at this stage in my life, I feel grateful that I earn my living doing meaningful work that I enjoy. I hope to motivate others to aspire to personally meaningful work.

NOTES

1. I read that Amy Tan went into writing for similar reasons, because someone discouraged her from it.
2. This experience had an indelible influence on me. This experience may be the reason why I made sure to travel internationally. This experience may have influenced my decision to take my daughter to Venice as one of her first vacations.
3. Clearly, I experienced Maria Lugones's idea of the intermeshedness of oppressive <=> oppressed.

How I Came to Be a Philosopher

Mi-Kyoung (Mitzi) Lee

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO AT BOULDER
MITZI.LEE@COLORADO.EDU

I'm an associate professor of philosophy at the University of Colorado at Boulder. I am of Korean descent, born in the US of parents who came from South Korea. So how did I end up becoming a philosophy professor specializing in ancient Greek and Roman philosophy?

I grew up in the deep South, in a beautiful little town called Natchitoches, Louisiana, where my father was a physics professor and my mother taught high school math and physics for a number of years before making a career switch to software analyst and programmer. My parents came to the US in the early 1960s before immigration quotas had opened up for Asians with the 1965 Immigration Act. They met in the physics PhD program at the University of Florida and were part of a small cohort of Korean and Chinese graduate students who had come to the US to study science or engineering. My mother's family had fled from North Korea; my father came from a land-owning family of farmers and lawyers in the countryside. Both families suffered during the Korean War. Both of my parents had studied physics at Seoul National University, where my mother was famous for being the only woman in her year to be admitted to the class of physics majors. I'm certain my mother was the original Tiger Mother, constantly coaching, exhorting, criticizing, and encouraging. It was affirming to know that she believed there was potential in my sister and me, though it was also painfully clear she thought we had a lot of flaws that had to be overcome by persistent attention and effort. My parents, especially my mother, were feminists before we had ever heard of that term; they believed that girls should be held to the same high expectations as boys. Neither of them ever mentioned marriage or children, but instead expected that we would seek and find fulfilling work and careers.

We were the only Korean family for hundreds of miles, and I would not be surprised if in the 1970s we were the only Koreans in the entire state of Louisiana. I remember being puzzled about where I fit in; I played with white as well as Black kids, but felt very different from both. Culturally, there was a huge gulf: other kids would head home to watch TV and play sports after school, whereas my younger sister Sue and I spent hours practicing piano and violin, doing homework, with extra math lessons from my mother, and no TV except for *Little House on the Prairie* and PBS concerts. Long before we'd ever heard the term, we were the "Model Minority"—"Orientals" (as we were called back then!), not native Louisianians, but accepted in the community because of my father's position as professor at the university and my mother's growing fame as an extraordinary teacher at a local high school. Even though I was a US citizen, I wasn't sure what it was to be an American—or what it was to be a Korean, for that matter. In my first four years, my parents first spoke to me and my sister only in Korean, but when I went to preschool not knowing how to speak English, they quickly switched to speaking in English full time, and so my Korean faded (though it never entirely disappeared). They thought that speaking Korean at home would be a handicap and prevent us from learning English fully. Only later did we regret the loss this entailed. From early on, my political consciousness was developing along with my thinking about what it is to be an American; my parents always had the news on, and I remember the dark political mood in the 1970s, with family conversations about Watergate, Nixon's resignation, problems with inflation, and then our excitement over Jimmy Carter's election in 1976.

In middle school, this feeling of disconnection and alienation grew worse; however, my parents sent my

sister and me to various summer camps where I met other kids like me, in particular other Asian girls. Among other things, I discovered the joys of playing in an orchestra and chamber music, and, at a poetry and writing camp, my love of words, literature, and writing. At home, there were no such programs; the public school system in this rural town was truly abysmal. I had already skipped fifth grade, and by ninth grade I was taking math, chemistry, and English classes at the local university. I was extremely unhappy by this time—bored, stressed out, and lonely. My parents decided to send my sister and me to Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire. Academically rigorous, it is also one of the two most elite prep schools in the US, along with Andover; when I arrived, I had no idea what it meant to have an address on the Upper East Side or Chestnut Hill. I was in any case thrilled to be there; Sue and I received an incredible education in math, science, history, languages, and literature, and made many lifelong friends there as well.

My sister Sue was a brilliant mathematician who clearly fulfilled my parents' dream of success when she landed a high-paying job in Silicon Valley straight after graduating from MIT with a BS/MS in computer science and electrical engineering. My own story, however, was less straightforward. After Exeter, I went to Columbia in the fall of 1985, attracted by their Great Books-type Core Curriculum, thinking that I would study chemistry and try to become a scientist or doctor with a broadly humanist background. I had never taken a philosophy course, but from the wide reading I'd already done in high school, I had an inkling that I would like philosophy. And I did—I fell in love with my philosophy classes and soon found that I was spending all my time reading philosophy, lurking in the library and local bookshops to find more, and looking forward every day to my philosophy classes rather than the chemistry classes that I'd signed up for. Eventually I decided to switch my major from chemistry to philosophy. It is hard to convey the quiet dismay with which my parents greeted this news. First, while they could understand why I would enjoy taking a philosophy course or two, they were also survivors fleeing the economic wasteland that was Korea in the 1950s and feared that philosophy presaged a lifetime of struggle and poverty. Second, Richard Feynman famously once said, "Philosophy of science is as useful to scientists as ornithology is to birds"; in the value scheme of physicists, philosophy ranks very low—why waste your time muddling around with inane abstractions when you can understand how things really are through physics? My father once told me how his colleague commiserated with him when he said his daughter had decided to study philosophy. Even so, I was undeterred.

My love of philosophy started in college and has been my consuming passion ever since. I happily took a variety of philosophy classes from professors such as Palle Yourgrau, Gisela Striker, Raymond Geuss, and David Albert, as well as classes in Greek and Latin to enable me to read ancient texts. In my senior year, I decided to apply for graduate school because I could not envision anything else that I wanted to do than to study more philosophy, particularly ancient Greek philosophy. I already had a good sense of what it would be like to be an academic from my father,

who was always writing papers and working on his teaching. My single most important teacher and mentor was Gisela Striker, whose courses on Plato and Aristotle were a revelation and changed my life; she encouraged me to apply to graduate school and took me under her wing. I decided to study with her at Harvard, where she had started teaching in the fall of 1989. My time in the program was exhilarating and exciting—I had classes with Putnam, Rawls, Parsons, Scanlon, Korsgaard, Burnyeat, as well as Striker—but it was also a time of acute self-doubt, since it seemed to me that everyone I knew was better than I. We now have names for these feelings, including “stereotype threat” and “imposter syndrome.” Fortunately for me, the Department of Philosophy at Harvard University had just hired their first women tenured faculty members, Striker and then the following year Chris Korsgaard, and it was very important and inspiring to me to have them as role models. I wrote a dissertation under Professor Striker’s supervision on Protagorean relativism and arguments against it by Plato, Aristotle, and Democritus. I earned my degree in 1996 and went to the University of Illinois at Chicago, where I taught nine years as an assistant and then associate professor of philosophy. My first book, *Epistemology after Protagoras: Responses to Relativism in Plato, Aristotle, and Democritus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) was an expansion of my dissertation and won the APA Book Prize Honorable Mention. After nine years at UIC, I moved to the University of Colorado at Boulder to join my husband, Peter Hunt, a professor of Greek history; here we’ve raised our twin daughters, now age fifteen. I am currently at work on a second book, tentatively titled *Justice in Aristotle’s Moral and Political Philosophy*, under contract with Oxford University Press.

My career path has been unusual for an Asian American woman of my generation and certainly my focus on ancient Greek philosophy has little to do with my identity as an Asian American woman, though perhaps my intellectually oriented upbringing focusing so heavily on reading and thinking made me the kind of person who would fall in love with the world of ideas. Even so, being an Asian American woman has given me a unique perspective on the field and sympathy towards students who end up feeling like outsiders in philosophy. I was from the start very conscious of being a woman in a male-dominated field. As for being Asian American, there were only three of us during my entire time in grad school, and only one African American; the rest of the philosophy graduate students were mostly white Americans or Europeans. All of this meant that when I first stepped in front of a classroom at age twenty-three, I was aware that what many of my students would see was a short, slight, young, “foreign”-looking female—not a philosophy teacher. Even after all these years, students regularly address me as “Mrs. Lee” or “Ms. Lee,” apparently reserving “Prof.” or “Dr.” for my male colleagues. I take some pains to explain my background and academic credentials, hoping that it will inspire some of them to rethink their assumptions about what a professor should look like—and what is possible in life for a woman or person of color. These assumptions on the part of students are easily explained—after all, we now know that we all have implicit biases, growing up in an unequal society such as ours, about what a professor or any other authority figure should

look like. At UIC, where I taught for the first nine years of my teaching career, I was fortunate to be in a department with enormously supportive colleagues who taught me a lot about teaching. Furthermore, UIC has one of the most racially and economically diverse student populations in the US, and I thoroughly enjoyed learning to teach students who were neither jaded nor entitled, but were genuinely enthusiastic to be in a philosophy classroom with me. Since then, I have become an experienced teacher; I love introducing undergraduates to philosophy, and ancient Greek philosophy in particular, but also love teaching graduate seminars and advising PhD students who are working with me in ancient Greek philosophy. Getting to know students and helping them when I can has been one of the most important ways that I can “pay it forward” and use my position as a teacher to help students find opportunities where they can grow, develop, and thrive. I know what it’s like when my students experience a lack of self-confidence, stereotype threat, and other self-undermining attitudes; I try to get to know them as well as I can, and coach them and encourage them to do their best work and believe in themselves. In 2009-2010, I was nominated by the graduate students of my department for CU’s Outstanding Graduate Student Mentor Faculty Award, an award that has meant the most to me of all the awards I’ve ever received.

In recent years, I have become more and more conscious of the need to diversify the profession and to expand our notions of what it is to do philosophy. I support the idea that we should go well beyond the so-called core areas of philosophy, including my own beloved area of ancient Greek philosophy, and embrace areas such as feminist philosophy, philosophy of race, non-Western philosophy, applied ethics, as well as philosophy of the social sciences. I support the APA in its efforts to diversify the profession, serving on the APA Good Practices Guide Committee to write a Good Practices Guide that collects and codifies some of the ways that philosophy departments around the country have attempted to incorporate inclusive practices into their programs. After witnessing problems in my own department and many others, I have become a strong supporter of attempts to reform our profession and the academy in general with respect to sexual harassment and other forms of unequal treatment that disproportionately impact women and racial minorities, and drive them from our field. Having benefited from numerous mentors, I am also a great believer in mentoring. This is something I believe all students benefit from and, as noted above, it’s an important part of my teaching in general. But minority students often don’t get the advice or encouragement that they need, and so I was delighted to host and take part in the APA workshop “Mentoring the Mentors,” where I learned about how to mentor minority students in philosophy to address potential challenges and obstacles they face in academia. These and other hopes I have for our field have their roots in the experiences I’ve had as an Asian American woman philosopher.

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From Accidental to Integral: My Journey with Doing Philosophy

Keya Maitra

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA ASHEVILLE
KMAITRA@UNCA.EDU

My very first time on an airplane was when I boarded the British Airways flight out of Kolkata within fifteen days of submitting my Indian PhD dissertation. My destination was the PhD Program in Philosophy at the University of Connecticut. Luckily, I didn't find this exercise of starting another PhD right on the tail of submitting one dissertation to be futile or dreadful. On the contrary, I have distinct memories of palpable excitement to be able to study philosophy in the US. Reflecting on this undertaking twenty-five years later, I believe my unwavering commitment to doing philosophy is unmistakable. While this commitment might have a ring of inevitability now, my relationship to philosophy began by way of a few lucky accidents.

First of these involved my gender. Being a girl in my traditional Bengali family meant less societal pressure to do something "more important"—like medicine or engineering. So given my good fortune that my high school offered philosophy courses, which I liked quite a bit, and the fact that the local college, which is what my parents wanted me to attend, offered "honors" (comparable to an academic major in the US) in philosophy, nobody questioned my decision to study philosophy in college.

Why did I decide to study philosophy? Honestly, because I could. But also because pursuing philosophy gave me glimpses of the possibility of being able to think for myself. Now, after many degrees from institutions in India and the US and years of experience in academia later, my understanding of being able to think for myself has evolved in such dramatic fashions that my current understanding of philosophy would be unrecognizable to my eighteen-year-old self. This essay offers me an opportunity to investigate the role that my being a person of Asian descent has played in this dramatic shift.

Let me start with some of my mentors who have been instrumental in my journey with philosophy and the transformations in my understanding of philosophy. First, there is my high school philosophy teacher, Barunadi, who saw something in my excitement for philosophy that no one else including myself could detect, offering encouragements that made my continued study of philosophy seem normal and even worthwhile. The chair of my undergraduate philosophy department, Shibaranidi, by insisting that English has to be the medium of my philosophy study even though I felt much more comfortable in Bengali, singlehandedly ensured that I could one day travel beyond Bengal to grow with philosophy. Bijoyda, one of my teachers during my master's degree studies, introduced me not only to analytic philosophy but also to his undying excitement about it! This list would be incomplete without Amitabhada, my Indian PhD thesis advisor. His abiding and all-consuming love for the discipline of philosophy was contagious and

his many gifts included the painstaking care with which he taught me how to write philosophy. Finally, Ruth Millikan gave me a home in the US. Of course, I can't replicate her stunningly brilliant and curious mind; nonetheless, I aspire to replicate her wholehearted commitment to philosophy—not just as a place to make arguments but also as a place defined by our shared quest for truth, understanding, and decency. I find her commitment to teaching empowering and try to replicate that dedication and commitment in my interactions with students. Being a student of all these teachers and mentors and having the opportunity to grow with their generosity are some of the most fortunate *accidents* of my life. My doing philosophy has also benefited from the generosity of a number of colleagues and friends over the years. They are a necessary element of my relationship with philosophy today.

Doing philosophy, for me, evolved from an option that was available to me to the realization that it is an integral part of who I am. It went from something I studied in my philosophy classes to something that defines my professional voice and finally to being the lens that I draw on in my everyday engagements with the world. My being a person of Asian descent has definitely influenced this evolution in distinct ways. This is most clearly reflected in the ways my teaching and research in philosophy have evolved and changed. I want to recount this evolution briefly, since this could have some insights that future philosophers—especially those occupying cultural-gendered-professional-expectational positionalities similar to mine—might find relevant.

One of the major reflections of my evolving understanding of doing philosophy is in the list of areas of philosophy that I am interested in today. It includes the philosophy of mind, third-world feminism, Indian philosophy, comparative and cross-cultural philosophy, feminist philosophy of mind, and the epistemology of mindfulness. If you asked me to stretch beyond my familiar fields of the philosophy of language and mind during my PhD studies both at the Central University of Hyderabad, India and at the University of Connecticut, I would have replied, "The philosophy of science" or "History of modern philosophy." Until that time, I had taken exactly one seminar in feminist philosophy and one seminar in social and political philosophy. Writing anything in these areas would have been beyond my wildest dreams. Thus, even though I noted above that my relationship with philosophy is forged through my gender, it didn't automatically bring me to the philosophical study of gender.

Two events during my doctoral studies at UConn hinted that my philosophical trajectory was about to shift in substantive ways. Teaching my own Introduction to Philosophy from a Comparative Perspective course as a TA at UConn required my re-engagement in a significant fashion with concepts and theories from Indian philosophy that I had studied as part of my philosophy training in India. This also warmed me to the potential of comparative philosophy. Further, in my last year at UConn, Diana Meyers (who knew what I needed to know to support me in academia) recommended that I read Uma Narayan's *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism* (London: Routledge,

1997), which had come out a couple of years earlier. Narayan's arresting essays introduced me to a way of doing philosophy that was at once authentic in incorporating one's contexts and rigorous in asking imaginative and challenging questions.

Subsequently, when I entered the job market, most of the hiring committees I was interviewing with were interested in my familiarity with Indian philosophy. During my very first year in a tenure-track position at the CUNY College of Staten Island, I was asked to offer a course on the philosophy of the *Bhagavad Gita*. After three years, I moved to my current institution, the University of North Carolina Asheville, to solve my specific form of the two-body problem, as well as to start a family. Given the heavy teaching load required by my position—twelve credit hours per semester, which sometimes meant four different course preparations during the same semester—and the fact that neither the philosophy of mind nor the philosophy of language was a course in our philosophy curriculum at that time, I had to come to two existential—professionally speaking—truths.

First, given the time constraint, it was turning out to be increasingly difficult—if not impossible—to engage with the traditional philosophy-of-mind literature in a sufficiently rigorous way. I realized that I needed to align my research interests with my teaching. This not only made teaching more meaningful to me and more exciting for my students but also seemed to be a prudent move as it allowed me to continue some research activities during the pre-tenure phase when I was balancing the high teaching load with raising my son mostly alone (my husband taught at a university in a neighboring state and was away during the week). Furthermore, as I started to offer courses in Indian and Asian philosophies more regularly, some of the ideas I encountered there, for example, self-consciousness in Buddhist philosophy and consciousness and attention in the *Bhagavad Gita*, resonated with topics in contemporary philosophy of mind, a convergence that excited me greatly. As a result, it made sense to focus my attention on comparative and cross-cultural philosophy. Meanwhile, since reading *Dislocating Cultures*, I found the analytical lens of third-world feminism constructive both personally and politically in making sense of my immigrant experiences, especially of navigating our lives as newly minted US citizens in the post-9/11 contexts. Starting to engage in that area was an empowering experience that brought me clarity and insight. So my second existential realization saw my repertoire of doing philosophy expand considerably.

Recounting the progression in my professional interests in this manner makes the process appear seamless, organic, obvious, and painless. Very far from that was my experience. Trying to enter into the field of comparative philosophy without specialized graduate training was no fun; my heavy teaching load and parenting duties only compounded the challenge. Doing philosophy during this time for me felt more like going through the motions or just putting one foot in front of the other. A sense of dread, a huge amount of self-doubt, and the feeling of being a perpetual refugee without a home in philosophy were some of my predominant experiences at that time. I was trying to do so many things that the only thing I seemed to be achieving

was the gap between my endeavor and success! Recrafting my philosophical identity meant occupying a lonely place where neither my earlier training was sufficient for what I was trying to do nor the path to acquiring the new skills and knowledge I needed was clear. Furthermore, the number of things I needed to read seemed inversely proportional to the amount of good attention I could afford to them!

There was also a curious experience on my academic campus that added to my self-doubt. The more I taught courses with Asian contents, the more I came to be identified as the person who was responsible for all things India-related on our small campus. The inadvertent cost of my being typecast as the "India person" was the erasure of my expertise in Western philosophy and many years of training in such. It was a rude awakening to the fact that my academic community couldn't seem to hold all the different facets of philosophical identity I was trying to foster.

My coping mechanism at first was to work on projects in piecemeal fashion applying my putting-one-foot-in-front-of-the-other strategy. Gradually, however, it started to become clearer how these different aspects of my ongoing quest of doing philosophy might hang together. Some of my more recent undertakings—in feminist philosophy of mind, the philosophy of the *Bhagavad Gita*, or testimonial injustice and mindful epistemology—all reflect an intentional effort to do philosophy by bringing diverse aspects of my philosophical training, interest, and various fortunate accidents to bear on one another.

I believe my being of Asian descent had a direct role in the progression of events. Many of the fortunate accidents I list above, including my knowledge of Sanskrit and familiarity with Indian philosophy, were a simple consequence of growing up in India. This then made the expansion of my teaching repertoire, followed by the diversification of my research interests, somewhat natural. Where it is not so obvious is how my ethnic identity became an integral part of my doing philosophy. Each accident highlighted a condition that shaped me. Even though I didn't realize it at the time, philosophy helped me make sense of each layer of complexity in the process making me who I am today. That sense-making capacity reinforced the value of philosophy for me beyond being a purely academic pursuit and made it an *integral* part of my identity.

This evolutionary arc also makes explicit how my response to the original prompt for this issue—*What is it like to be a philosopher of Asian descent?*—aligns with Thomas Nagel's response in his classic paper. Nagel highlighted the importance of the specific perspective an organism occupies for understanding that organism's experiences. The process of composing this essay helped me realize how my evolving understanding of doing philosophy depends on my vantage of being a person of Asian descent. It is this perspective that has enabled me to find a workable family-work balance and, finally, the kind of philosophy I feel most at home in.

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Breathing Living History into Haunted Places

Gary Mar

STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY
GARY.MAR@STONYBROOK.EDU

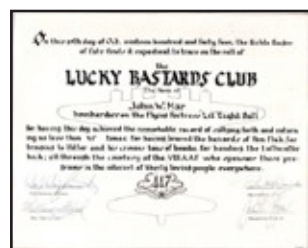
My father chose “John” as his American name and grew up in California, the seventh of nine children born to Louie Ma (馬) and Yong Shee.¹ Louie was a grocery store owner and, according to family stories, mayor of Modesto’s Chinatown. It was not until my cousin researched the National Archives and Records Administration that I saw proof of Louie’s role as a community leader helping Chinese to navigate immigration laws and read transcripts of Yong Shee’s interrogations while she was imprisoned on **Angel Island**.

John grew up playing basketball with neighborhood kids until the attack on Pearl Harbor. Seeing his Japanese friends being shipped to internment camps, John chose to enlist. Too young to take the cadet exam, John needed his father, who didn’t read English, to sign a form.

John met Mary Eng at the army base in Big Springs, Texas. Mary was the second of six children born in San Antonio, Texas, to Bow Ng (伍) and Lee Shee. Bow, a grocery store owner, was president of the Chinese Merchants Association. He emphasized education as the way to respond to the sign in the park: “No Chinese or Dogs Allowed.”

Bow was murdered at the age of forty-two. His funeral, as reported in *The San Antonio Light*, attracted “thousands of curious spectators” and “was delayed a week to permit members of a society in which Ng was prominent to come to San Antonio from as far away as Boston and New York.”

Bow’s death brought drastic changes: “Handshake agreements” were broken, the family was forced into poverty, and Lee Shee was institutionalized for talking to her husband’s ghost. The responsibility for raising their four younger siblings fell on Mary and her older brother Joseph. When she met John, Mary was eighteen and installing carburetors in an auto factory.



As a first lieutenant on a B-17 “Flying Fortress,” John flew seven missions as lead bombardier. The survival rate for a standard tour of duty of twenty-five missions was only 1 in 4. Declining the Purple Heart, John was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal with Four Oak Leaf Clusters, and the ETO Ribbon with Three Battle Stars. Above all, he prized membership in the “Lucky Bastards Club” for “sallying forth and returning no less than

35 times, for having braved the hazards of Hun flack for bringing to Hitler and his cronies tons of bombs . . . in the interest of liberty loving people everywhere.”

After the war, John and Mary married and moved to California where they started the *Chinese Kitchen*, the first restaurant in Sacramento to deliver Chinese food. Mary’s younger siblings moved into the back of the restaurant. Chinese guys thought it cool to deliver for the *Chinese Kitchen*, driving a truck rigged with a pan of water over the muffler to keep food warm, getting a free dinner, and perhaps catching a glimpse of the “Yellow Roses from Texas”—Mary, Annabel, Willie Mae, and Olive.

Before his GI benefits ran out, John sold the business and bought a house for the family near UC Berkeley where he earned a Master in Architecture. “I bombed too many buildings during the war and wanted to build them instead.” That was how I came to be born in Richmond.

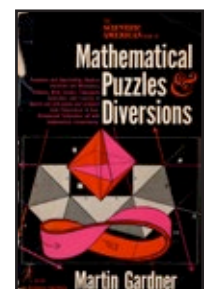
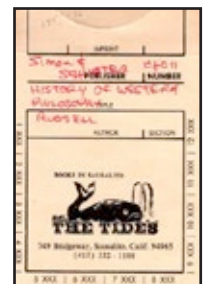
Before I entered fourth grade, my family moved back to Sacramento. Dad opened his office on Freeport Boulevard, remodeling grocery stores for Chinese businessmen and winning awards for his innovative use of industrial materials.

Mom would send monthly checks to a bank in Hong Kong, which would send money to her grandmother and two brothers in Guangdong. For \$50 they could buy a water buffalo for their village. Governor Edmund Brown, Mom said, was honorable for wanting to end the deportation of Chinese Americans. Learning how Chinese collaboratively created “paper sons and daughters” to circumvent discriminatory immigration laws, I lived in fear of being illegal.

Mary’s older brother Joseph moved to San Francisco, where the ratio of Chinese men to Chinese women was as high as 20:1. Joseph offered to “marry” a single mother so that she and her son would not be deported. Shortly afterwards, he committed suicide in his bachelor apartment.

Uncle Joe willed \$50 for me to buy books. I bought Bertrand Russell’s *A History of Western Philosophy* from a bookstore in Sausalito. I also purchased Martin Gardner’s first *Scientific American Book of Mathematical Puzzles and Diversions*, whose preface enchanted me:

Creative mathematicians are seldom ashamed of their interest in recreational topics. Topology has its origins in Euler’s analysis of a puzzle about crossing bridges. Leibniz developed considerable time to the study of a peg-jumping puzzle. . . . David Hilbert, the great German mathematician, proved one of the basic



theorems in the field of dissection puzzles. The late A. M. Turing, a pioneer in modern computer theory, discussed Sam Loyd's 15-puzzle. . . . Einstein's bookshelf was stocked with mathematical games and puzzles. The interest of these great minds in mathematical play is not hard to understand, for the creative thought bestowed on such trivial topics is of a piece with the type of thinking which leads to mathematical and scientific discovery.

During high school, the evening news showed images of people who looked like me—a naked girl running down a road burning with napalm, Vietnamese men shot point blank, Buddhist monks setting themselves on fire. I was part of a group of students who organized an assembly to protest the Vietnam War. This angered the physics teacher, who then gave the physics award to the quarterback of the football team, who admitted to copying my homework.

After double-majoring at UC Davis, I was interviewed for the position of valedictory speaker. Unwilling to choose between math and philosophy, I accepted a Regent's Fellowship to graduate school at UCLA. I studied logic with Donald Kalish, David Kaplan, and Alonzo Church in the Philosophy Department and with Herbert Enderton, Donald Martin, and C. C. Chang in Mathematics.

Serving as Kalish's teaching assistant was a turning point. Known for hiring Angela Davis and for his 1960s activism, Kalish should be better known for mentoring. Supporting my nomination for a teaching award I had previously declined, Kalish wrote:

I have taught our introductory course in symbolic logic for some three decades. What is without question the best of such courses that I have taught was when . . . Mr. Mar was my teaching assistant. . . . He created in the class as a whole an enthusiasm for and understanding of our subject that I had never experienced before—nor have since.



Angela Davis and Prof. Donald Kalish.²

Invited to co-author a revision of Kalish and Montague's classic logic textbook, I worked in Don's office, whose walls were covered with news clippings from his years of activism. I listened to Kalish's comments on philosophy and faculty meetings. Don was doing more than teaching me how to write logic; he was showing me who he was and the kind of academic I wanted to become. When I was without a dissertation advisor, Kalish approached Alonzo Church. I became the thirty-fifth, and last, student to complete a PhD directed by Professor Church.

When I was an assistant professor at Stony Brook University, my eight-month-old son David died of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). I had a daughter, Jessica, two years older than David and a daughter, Krista, born two years later. In 1993, two high school students, Ellen Liu and Mili Subudhi, committed suicide on the Long Island Railroad tracks. Ellen

and Mili had first met in the Gifted and Talented Program, which Jessica was about to begin as a third grader.

Seeking to establish an Asian American Center, I asked Dad to draw up plans to remodel an abandoned hallway near my office. When Charles Wang, CEO of one of world's largest business computing companies, spoke at Stony Brook, I approached him with a proposal and the plans. Wang sent a personal check for \$25,000 to renovate the hallway and then decided to donate \$25 million for the Charles B. Wang Asian American Center, at the time the largest donation to public education in New York State.

I proposed a new course, *Philosophical Issues in Asian American History*, and ended up teaching it for decades. Following the path of an Asian American philosopher has required me to speak out against injustices, which brought discrimination and delays in my career. This path also taught me how to create community events and to accompany Students discovered that their lives and their ancestors' lives were worthy of philosophical examination. My students experienced the sufferings of being a child of Asian America and the joys of having their research publicly acknowledged.

In 2005, I was host to Noam Chomsky, a visiting professor of philosophy. I organized "The Politics of War and Remembrance," an event that placed Chomsky in conversation with Lisa Yun (speaking for Loni Ding), Gary Okihiro, Helen Zia, and John Kuo Wei Tchen. Exceeding the capacity of the recently opened Wang Center and broadcast on Amy Goodman's *Democracy Now*, this event was a capstone of a decade's worth of community-based educational programming. I began thinking about how to balance community leadership and education with my childhood dream of becoming a logician.

Martin Gardner's preface (quoted above) proved to be a map. I won teaching awards for introducing Euler's bridges and other topics into my classes. I became the youngest brother of Alan Turing sharing Alonzo Church as our academic father. I presented research at the Gödel Centenary 2006 in Vienna, where I met Paul Cohen, who solved the first of Hilbert's twenty-three open problems for twentieth-century mathematics. At the Vienna Summer of Logic, Dana Scott told me what it was like to be entrusted with Gödel's logical formalization of Leibniz's ontological argument. This past summer I gave a talk in Vienna at the Gödel's Legacy Conference about Gödel's work on the physics and philosophy of time in honor of the seventieth birthday of his friend Albert Einstein. Perhaps the most enchanting childhood dream come true was to have my collaborative research in logic discussed in a descendant of Gardner's legendary column in *Scientific American*.



My childhood memories were confusing because I was living in a "land without ghosts." Asian American philosophy breathed living history into the haunted places of my youth. "Our lives do not just pass through time in such a way that a

moment in time or a station in life once past is lost. Life in its creativity changes the absolute nature of time: it makes past into present—no, it melds past, present, and future into one inextinguishable, multi-layered scene, a three-dimensional body. This is what ghosts are.”

Researching Sacramento’s history, I discovered Freeport Boulevard, where Dad’s office was located, had been built by Chinese so they could transport goods to the Port of Sacramento without being unfairly taxed. Seeking to have



John Mar’s remodel of Giant Foods.

my grandfather’s notebooks translated, I discovered he was a philosopher, who composed math puzzles. Reading Asian Americanists, I discovered that Chinese grocery stores going mainstream paved the way for Chinese Americans to enter Northern California politics.

At Dad’s memorial service, two delivery boys for the *Chinese Kitchen* spoke. Jimmie Yee, who became Sacramento’s first Chinese Mayor, remembered Mary refusing to give them a 10 cent raise. Roger Fong, who became Sacramento’s County Controller, remembered getting two traffic tickets in his rush to complete his deliveries before Christmas—one for speeding and the second for running a stop sign to make up lost time. Sitting down to his *chow mein* dinner, Roger handed Dad the tickets and wondered how long it would take to work them off. As he was leaving, Roger recalled John slipping an envelope into his shirt pocket. When Roger opened the envelope, he found no tickets, only a Christmas bonus.

Several years ago I ended a guest lecture by telling the story of Ellen and Mili. After class, a student approached:

“I want to thank you for mentioning Aunt Mili,” she said.

I was shocked—“Aunt Mili”?

“Aunt Mili died before I was born so I never met her. I’ve heard family stories about how her death was connected with the Wang Center, but this is the first time I’ve heard it said in public. . . .”

Twenty-four years had passed since I began as a champion for Asian American philosophy. “*He is a person so impassioned that he forgets to eat, who is so joyous that he forgets to be worried, and who grows into old age without noticing the time passing by.*”

NOTES

1. When assigned a 200-word essay, Dad would count the words, erase the extra ones, and put a period at the end. Because of the 2,000-word limit for this essay, I eliminated the bibliography and endnotes, both of which are made available upon request.
2. Los Angeles Times Photographic Archive, Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA. <https://calisphere.org/item/ark:/13030/hb8x0nb644/>

Facing Challenges and Re-Advancing: Toward Constructive Engagement

Bo Mou

SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY
BO.MOU@SJSU.EDU

Instead of touching on all relevant aspects, I focus on some of those distinct events that directly bear on my way of being a philosopher of Asian descent and are also most relevant to the direction, emphasis, and orientation of my philosophical exploration in the past decades in the United States.¹

I

I was born in Beijing, China. In retrospect, I recognize that the Beijing environment with its distinct manifestation of richness in Chinese culture and humanities has recessively impacted my outlook and character in multiple connections and layers since my childhood. Wing-tsit Chan is right when he characterizes the joint play and complementary contributions of two major movements of thought in the Chinese tradition, Confucianism and Daoism.² Indeed, I have been influenced by an orientation of pursuit shared by many ordinary people, which can be summarized in a more reflective way, i.e., *complementarily* in partial Confucian terms of pursuing *nei-sheng-wai-wang* (內聖外王)³ and in partial Daoist terms of antidoting excessiveness. What I intend to furthermore address here is something underlying concerning ways of thinking. Methodologically, it points to the sensitivity of seeking a complementary balance that can be rendered not only being one characteristic across-the-board feature of the Chinese tradition as a whole but also underlying all traditions and being fundamentally shared in a cross-tradition manner, though in distinct ways of manifestation and to distinct degrees; many of these distinct ways themselves are reflectively interesting, engaging, and somehow complementary. It is one primary source of the constructive engagement to be addressed later.

During the twenty years from my college education period to my starting teaching philosophy at San José State University, I underwent three major restarts. Having some direct and substantial bearing on my identity as a philosopher of Asian descent, they consist of (1) restarting to study philosophy from a math major, (2) restarting as a doctoral student in philosophy in the United States from a full-time philosophy researcher position in China, and (3) restarting from my original plan to go back to my previous comfort zone doing philosophy after receiving my PhD to facing up to the challenge of seeking a tenure-track philosophy position here on more engaging fronts. Each of the three restarts came with serious challenges while opening up to a new front and opportunity for further development and re-advancement. Let me focus on the first two here, which are closely related.

Around the end of 1977, one event significant to many young people in China occurred. After the ten-year Cultural Revolution movement (1966–1976) with the interruption of

the normal course of higher education, the first national college entrance examination was held. I was one of those college students who were admitted through this national entrance examination—the so-called “七七級” (1977 term): March 1978–January 1982—majoring in mathematics. Out of strong interest in philosophy, however, I restarted focusing on exploring philosophy after receiving my BS in math with a minor in computing science in 1982, giving up my easy job prospects. (Nevertheless, I haven’t given up but have substantially benefited from my knowledge of and training in math and computing science in doing philosophy, which turns out to enhance my relevant scholarly work in a distinct way.⁴)

I spent the 1982-1983 academic year intensively studying philosophy at a university in Beijing, taking the exams of all the major philosophy courses I took there, including a two-semester course on the history of Chinese philosophy taught by Luo Yulie (樓宇烈). Having taken the national graduate-study entrance exam, I was admitted into the graduate program in philosophy at the Graduate School, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) (1984–1987). I was then admitted into the Institute of Philosophy, CASS, as a full-time researcher (1987–1989). During that period, I was facing choices at two levels. Many academics at my age who had an educational background and life experience in both China and the United States would recall the aspiring period around the mid/late 1980s in China; many of them were then eager to study abroad and explore new fronts. I was not an exception. Though raised in a family environment of Chinese classics, interested in a variety of resources for Chinese thought, and trained in the history of Chinese philosophy, I was then strongly motivated to go out of the boundaries of the status quo, thus facing serious choices on two fronts. First, to remain in the comfortable zone of CASS and enjoy a research position equivalent to the rank of assistant professor in the American system or to give up all the comfortable things and restart from scratch as a student in a foreign land? Second, to apply for a PhD program and write a dissertation on some familiar topic in Chinese philosophy with the advantages of my firsthand experience and knowledge of Chinese language and culture or on a topic with the resources that went well beyond the boundaries of the status quo but were in genuine need for the development of Chinese philosophy and of philosophy in China? Eventually, I chose the more challenging options. This contributed to my decision to resign from my research position and restart as a student enrolling in a PhD program in the US with my concentration areas in the philosophy of language and metaphysics, focusing on the issue of the relationship among language, thought, and reality. As I had planned to go back to CASS after receiving my PhD, financial stability and safety were my primary considerations besides the academic excellence of a PhD program. My elder brother was then pursuing his doctorate in biology at Cornell University; to be near to him, I applied to a number of schools that were in the State of New York. In 1989, I received offers of full financial support from the University of Rochester, Columbia University, and SUNY Buffalo. I chose Rochester for its five-year full-financial-aid package and for the safety of the location, without considering whether or how choosing a school or program would bear on securing a philosophy position in

the US as it was not my goal at that time. At Rochester, I was fortunate to have had my dissertation supervised by Richard Feldman, Theodore Sider, and Rolf Eberle: They are not only strong in the philosophy of language and metaphysics but also highly respected for their expertise in epistemology, metaphysics, and logic, respectively; their joint scholarship well fits distinct but closely connected dimensions of the cross-tradition fundamental issue of the relationship among language, thought, and reality. What I learned from them during my PhD-pursuing period, together with what I have learned from Donald Davidson, Adam Morton, Al Martinich, and Kwong-loi Shun through certain outside projects around and after that period, has provided me with an indispensable theoretic preparation (besides those Chinese resources explored in China) for my way of treating resources in Chinese philosophy, Western philosophy, and comparative philosophy in my subsequent scholarly work.

II

Perhaps, in my case, what most distinguishes my identity as a philosopher of Asian descent lies in my cross-tradition philosophical work in the past two decades since I joined the philosophy faculty at SJSU (with my AOS in the philosophy of language and my background in Chinese philosophy) in 2000, exploring how distinct resources from different philosophical traditions (say, Chinese and Western traditions) can talk to, learn from, and engage with one another, and thus jointly contribute to the contemporary development of philosophy and society. What distinguishes my work in this creatively engaging area is my endeavor to contribute to one strategic goal and methodological strategy in cross-tradition engagement in philosophy. Generally speaking, this approach can be characterized as follows: It is to inquire into how, by way of reflective criticism (including self-criticism) and argumentation and with the guidance of adequate methodological guiding principles, distinct approaches from different philosophical traditions (whether distinguished culturally or by style/orientation) can talk to and learn from one another and jointly contribute to the development of philosophy and of contemporary society on a range of issues of philosophical significance, which can be jointly concerned and approached through appropriate philosophical interpretation and from a broader philosophical vantage point. The foregoing strategic goal and methodological strategy might as well be called “the constructive-engagement strategy of cross-tradition engagement in philosophy” (henceforth, “the constructive-engagement strategy”).⁵

This endeavor is a closely related two-track story. One track is my role in a range of international collective constructive-engagement projects, which I have initiated and coordinated in the past two decades. First, as a contributing editor, I have initiated and coordinated several multiple-year constructive-engagement anthology projects during this period. These include the anthology project “Chinese and Analytic Philosophical Traditions: Two Roads to Wisdom?” (1999–2001 with its end result⁶), the anthology project “Comparative Approaches to Chinese Philosophy” (2002–2003 with its end result⁷), the conference-anthology project “Davidson’s Philosophy and Chinese Philosophy: Constructive Engagement” (2002–2006 with its end result⁸),

the conference-anthology project “Searle’s Philosophy and Chinese Philosophy: Constructive Engagement” (2004–2008 with its end result⁹), the reference-book project “History of Chinese Philosophy: A Constructive-Engagement Approach” (2004–2009 with its end result¹⁰), the conference-anthology project “Constructive Engagement of Analytic and Continental Approaches in Philosophy: From the Vantage Point of Comparative Philosophy” (co-coordinated with Richard Tieszen, 2010–2013, with its end result¹¹), and the conference-anthology project “Philosophy of Language, Chinese Language, Chinese Philosophy: Constructive Engagement” (2006–2018 with its end result¹²). Second, I was part of the international association project for the International Society for Comparative Studies of Chinese and Western Philosophy (ISCWP) with its explicit emphasis on the constructive engagement between Chinese philosophy and Western philosophy, which was established in 2002 and for which I served as the founding president. Third, I was part of the peer-reviewed, open-access international journal project for *Comparative Philosophy* (www.comparativephilosophy.org) with its emphasis highlighted by its subtitle *An International Journal of Constructive Engagement of Distinct Approaches toward World Philosophy*, for which I have been serving as the founding editor-in-chief since the journal made its debut in 2010. Besides the foregoing three sets of international collective constructive-engagement projects, there is one local collective constructive-engagement project, the Center for Comparative Philosophy at San José State University (the first research center that has been established for comparative philosophy in the US with emphasis on the constructive-engagement strategy), for which I served as the founding director (2007–2013). I appreciate the valuable contributions and joint endeavors of all the contributing scholars and colleagues to the foregoing projects as listed in my “Preface and Acknowledgments” in *Cross-Tradition Engagement in Philosophy: A Constructive-Engagement Account* (2020).

The other track is my personal research agenda and scholarly work, which is closely related to the foregoing track. On this track, the prominent work of mine is a triad of three distinct but complementary monographs,¹³ besides my authored reference book¹⁴ and my edited reference book.¹⁵ My most recent monograph, *Cross-Tradition Engagement in Philosophy: A Constructive-Engagement Account* (2020) (henceforth, *CTEP*), is intended to give a relatively systematic theoretic account of the constructive-engagement strategy (together with detailed discussions of a number of representative case studies covering issues in philosophical methodology, metaphysics, epistemology, the philosophy of language, logic, and ethics), which can be viewed as a concluding chapter for me to the aforementioned international collective constructive-engagement projects which I have initiated and coordinated in the past two decades. This monograph is closely related to the previous two monographs of mine, *Substantive Perspectivism: An Essay of Philosophical Concern with Truth* (2009) (henceforth, *SP*) and *Semantic-Truth Approaches in Chinese Philosophy: A Unifying Pluralist Account* (2019) (henceforth, *STACP*). Though each of them is a self-contained book, together they constitute a triad whole at an in-depth level in my own research agenda. *SP* and *STACP* treat the same specific but fundamentally jointly concerned philosophical issue of truth

respectively in view of contemporary Western resources and ancient Chinese resources, which are deeply complementary and unified by the same meta-theoretic account of truth, a unifying pluralist account. *CTEP* marks the completion of this triad. This most recent monograph also marks a momentous accumulating point of my relevant scholarly work in cross-tradition philosophical engagement in the past two decades.

The foregoing two-track endeavor and its results have brought about a sense of scholarly accomplishment relief to me as a philosopher of Asian descent. However, looking forward and facing up to new challenges, I am still on my journey toward the constructive engagement in my academic pursuit and in my *nei-sheng-wai-wang* pursuit, both in a Confucian-Daoist way and in ongoing consultation with all constructive resources from the Asian/Chinese traditions, from my current environment, and from my teachers, scholars, and colleagues here.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to Dr. A. Minh Nguyen, Chair of the APA Committee on Asian and Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies, for his invitation to contribute this piece to the current issue of the committee’s newsletter on the theme.

NOTES

1. Due to limited space, I have removed most content of the part about how some deeper layers of my life (related to my growing-up environment, relevant resources of the Chinese philosophical tradition, and my family background) bear on my way of being a philosopher of Asian descent and the part about my third major restart to be mentioned later in this essay. These contents might be included in a more complete account on the theme in the future.
2. Cf., Wing-tsit Chan 陳榮捷, trans. & comp., *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), 14, 136.
3. It can be literally translated as “sageliness within and kingliness without,” which, in plain language, means that one should strive to become a noble person through inside self-cultivation while actively endeavoring to make outside society and others become better (both in a Confucian way).
4. For an illustration, see Appendix 3, “An Expanded Predicate Logic Account with Enhanced Identity Sign and Collective-Generic Operator,” in Bo Mou, *Cross-Tradition Engagement in Philosophy: A Constructive-Engagement Account* (New York and London: Routledge, 2020).
5. Exactly how to label the foregoing strategic goal and methodological strategy of cross-tradition engagement in doing (comparative) philosophy is relatively unimportant, but it is more inclusive than what is labeled “cross-cultural” philosophy; it is a general engaging way of doing philosophy, instead of being restricted to “cross-cultural” items, as shown by a range of collective constructive-engagement projects in the past two decades to be addressed below.
6. Bo Mou 牟博, ed., *Two Roads to Wisdom? Chinese and Analytic Philosophical Traditions* (Chicago: Open Court, 2001).
7. Bo Mou, ed., *Comparative Approaches to Chinese Philosophy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).
8. Bo Mou, ed., *Davidson’s Philosophy and Chinese Philosophy: Constructive Engagement* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).
9. Bo Mou, ed., *Searle’s Philosophy and Chinese Philosophy: Constructive Engagement* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).
10. Bo Mou, ed., *History of Chinese Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009).
11. Bo Mou and Richard Tieszen, ed., *Constructive Engagement of Analytic and Continental Approaches in Philosophy: From the Vantage Point of Comparative Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

12. Bo Mou, ed., *Philosophy of Language, Chinese Language, Chinese Philosophy: Constructive Engagement* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).
13. Bo Mou, *Substantive Perspectivism: An Essay of Philosophical Concern with Truth* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009); Bo Mou, *Semantic-Truth Approaches in Chinese Philosophy: A Unifying Pluralist Account* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019); Bo Mou, *Cross-Tradition Engagement in Philosophy*.
14. Bo Mou, *Chinese Philosophy A-Z* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009/2010).
15. Bo Mou, ed., *Chinese Philosophy: Critical Concepts in Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018).

The Past, the Present, and the Owl of Minerva

Karen Ng

VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY
KAREN.NG@VANDERBILT.EDU

I was born in Hong Kong and my family immigrated to Toronto, Canada when I was five years old. That moment of transition—saying goodbye to familiar people and places, arriving in a new world feeling both excitement and alienation—formed some of my earliest and most vivid memories. Being an immigrant shaped me profoundly. The experience of being on the outside looking in, of wanting and failing to fit into the dominant culture, and at the same time cherishing a somewhat secret Chinese way of being (a lot of it surrounding food)—all this shaped my interior life and was something I struggled with well into my teens. When I got older and learned more about the colonial history of Hong Kong, I realized that Chinese identity was complicated for almost everyone in my family and everyone my family knew, many of whom emigrated in the '80s and '90s prior to the 1997 handover. As happens in many colonial contexts, the hybridity of Hong Kong is vividly reflected in its language and its food. My broken, colloquial Cantonese is filled with loanwords from English, easily aided by actual English words to supplement my childlike vocabulary. My mother drank Hong Kong-style milk tea every morning (she complained of the weak tea when we moved to Canada, eventually giving it up and switching to coffee) and many weekend brunches were spent in Hong Kong-style diners, where favorites included spaghetti with red sauce and pork chops, instant ramen with spam, egg custard tarts, and French toast. These strange foods are a synecdoche for the complicated sense of Chinese identity that many Hongkongers share, one that remains unresolved in the years since the handover.

As a child, I was offered a simple narrative about why we had to relocate, namely, out of fear of living under the totalitarian rule of communist China (I'll leave aside the question of whether that narrative was overly simple—this is not a historical essay). Much of this was couched in terms of the freedom of education and its absolute rather than merely instrumental importance. To this day, when asked, my parents will claim that they immigrated for the sake of my education. The idea that a scholarly, intellectual life was worth pursuing for its own sake was thus never foreign to

me, and many weekends were spent at the local public library devouring endless piles of books. What is striking to me now about my parents' commitment to education was that it was a function neither of class privilege (they grew up in relative poverty) nor of their own personal experiences with educational institutions (neither went to college). And in contrast to the stereotypes of Chinese "tiger" parenting, my parents were continually and exceedingly supportive of my intellectual interests and educational choices. When I discovered philosophy through a course in high school taught by one of the most spirited teachers I ever had, it felt like a happy coincidence that the ideas and arguments that floated around our dinner table, in my head, in the music I listened to and the books I read, constituted a tradition and a discipline, something that one could study systematically and pursue professionally. With the guidance of my high school philosophy teacher, I read Plato, Nietzsche, and Marx and, unsurprisingly, became enamored with existentialism. On the verge of the anticipated self-reinvention that often comes with the transition to college, the freedom that accompanied the fact that existence preceded essence held an undeniable allure. Later I would conclude that the existentialist conception of freedom was deeply flawed, but at the age of eighteen, there could be nothing worse than falling into the trap of bad faith.

I did my undergraduate degree at the University of Toronto, where, without a good understanding of disciplinary divisions and norms, I started out as a political science major thinking that this was the best way to pursue my burgeoning interest in social and political philosophy. Luckily, I also enrolled in some philosophy classes and quickly discovered that I wanted to spend nearly all my time reading for those courses and reading all the philosophy I could get my hands on. At the time, Toronto had an abundance of used bookstores where my friends and I spent a lot of time and money—at one point I lived next door to my favorite, Balfour Books, which happily remains in business. My studies at U of T were heavy on the history of Western philosophy, and many of my professors placed a strong emphasis on the close reading of philosophical texts. Highlights from this time include classes on Kant and Hegel, reading Schelling in my nineteenth-century philosophy class, a four-person senior seminar on Foucault led by Ian Hacking, and being published twice in the department's undergraduate journal. I graduated as a "specialist" in philosophy (basically, a super major with more philosophy classes) with a minor in women's studies. Although I had planned for many years to apply to law school, I changed my mind and applied to MA programs in philosophy, deciding to attend the University of Essex. Like many new graduates, I was eager to travel and live in new places. I didn't know this at the time, but my graduation from U of T would also mark the end of my time of living permanently in Canada. After completing my MA, I moved to New York and eventually completed my PhD at the New School for Social Research.

Of course, I had not failed to notice that in stark contrast to nearly all the spaces I knew growing up in Toronto, often cited to be the most diverse city in the world, philosophy as a discipline was overwhelmingly white. And unsurprisingly, in nearly all my classes there were more men than

women, and the men talked more and with a confidence that at the time I hardly ever questioned. I was extremely nervous about speaking up in class well into my graduate studies. Complicating matters, I ended up specializing in nineteenth-century philosophy and Frankfurt School critical theory, writing a dissertation, and eventually a book, on Hegel, a towering symbol of Eurocentrism if there ever was one. The irony is not lost on me that Hegel considers the Chinese to be not “properly” historical, claiming that we lack the inwardness characteristic of subjective freedom and have no inherent moral consciousness, not to mention an unsophisticated language that is poorly suited for the development of philosophy and the sciences.

Hegel’s comments notwithstanding (no one can be right about everything), I feel unbelievably lucky that I was able to make philosophy my profession. Securing a job after graduate school felt like a miracle and the dysfunctions of the academic job market, alongside the wider dysfunctions of higher education in this country more broadly, are at this point widely documented. I think there is evidence for both optimism and pessimism regarding philosophy as a profession, although the COVID-19 crisis that hit after I had been invited to contribute this piece undoubtedly brings further uncertainty and extreme cause for concern. On the side of optimism, the discipline appears to be increasingly committed to efforts of diversifying philosophy in a wide range of senses, whether this concerns the canon, previously neglected philosophical subdisciplines, pluralizing philosophical methods, the demographics of students and faculty, or expanding the reach of philosophy outside the academy into the broader concerns and debates of the public sphere. The institutionalization of these various efforts is surely a mark of progress, and I am hopeful that these efforts will have transformative effects on the discipline as a whole. More anecdotally, the recent cohorts of graduate students in my own department have happily created some of the most diverse philosophical contexts that I have ever been a part of.

Less optimistically, and even before the pandemic, many broader trends (again, well documented) have signaled that the current system of academic labor is highly dysfunctional. The floundering academic job market (aptly described in a recent article as operating more like a lottery than a market), the adjunct labor crisis and the opposition to faculty and graduate student unions at private universities, broad cuts to higher education, the pressure on departments and faculty to conduct affairs and research on the basis of inflexible metrics, and the high-stress culture of publish or perish—all of these widely reported trends have negatively impacted the lives of faculty and graduate students, making it difficult to be optimistic about the future of academic philosophy and academia more broadly. One of the most difficult aspects of my job is advising graduate students concerning the job market, because it brings about acute feelings of cognitive dissonance. If Hegel is right that the owl of Minerva flies at dusk, when a shape of life has grown old, then philosophy might be better at helping us to understand our present crisis than offering clear solutions for the future. I’m not sure if Hegel is right, but I have no solutions here—at least none that will not sound naïve or utopian. On the other

hand, so-called realism about the current state of affairs is often reactionary, a sign of fear, self-deception, and complacency, a refusal to see reality for what it truly is.

If being an immigrant was the most important defining feature of my childhood, then being a philosopher, or doing philosophy, is surely what shaped my entry into adulthood, to the extent that I have entered it. The uncertainty of what counts as adulthood presently is likely due to the uncertainty surrounding the institutions that were traditionally the hallmarks of adulthood, including work, property, family, and marriage. Rather than struggling against my immigrant status as I did in my childhood, I now cherish this way of relating to myself and the world. I am now almost the same age as my parents were when they moved to Canada, and I often try to imagine my way into what that experience was like for them, moving to an unknown place with a young child, adjusting to a foreign language, searching for work and a new community. Abandoning my earlier commitment to the existentialist conception of freedom, I have come to think that Hegel’s conception is likely the best one philosophy has on offer. Freedom as being at home with oneself in one’s other suggests that a certain sense of alienation is essential to the achievement of genuine freedom. This might be an odd way in which my experience as an immigrant joins with my experience as a philosopher, but I often find myself returning to this conception to help untangle our difficult, often dark present.

Ambiguity, Alienation, and Authenticity

Anthony Nguyen

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
ANTHONY.NGUYEN.1@USC.EDU

1. WHO AM I?

“You’re not Vietnamese. You’re American.” My dad said this to me when I was in high school.

I grew up in Saint Petersburg, Florida. So, home for me is approximately 9,760 miles away from Tân Hiệp—a rural district in Vietnam’s Kiên Giang Province—where my dad grew up. As a child, I watched *Bugs Bunny*, *Powerpuff Girls*, and *Courage the Cowardly Dog*. I ate hotdogs on the Fourth of July. I pledged allegiance to the flag of the United States of America every morning in school. I did not have the childhood of my father.

My uncle recently joked to me that I am American Vietnamese. Vietnamese first. American second. The joke’s content betrays the value, in my family, in being Vietnamese over being American. Its nature as a joke betrays my Americanness.

I was not considered Vietnamese enough to be Vietnamese. But I was often not considered American enough to be American. I was always singled out in school for my Asianness. Because of my difference, I was bullied in middle school. It is worth emphasizing that attention was distinctly given to my Asianness, not my Vietnamese-ness. Particularity gave in to generality and stereotype. Within my

family, Vietnamese identity was salient and distinguished from other Asian identities. But outside of it, much of Asia was, and is, lumped together by many non-Asians. From this perspective, distinctions among people of Asian descent are erased. Hence the familiar joke that all Asians look alike.

When I was seven or eight, my uncle—the same one who recently joked that I am American Vietnamese—was driving me home. We briefly stopped at a red light when a middle-aged, white man and his family drove up next to us, just to our left. With unmistakable contempt, he asked my uncle, “You’re not from around here, are you?” I forget what my uncle said in reply. He had been living in America for more than a decade at this point. America had become his home. The white man continued, “Go back to where you came from!” before speeding off at the green light. I shared my uncle’s feelings of anger and powerlessness.

“Asian American” sounds like an oxymoron for many. But that is what I am. The phenomenology of this existence is at times ambiguous. I have to often ask of myself: How much should I act “like an Asian” now? How much “like an American”? How do those around me perceive me?¹ What is my cultural identity, really? I am, to some extent, alien to both my ancestors and my fellow citizens. As a child, I often felt that no culture I identified with could make room for me. As Gary Mar puts it, the “experience growing up with ‘a childhood among ghosts’ was distinctively Asian American.”²

The only way forward is to make peace with my identity, to embrace the authenticity within my difference. For me, being a second-generation Vietnamese American and Asian American is to pick and choose under uncertainty. It is both freedom and paralysis. I am still learning what my Vietnamese American and Asian American identities mean to me, and for me, today.

2. RACISM

Identity, however, underlines difference, which often becomes fuel for bigotry. In today’s era of the coronavirus pandemic, we are all witnessing the otherness of Asians and Asian Americans in broad daylight. Donald Trump has called the coronavirus “the Chinese Virus.”³ A White House official has called the disease scientifically known as COVID-19 “the Kung Flu.”⁴ Stop AAPI Hate, run by the Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council, received 1,843 reports of anti-Asian discrimination related to coronavirus between March 19 and May 13 this year.⁵

Prejudicial acts against Asian Americans have been violent. In February, a sixteen-year-old Asian American boy was beaten by bullies at his high school. He was sent to the emergency room. His attackers targeted him because he was Asian American and thus, in their eyes, a likely carrier of the coronavirus.⁶ In March, three members of an Asian American family in Midland, Texas, were stabbed. One victim was two years old. Another was six years old. The culprit attacked them explicitly “because he thought the family was Chinese and infecting people with the coronavirus.”⁷ The victims are not actually Chinese. They’re Burmese.⁸

Despite the fact that Asian Americans are often viewed as a “model minority” (which is itself problematic), we will not achieve equality for ourselves until racism is extinguished altogether in the United States. Not only would it be wrong for Asian Americans to want to share, alongside white Americans, a position of racial domination, we will never be treated justly so long as American racism—distinctively white supremacist in nature—exists. Both morality and self-interest thus compel us to support anti-racist work such as that of Black Lives Matter, which has recently garnered national attention.

In the era of the coronavirus, I am made acutely aware of my Asian body. In pre-mask times, one man looked disgusted at me and covered his mouth with his shirt as he quickly walked past me. Another time, a woman walking in my direction bitterly said something about how I better not give her the coronavirus. She spoke just loudly enough for me to hear. Although both events were uncomfortable, they could have been dangerously worse. *A two-year-old baby in Texas was stabbed for looking Asian.*

This is why I cannot accept Andrew Yang’s response to the blatant anti-Asian racism that has become more prominent in light of the COVID-19 pandemic:

We Asian Americans need to embrace and show our American-ness in ways we never have before. . . . We should show without a shadow of a doubt that we are Americans who will do our part for our country in this time of need. Demonstrate that we are part of the solution. We are not the virus, but we can be part of the cure.⁹

Here, Yang claims that it is on Asian Americans to show that we are Americans. This is false. It is on everyone else to recognize the Americanness of Asian Americans. Our status as Americans is not something we must do more to deserve. It is tautologous that all Asian Americans are American. If we acquiesce to anti-Asian xenophobia by accepting that our Americanness is something we must earn, we will have lost our way. Morality, dignity, and basic logic suggest a better path.

3. PHILOSOPHY

Given anti-Asian racism, what does being an Asian American philosopher mean to me? I first developed an interest in philosophy in high school when I was questioning the Catholicism and (implicit) moral realism that I had been raised in. After reading J. L. Mackie’s *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, which I enjoyed, I wanted to take philosophy classes in college. I started off at Florida State University. It is there that I became interested in pursuing academic philosophy. I soon transferred to Reed College to finish up my undergraduate studies. I transferred because I wanted the liberal arts college experience that Reed promised. Moreover, I knew that Reed was effective at sending their philosophy majors to top graduate programs in philosophy. (I thank the heavens up above that knowledge is factive.) I happily ended up at the University of Southern California, where I am pursuing my PhD.

I am sometimes unsure what effects my being Asian American has had. I suspect many people's belief that I am a technical philosopher has something to do with my being of Asian descent. I am myself surprised when other graduate students I've only recently met tell me that they see me as a very technical philosopher. But while my work is generally nontechnical in nature, I have discussed and worked on some technical issues in the philosophy of language, metaphysics, and logic. So, I'm unsure what is due to stereotype and what is due to inference from my past behavior.

In any case, even positive stereotypes are unwelcome. As Carole J. Lee notes, "most Asian Americans negatively react to the positive stereotype[s] associated with their group because imposing a stereotype . . . depersonalizes them."¹⁰ Each person of Asian descent is degraded when one of us is seen in that "oriental sort of way."¹¹ No person of Asian descent is, or will be, the nameless, stereotypical caricature of an Asian. Yet, this caricature provides the standard by which we are all measured.

I will also say that there being so few influential analytic philosophers of Asian descent is alienating. In a 2009 *Leiter Reports* poll asking who the most important philosopher of the last two hundred years is, everyone in the top forty was white.¹² The only well-known analytic philosopher of Asian descent that I can think of is Jaegwon Kim. And I've never read him—I don't work in the philosophy of mind. There are not many well-known analytic philosophers of Asian descent around. One can easily study analytic philosophy and never learn about the work of a philosopher of Asian descent.

Only white men are sufficiently represented in the canon of analytic philosophy. Nonetheless, my own sense is that underrepresentation in the discipline today is less acute for philosophers of Asian descent than for philosophers from other marginalized groups. In 2018, the APA reported that 317 out of 4,581 of their members identified themselves as Asian. So, approximately 7 percent of all APA members, in 2018, identified themselves as Asian.¹³ Roughly 6 percent of Americans are Asian Americans. This gives some reason to believe that, in the discipline today, philosophers of Asian descent are at least on track to being fairly represented in the discipline.¹⁴ But I am hesitant to draw this conclusion. Not all APA members are American. Moreover, the data does not guarantee that philosophers of Asian descent are well-represented in positions of power (e.g., tenured positions). Finally, Asian Americans constitute an extremely heterogeneous group. It should be unsurprising if there are differences in how well different groups of Asian Americans are represented in academia, just as there are broader socioeconomic differences among different groups of Asian Americans.¹⁵

In any case, philosophy is still too exclusionary. David Haekwon Kim gives an example showing this quite clearly:

Just think of what a dissertation or tenure committee would say to a philosopher putting forward, say, a Confucian theory of racial shame or a Buddhist critique of the exoticization of

Asian women. Such a philosopher has committed professional *harakiri*.¹⁶

To the exclusion of other topics, there is a deeply Western, Eurocentric focus on what topics are held in high regard in academic philosophy. There is no question that the boundaries of what is considered a "respectable" and "serious" philosophical topic must be broadened. This would require dealing a blow to the "conceptual whiteness" of philosophy.¹⁷ But that is a good thing. Many philosophers of Asian descent may understandably have a special relationship to some Asian philosophy. But insofar as such philosophy is disparaged, many philosophers of Asian descent will have to endure the "derogation of philosophical thought that resonates with their identity."¹⁸ How could this *not* make many students of Asian descent suspect that they do not belong in this discipline?

For my part, I have "played by the rules." I mostly work in traditional areas of analytic philosophy. I do genuinely enjoy thinking about these topics, but this focus is clearly to my professional benefit. Things would be very different for me if I did not work within the confines of analytic philosophy. I doubt that I could have published in influential generalist philosophy journals if my papers were on, say, Vietnamese Confucian ethics as opposed to what my publications were actually on—analytic philosophy of language, metaphysics, and philosophy of biology.

My focus on analytic philosophy is perhaps a consequence of the nonexistence of alternatives at the departments I've studied at. (Florida State University is a slight exception, since they offered a few classes in continental philosophy while I was there. But the canon of continental philosophy is overwhelmingly white as well.) You could say that I do not know how else to do philosophy. No Asian or Asian American philosophy courses were ever offered in any of the departments that I've studied at.¹⁹ I would have definitely at least tried my hand at them if given the option. Maybe I wouldn't have liked it. Maybe I would have. Either way, if Asian and Asian American philosophy had been held in much higher esteem in the West, I am confident that philosophy would have felt more welcoming for a younger version of myself. There are still many philosophers and students of philosophy who would thrive in a more inclusive climate. As a discipline, I believe that we owe them more than what we have given.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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NOTES

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My Philosophy Journey to the West

Ann A. Pang-White

UNIVERSITY OF SCRANTON
ANN.PANG-WHITE@SCRANTON.EDU

Philosophizing is a journey. In my case, I have traveled from the East to the West and back again. I hope that this time, with nutrients from both roots, I have journeyed more maturely.

I grew up in a small town on the west coast of Taiwan during 1960s–1980s when Taiwan was still under martial law. My childhood and early adulthood life was austere but stable, at times intense, when the political conflict between mainland China (People's Republic of China) and Taiwan (Republic of China) became heightened. My budding interest in philosophy was kindled by courses in intellectual history taught by amazing teachers in middle and high schools. They opened my eyes to the deeper contents of human history—the ideas, conflicts, planned or unplanned undercurrents that drove historical changes. I ended up with a philosophy major in college, despite the fact that my parents—like most Taiwanese parents—preferred that I chose a different major that would give me better job prospects than philosophy. They were loving parents, however, and were supportive of my decision once I made up my mind.

I was a rebellious child by Taiwanese standards. In high school, to my parents' dismay, I worked in a factory to earn some extra spending money so that I could travel with friends. In college, behind my parents' back, I secretly purchased a small motorcycle. I studied hard but also partied hard—a model student in academic excellence but also a rebel in resisting social norms. After graduation from college, much to the disappointment of many of my professors, instead of going to a philosophy graduate program, I took a three-year break from academics and went into the workforce. The work experience in the factories and companies taught me valuable lessons about the predicament that many blue-collar workers face, the socioeconomic conditions that often privileged the wealthy, the importance of empathy, and the value of the mind. These were lessons that couldn't be learned in the confines of the academic environment.

My first deep conversion experience did not take place until a motorcycle accident that happened in my senior year in college. Riding the secret motorcycle that I intentionally hid from my parents, I was hit by a car one night after leaving a friend's house. Not able to move my body or hear or feel anything for an extended period, my mind, in bleak darkness, watched over me. In that surreal moment in between consciousness and unconsciousness, life and death, many thoughts—surprisingly—rushed to the mind that was at a loss. All regrets flooded in, in tandem.

"Who would notify my parents of my death?"

"Dying on the street on a motorcycle that I hid from them. What a scandal it would be!"

“The secrecy of the motorcycle . . . I should not have hidden the fact from them . . .”

“What a sorrow my death is going to cause them though my relationship with them has been strained!”

“What about my annoying siblings? I will never have the opportunity to tell them that I love them even though we’ve just fought.”

“What about my friends?”

“In a few months I will graduate, but there are unfinished projects, and now they will never get finished.”

It was an existential moment, an awakening, that taught me the fragility of life in the most personal and vivid way—no one is invincible. We all should strive to live out the fullness of our lives mindfully in the here and now. It is a blessed life if, when death comes, we can leave the world without regrets.

After this personal ordeal, in 1987, a year after my graduation from college, Taiwan ended its martial law enforcement (1949–1987) that had governed the country for almost four decades, the longest imposition of martial law by a government at the time. It was an overwhelming time for the Taiwanese—a complex feeling mixed with both joy and anxiety. The number of newspapers, television and radio stations, civic organizations, protests, etc. mushroomed a hundredfold. A newspaper that typically had six pages per issue grew to fifty pages. Buses had to take alternative routes because the roads were blocked by protesters that had been cooped up for four decades. Freedom is so precious, but we had to learn how to exercise it and how to live in an open society caringly and responsibly. It was not an easy path.

After working for three years in the factories and companies, in 1989 (the year when the student-led Tiananmen Square protests broke out in Beijing, China), I came to the US to pursue a master’s degree in philosophy at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, South Carolina, and later a doctorate degree in philosophy at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. These international experiences not only ignited my interest in exploring how the East and the West have distinctly diverging interpretations of what freedom is but also revealed to me how cultures engage philosophy differently.

When I studied philosophy at Tunghai University in Taiwan, all students were required to take courses in history of philosophy from both Eastern and Western traditions. Philosophy majors were expected to demonstrate competence in both areas, not only when they were taking the courses but also in their graduation subject tests in their senior year. In the US, there are typically no senior graduation subject tests in undergraduate philosophy programs that grant bachelor’s degrees in philosophy. Nor is basic competency in both Western and non-Western philosophies normally a requirement for a bachelor’s, master’s, or doctorate’s degree in philosophy.

I came to the US to study philosophy for an advanced degree because I felt that Chinese philosophy could benefit from the analytical method for clarity of concepts and argumentative style. I soon discovered, however, that philosophy in the US academy had a jarred preference for doing philosophy analytically, predominantly with arguments constructed by pure logic in abstraction. Because of such preference, other modes of philosophizing—by means of literature, metaphor, analogy, symbolism, or sentiment, for instance—were relegated to secondary importance or even regarded as non-philosophical. Asian philosophy with its embedded poetic sense, its love of paradox, its non-dualist logic that rejects the absolute demarcation of subject and object, among other factors, became a primary candidate for such devaluation. I was astounded by this fact. Nonetheless, I awfully and painfully bought into this all-pervading, prejudicial, analytic mode of philosophizing in my early academic career in the US. In 1997, I was hired by the Philosophy Department at the University of Scranton for a tenure-track assistant professor position for my specialization in Western medieval philosophy and my competence in Chinese philosophy. The first time I taught a Chinese philosophy course, I broke down in tears in private multiple times throughout the semester. It was a complex emotion. I felt that I failed to convey the splendor of Chinese philosophy to students because I did not know how to teach the materials analytically. I also began to doubt whether Chinese philosophy was philosophy because it did not fit the standard Western conception of what philosophy is. It took me years to be at peace with how Chinese tradition engages philosophy in its own unique and valuable way and to feel proud of what Chinese tradition can contribute to contemporary philosophical debates on the good life, virtue, political theories, environmental ethics, and many other subjects. There is no need for Chinese philosophy to fit the standard Western conception of philosophy. Mathematical reasoning, analytical method, and analytical philosophy have their use and validity, but when they become hegemonic, they become barren.

In 2020, twenty-some years after I first started my academic career, this decisive preference for analytical tradition and method in the academy has not changed. This exclusivist perspective of what counts and what does not count as philosophy, coupled with the structure and content of the philosophy curriculum from undergraduate program to graduate program, is still all-pervading—it limits the student’s perspective of the world and fabricates a reality that is partial and incomplete. In my expanded list of readings and interests, I began to see that such an exclusionary mentality divides and prioritizes not just certain cultures, but also certain races, sexualities, and genders. Simone de Beauvoir’s painstaking analysis of the notion of duality regarding how relative opposites are absolutized into the eternal superior rational *self* and the eternal inferior irrational *other*—a means to denigrate women—is equally relevant here in our analysis of the relationship between culture and race, and of the conceptualization of what counts and what does not count as philosophy.¹ Bryan W. Van Norden’s blunt critique of the long history of philosophical ethnocentrism in American-European universities and his passionate call for a more inclusive global curriculum may annoy some

people. Nonetheless, these provocative statements are prompts for deeper reflection on the future of philosophy and, more importantly, on what kinds of person we want our students to become and what kind of world we want to pass down to future generations.²

Looking forward, if we take a look at the hard numbers, faculty of color, women faculty, and women faculty of color in philosophy departments across the US are disproportionately underrepresented. The numbers for these categories are not only the lowest in the humanities but also even lower than those in the natural sciences.³ I am among the few lucky ones. Although it is difficult to align effects with their causes, one does wonder what makes philosophy historically a discipline so predominantly occupied by a select group of a particular race and sex. Referring back to my earlier point, is it possible that how philosophy has been traditionally defined contributes to this embarrassing disparity? Rather than narrowing philosophy, shouldn't we be widening it—welcoming as many inquirers and interlocutors as possible in the pursuit of truth and goodness? After all, isn't this the very nature and purpose of philosophical inquiry? Hegemony is unphilosophical. Homogeneity is the death of philosophy. When asked what challenges I see in the future of philosophy, I hope that philosophy, which prizes itself as a discipline of reason, will become more inclusive and steer away from the dogmatism that undermines the spirit of philosophy.

Always interested in comparative philosophy since my college years, I took a detour to medieval philosophy and analytical philosophy, writing a master thesis on Aquinas's Third Way with first-order symbolic logic supplemented by modal logic and later a dissertation on Augustinian ethics. I am now finally coming home to the field of cross-cultural comparative philosophy and have taken an interest in the less traveled paths of philosophy of women in Chinese tradition and comparative philosophy on women. I find great enjoyment in conducting research, delivering talks, and teaching on subjects that I think will make a difference in students' lives, in the community, and in the greater academic circles. I am grateful for where life has taken me and the good luck that affords the kind of work that I do at a Jesuit university that places great emphasis on the humanities and is genuinely eager to create a socially and globally engaged curriculum for our students as an embodiment that enlivens its faith-informed vision. Nevertheless, just like many other universities in the US evidenced by the data published by the National Center for Education Statistics,⁴ philosophy curriculum and its faculty constitution still have room for growth for it to become an exemplary model for other programs. As a tenured full professor of philosophy, I am fully aware of my privilege of being able to speak more freely, in comparison with untenured faculty or faculty who have yet to advance to the full professor rank, and my responsibility to use that privileged voice at the right moments. Nevertheless, am I so free that I can just speak without repercussions or concerns of being ostracized, shunned, or ridiculed? Probably not. For woman philosophers of Asian descent, there is not just one glass ceiling. There are multiple glass ceilings. "Am I the other?" I ask myself at times. To some extent, the answer is yes, but it is also a moot point, since we all are the others at some point in our life, whether in the past, in the present, or

in the future. The self-other distinction is real, but it is also a relative one. The difference between the wise and the unwise is that the wise recognize such vulnerability and empathize with others. Therefore, the best advice I can give myself and others in similar situations is to act in good faith with a clear conscience and an empathic mind. When such good faith is not reciprocated, just shake the dust off and carry on.

NOTES

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4. See note 3 above.

Doing Philosophy at the Margin

Jin Y. Park

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
JYPARK@AMERICAN.EDU

I sometimes tell myself that I am an expert in being at the margin. I am a woman in a patriarchal society, an Asian in the West-dominated world, doing philosophy in a time when people say that the humanities are dead, and I specialize in Asian philosophy within an academia that is reluctant to accept non-Western philosophical traditions as philosophy. So here I am: an Asian woman in Western academia working on Asian, especially Korean, philosophy.

I am outlining my marginal positions not to complain about them, but as a testimony to the source of my philosophical inspiration. I believe that my experiences as an Asian woman in a Confucian society and then within a white-dominated world had seminal influences on my approach to philosophy, and those experiences have become main philosophemes for my philosophy.

My reading habits in my childhood led me to a number of philosophy books in addition to fictions, essays, and biographies. I don't think I asked myself about the nature of philosophy at that time. I felt most at home when I read existentialism, which was not taught at my university in Korea. I read the existentialist philosophers by myself: Sartre, Camus, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche. My philosophical questions

at the time were mostly existential, dotted with abstract ideas of social revolt. The situation gradually changed.

During my graduate school days, my philosophical reading began to take a rather political turn. While I was getting my first master's degree in Korea, one of my professors said in class that the university didn't hire women. Such an openly discriminatory statement was not illegal at that time, and I don't know how many students in the class felt offended, but I still remember that moment. That was obviously not the only time that I became aware of gender discrimination in the Confucian and patriarchal Korean society. Up to that point, I was partly shielded from the direct impacts of gender discrimination because I was still in the academic setting at an elite university. Once I graduated college, my gender became a visible element for people to judge me and design my future. Having grown up under a military dictatorship and an authoritarian government and having spent my college days with students' demonstrations for democracy being fixtures on campus and the streets, I developed a keen sense of the influence of power structure and violence in our lives. These were some of the constant themes of discussion in my college days. One after another, different forms of marginalization and social oppression began to come together in my thinking. I then left Korea to continue my study in the United States where I encountered another layer of discrimination based on my race.

Korea was a relatively homogeneous society, and my gender was the most visible identity that the society discriminated me against. In the US, I found myself becoming an Asian woman, and I had to deal with that visible identity. In order to understand this new minority position, I began my own research on Korean Americans and their immigration history as well as changes in immigration laws and the model minority theory. I was also fascinated by African American literature via which I felt so painfully the suffering of the marginalized group. Gradually, I found myself reading and doing research to embrace the reality through which I had lived: inequality and social injustice, being a marginalized group in an authoritarian society, a marginalized group in a capitalist society, a marginalized gender in a patriarchal society, and a marginalized race in a society of white supremacy. And the existential reality with which I began my philosophical journey was a part of this discourse of marginality, as I understood myself to be a finite being, yearning to understand the reason for being finite instead of infinite.

More than any other political philosopher, Jacques Derrida's works gave me a tool to use in my efforts to articulate what it means to be at the margin, how to identify the schemes through which marginal life is being created and justified, and how to act and react to such discriminations. The fact that Derrida's philosophy shares similar ideas with the traditional Asian philosophy of Buddhism was one of the major triggers that led me to a cross-cultural philosophy of Buddhism and Derrida's deconstruction. Since the first time I read Derrida's work in graduate school, cross-cultural philosophy became a major component of my philosophical investigation.

It is not a secret that non-Western philosophy, including Asian philosophy, is still in a marginal position in the

academic discipline of philosophy. But I believe that we are becoming increasingly sensitive to the imbalance in the presentation of philosophical traditions in our philosophy curriculum. Recent publications on the imbalance in the philosophy curriculum, including the West-centrism and male dominance in philosophy, demonstrate that a gradual change is occurring in the domain of philosophy.¹

At a number of US college campuses, the idea of diversity and inclusion has been a mantra of the twenty-first century. Despite the buzz, it is often not clear how that goal of diversity and inclusion would be actualized in real life. In the meantime, Asians and Asian Americans suffer from a double-minority position. Asians are obviously a minority in American society, but when it comes to "diversity and inclusion," universities often say that their priority is to focus on "underrepresented" minorities. The model minority theory still hovers over Asian Americans and is being used to avoid giving needed attention to Asian Americans on the university campuses. Of the full-time faculty in degree-granting postsecondary institutions in the US, Asian and Pacific Islander females constitute only 4 percent, compared to 35 percent white females. Among those with the rank of full professor, Asian and Pacific Islander females constitute only 3 percent.² Marginalization and the practice of exclusion also have impacts on the reception of our scholarship.

The research of Eric Schwitzgebel, a professor of philosophy at the University of California at Riverside, on the citation rate of women and ethnic minorities in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* yielded a revealing demonstration about the impact of ethnicity and gender on the reception and value of our scholarship. Schwitzgebel reports his findings as follows: Among the top fifty most-cited contemporary (born in 1900 and after) authors, females consist of only 2 percent, and minorities comprise 0 percent; among the top one hundred most-cited contemporary authors, 7 percent are female, and 1 percent are minorities. And among the top 267 most-cited contemporary authors, 10 percent are female, and 3 percent are minorities.³ Schwitzgebel concludes that "[a]t the highest levels of visibility in contemporary mainstream Anglophone analytic philosophy (as measured by citation in the discipline's leading reference source), men vastly outnumber women, and ethnic minorities are virtually absent." I am not claiming here that the quality of one's scholarship is decided only by one's ethnicity or gender. But it is also true that evaluation of our scholarship is not free from the discrimination our society practices, and being a philosopher of Asian descent means that we do our scholarship despite having such a marginalized position. In this context, such a reality becomes part of our philosophical agenda.

I believe that it is essential for the future of the discipline of philosophy that we broaden the scope of our curriculum and expand our scholarship beyond the mainstream philosophies. When I teach general philosophy courses like Moral Philosophy, I incorporate Asian materials to discuss Buddhist ethics, Confucian ethics, or Daoist positions on morality. Comparing the Buddhist, Confucian, or Daoist positions on ethics with the more conventional moral

theories of Aristotle, Kant, or Mill offers students a broader spectrum of what it means to lead a good life, how different cultures and philosophical traditions approach ethics from different stances, and what options they have when they engage in moral deliberations.

As Asian-descendent faculty members struggle to earn proper attention for their positions in academia, Asian American students feel frustrated, not seeing a venue to raise their voices and courses that represent their own experiences. As a faculty member of Asian descent, I believe that it is our responsibility to open a path for these young Asian Americans to raise their voices and learn about topics that reflect their life experiences as much as philosophy that locates them at the center. To do so also means not exclusively singling out Asian Americans from the other marginalized groups and their experiences. Instead, Asian and Asian American philosophers should be able to place the marginal position of Asians in a broader spectrum of marginalized groups in diverse contexts. Everybody must in some way be in a marginal position if we consider the multiple subjectivities through which we live our lives. But we tend to suppress our marginal positions and reveal our central position only, and, by doing so, foreclose our capacity to understand others as well as ourselves.

I tell my graduate students that by the time they become professors, “philosophy” should not mean just Western philosophy, and an introduction to philosophy won’t be filled with Western white males’ philosophy. I also encourage them to cover some of the non-Western philosophers in their Introduction to Philosophy classes, even though non-Western philosophy might not be a field in which they have expertise. Most of the students receive this advice with a positive perspective, which I believe is progress in itself.

To me, to be a philosopher of Asian descent means that I am thoroughly sensitive to the power structure that is at the core of our philosophizing and the discipline of philosophy. It also means that I base my philosophy on the lived experiences of myself and many others who have experienced discrimination and marginalization of different kinds and at different levels. My life experiences also define the nature of what philosophy I wish to do and believe I am doing. In Buddhist philosophy, there is a teaching that, if one sees the world with the Buddha’s eyes, there is nothing that is not a Buddha. If one sees it with the unenlightened being’s eyes, everything just looks like mundane reality. Seeing things as a Buddha means that each and every event in life can be the revelation and experience of truth; and the experience of truth is not limited to a specific gender or race. This is one of the reasons that I categorically oppose the claim that philosophy is a search for the universal truth and that the contexts of doing philosophy can be put in parentheses or do not matter. Truth might be universal, but when the truth happens in an individual’s life and lived events, it happens in context, and the individual understands truth in that specific context. The capacity to link the dots to understand the broader implication of the truth that individuals experience in a singular event is the path to universal truth, not the other way around.

The French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty made a statement similar to the Buddhist claim I mentioned above when he said, “Philosophy’s center is nowhere and its circumference nowhere.”⁴ Everyday events in life can be a philosophical topic for us to think about life and the world, and being a philosopher of Asian descent, for me, means that I am keenly aware of the connections between our lived experiences and our philosophizing.

The othering of others has been one of the perennial schemes of marginalization and its justification. The subject is the subject only to the subject, and the subject is the object to other subjects. Others are others from the subject’s perspective, but the subject is the other from that other’s position. At a time of pandemic, hate crimes against Asians and Asian Americans are increasing; women, as the first caregivers at home, must be having an especially hard time in this “stay-at-home” reality. How a philosopher of Asian descent connects with such reality in their philosophizing will be what makes them unique as much as what makes them a part of philosophy in general.

NOTES

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3. Eric Schwitzgebel, “Citation of Women and Ethnic Minorities in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,” *The Splintered Mind* (blog), August 7, 2014, accessed April 14, 2020, <http://schwitsplinters.blogspot.com/2014/08/citation-of-women-and-ethnic-minorities.html>.
4. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Partout et Nulle Part,” in *Signes* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1960), 207; English translation, *Signs*, translated by Richard C. McCleary (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1961), 124.

My Journey Across the Pacific

Yuriko Saito

RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN
YSAITO@RISD.EDU

I became hooked on philosophy when I read Descartes’s *Discourse on Method* as an undergraduate in my home country, Japan. I still remember the thrilling intellectual adventure of doubting everything. I was never able to unhook myself from philosophizing and this passion led me to pursue graduate work in the United States at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

Three things from my graduate studies stand out in memory. First is the sheer intensity of philosophical reading and writing, both in quantity and in quality. Although I had become fairly proficient in English by then, I was utterly overwhelmed by tackling Hegel and Leibniz, among others, during the first semester. I don't remember how I survived the proverbial "baptism by fire."

Another experience still vivid today is my first encounter with the visual images of European formal gardens in the course on nature aesthetics. I now realize that it reveals my ignorance more than anything else, but I remember the shock of seeing those gardens that are so different from Japanese gardens, the only gardens I was familiar with. However, I experienced an even bigger shock when my subsequent research indicated that those formal gardens were regarded as representing nature by the seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century European thinkers. How could such artificial-looking gardens represent nature? This puzzle was one of the reasons that led me to write my doctoral dissertation on the aesthetic appreciation of nature. Today nature aesthetics and environmental aesthetics are well-established, but back then aesthetics discourse was art-centric, which made my research both challenging and exciting. In addition, it was before the ubiquity of the computer and internet, so the research required going through the library card catalogue and I wrote my dissertation on a typewriter, making revisions a true nightmare, particularly when adding or deleting endnotes!

The final indelible memory from my graduate studies is feeling dismayed at the generally positive interpretation of "self-respect," one of the subject matters in an ethics seminar that focused on various emotions, such as sympathy and envy. The Japanese equivalent, *jison* 自尊, has a rather negative connotation, more like pride or self-aggrandizement. It is much later that I came to realize that my bewilderment deserved an opportunity for a comparative study in ethics.

For more than thirty-five years, my academic home was the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) until I retired in 2018. Although a certain number of credits in liberal arts is required for a BFA, all RISD students major in art or design; hence, there is no philosophy major or department. It was challenging to teach students who neither had a background in philosophy nor would pursue it, and at times I missed the opportunity to teach an advanced philosophy seminar. However, I soon realized that this challenge was also an opportunity to develop teaching strategies to reach visually oriented, creative students. Specifically, I used many examples, both the slides and actual objects, as a springboard for developing a theoretical discussion. In addition, by necessity, I had to explain philosophical ideas in a non-technical, accessible manner. This way of teaching had a significant impact on my own work. In presenting my ideas, whether orally or in writing, I always tried to make the content comprehensible to the general audience through various examples and jargon-free explanations.

Teaching at RISD also shaped the content of the courses. Being the only Asian instructor in the liberal arts division

at that time, I took it upon myself to expose RISD students, predominantly Western until about fifteen years ago, to Asian ways of thinking, by drawing from Confucianism, Taoism, Zen Buddhism, as well as Japanese aesthetics. I included these philosophies and cultural traditions in every course. I also offered a course in Japanese aesthetics every year, which became very popular with a long waiting list. It was exciting to see the students' horizons expand with various examples and readings that were unfamiliar to them.

However, I made sure that they did not develop a dreamy-eyed appreciation of everything Japanese, which is easy to do particularly with Japanese arts, by also addressing some sober and politically problematic implications of Japanese aesthetics. For example, when discussing the long-celebrated ephemeral beauty of falling cherry blossoms expressed in various classical literature, we also read parts from Emiko Ohnuki-Tierty's *Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalisms: The Militarization of Aesthetics in Japanese History* (University of Chicago Press, 2002). When lecturing on the Japanese landscape aesthetics, I included *The Theory of Japanese Landscape* (日本風景論, 1894) by Shigetaka Shiga (志賀重昂), a geologist and an ultranationalist, who argued for the superiority of Japanese landscape in comparison with that of the rest of the world. Very popular at the time, his theory fueled the nationalistic sentiment during the Sino-Japanese War, paving the way for the Russo-Japanese War and eventually World War II.

As aesthetics was my main field, teaching RISD students was a true privilege, as they had given me constant intellectual nourishment particularly through their studio work. The dissertation on nature aesthetics was my first foray into a heretofore unexplored area in the mainstream art-centric aesthetics discourse. Interacting with RISD students, half of whom are design majors, opened further areas of aesthetic inquiry. I was repeatedly awestruck by design professions that address so many factors: functionality, safety, cost, sustainability, and aesthetics through much theoretical thinking as well as experimentation. I developed a respect for various artifacts and structures that make up our everyday environment and normally do not garner much attention. Above all, I learned that the design of artifacts and built environments has an immense power to affect the quality of life and the state of the world, for better or worse.

What I learned about design led me to think about the role of aesthetics in our everyday life. I was able to develop my thoughts in a series of presentations, articles, and two books published by Oxford University Press (*Everyday Aesthetics*, 2007; *Aesthetics of the Familiar: Everyday Life and World-Making*, 2017). In addition to exploring this heretofore neglected area in the Anglo-American art-centric aesthetics, I incorporated my thinking on Japanese aesthetics derived not only from formal research but also from my own experience of living in Japan. My purpose was not so much to introduce Japanese aesthetics per se, but rather to use it as an example of how everyday aesthetic concerns can be addressed. For example, I argue that moral virtues such as care and respect for the other, whether persons or objects, can be expressed aesthetically and illustrate this point by various artistic practices, designed

objects, and daily affairs in Japan. The point of doing so is to demonstrate a general point that moral virtues are integrated into the aesthetic dimensions of people's daily lives, despite cultural and social differences in specific manifestations.

I also examine the Zen training of transcending self in experiencing the world, which is primarily exemplified in the training for Japanese traditional arts. I have come to appreciate the bewilderment I felt over the notion of self-respect in that graduate seminar by realizing that my Japanese upbringing ingrained in me the moral and aesthetic importance of minimizing self in respecting the other. We are encouraged to listen to the voice of the other, whether human or nonhuman, on its own terms, thereby respecting the other's reality and integrity for what it is. At the same time, I am cognizant of a possible negative consequence of this moral stance that encourages denying one's own self and sacrificing one's well-being, not only from my personal experience but also from other people's accounts. Having lived in both Japan and the United States, I recognize the importance of the relationality and interdependence of human existence while maintaining a degree of autonomy of self, a subject much discussed in feminist ethics, care ethics in particular. I am privileged to have two "homes" and appreciate what each has to offer, but at the same time, I cannot deny feeling not fully "at home" in either culture.

However, those of us whose life straddles two cultures are particularly suited to engage in a comparative inquiry, and I would suggest that we have a responsibility to build bridges. I believe that my role in pursuing philosophical aesthetics is not only to introduce Japanese cultural tradition and aesthetics but also, and more importantly for me, to facilitate a fruitful dialogue between Japanese philosophy and Western philosophy by focusing on a common theme, such as the aesthetic expression of moral virtues that I mentioned. Trained in Western philosophy, I took it for granted that there are distinct subdisciplines within philosophy, such as metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics. However, such fundamental framework is subject to questioning when approached from the Japanese perspective. Aesthetics in the Japanese tradition, for example, is not theorized from a spectator's point of view regarding beauty and art, a dominant mode of inquiry in Western aesthetics, but rather is practiced as a way of life not only by professionals but also by the general populace in pursuit of the good life and moral goodness. This is not to judge one framework to be better than the other. Rather, by developing an understanding of a philosophical and cultural framework different from what is most familiar (and, for many of us, what is most familiar in this context is Western philosophy), we can appreciate each worldview's strengths as well as its limitations. Intellectual honesty and integrity demand this effort, particularly from philosophers. Citing Marilyn Frye and María Lugones, Kathleen Higgins promotes "collaborative dialogue" by overcoming the "arrogant perception" that takes one's own position as superior to those championed by members of other groups and instead cultivating "loving perception" through sympathetic and imaginative understanding.¹

Philosophy today has come a long way from when I was a graduate student. At that time, non-Western philosophy, if referenced at all, was regarded more as an exotic curiosity. Multiculturalism, feminism, decolonization, politics of difference, and critiques of white-, male-, and hetero-centric regimes are welcome developments. However, old habits die hard and the Anglo-American philosophical discourse still favors argumentation that encourages competitiveness and combativeness. Of course, argumentation is a necessary tool of philosophizing, but sometimes it is used as an end in itself. Instead, venues such as conferences and journals should be an opportunity for us to think and explore collaboratively. Disagreements and critiquing are obviously indispensable for such projects, but they are necessary because we want to use them as a means of advancing our *thinking together*.

Philosophy still suffers from a perception among the general populace that it is a purely abstract and speculative endeavor with little relevance to people's daily lives. Philosophers are viewed as talking only to other philosophers and I admit that I share this perception. Philosophy in the West started with Socrates walking around the city and engaging Athenians in a dialogue over concepts that permeate their everyday lives. It was not an academic exercise that has significance and relevance only to other academicians. While specialized training is necessary for philosophers, my vision and hope for our discipline is to engage in a discourse that "matters." The work we produce should be the kind that helps the audience members, both philosophers and nonphilosophers, illuminate and critically examine assumptions governing their lives. With the proliferation of open-access publications and the ease of global communication, opportunities abound for philosophers to engage in public discourse. This is an exciting time and teaching can be done beyond the classroom walls. Whatever form it takes, the future of philosophy depends upon being socially engaged in terms of both the content and the format of the discussion. We need to ensure that philosophy does not become a purely academic exercise that is irrelevant to people's lives and social discourse.

NOTES

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The Fluidity of Identity: Moving Toward a Philosophy of Race

Falguni A. Sheth

EMORY UNIVERSITY
FALGUNI.SHETH@EMORY.EDU

Asian identity has never been an easy category to inhabit, except in terms of history, nationalist politics, immigration rules and quotas—"official" categories of public policies and international relations. The fluid contours of identity are inevitably eclipsed when identity becomes reified

in these categorizations. To be a philosopher of Asian descent changes in meaning as context changes. In 2002, to be a philosopher of South Asian descent meant that my focus was on how Muslims were undergoing sudden and extreme persecution under the state. But, as I entered the job market, that research elicited interview questions (at multiple institutions) such as “Can you teach Islamic philosophy?” “Are you Muslim?” The latter question was illegal, but indicative of an academic, intellectual, and even philosophical entitlement, secured through institutional power. Entitlement, I now understand, is the thread that runs through the dynamic between myself, loosely construed as a political philosopher of Asian descent, and mainstream (even progressive) academics who police the gates of philosophy.

Growing up a South Asian immigrant in the lush suburbs of Central Jersey was a dream come true for my father, but a nightmare for me. By the third grade, what I only later understood in graduate school as the racism of a teacher and many classmates left me alienated for the duration of grammar school. During my first year of high school, my family moved closer to New York City so my parents could be closer to the store that they owned and ran. We settled in a working-class town on the Hudson River, majority white Irish and Polish, but with a significant population from Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Portugal, and Puerto Rico. It was liberating to be among other teenagers who looked somewhat similar to me.

Until I graduated from college, I never imagined becoming an academic, let alone a philosopher. I learned quickly that what qualified me as a top student at my public Northern Jersey high school had not translated into the broad education or the solid study skills of my extremely smart peers at the elite West Coast university to which I had fled. I found the readings in my political science and English classes overwhelming and difficult to digest. I had no idea how to write a blue book essay exam; I didn’t even know how to study for one, but I learned, thanks to better-prepared and generous classmates.

But the West Coast was where I began to develop a racial consciousness that counteracted my shame about being an immigrant and “Indian.” I began to realize there that while “Asian” had mostly replaced “Oriental” as a descriptive term, it remained a term of art designating (and often denigrating) a long-standing “Other” against a dominant whiteness and a Black Other. I hadn’t yet learned to think of myself as brown or as a person of color. The latter term seemed bellicose, judging from the graduate students who used the term at UC Berkeley. During that time of radical protests and rent control, the ethnic and racial politics of California seemed full of potential for change and justice. And simultaneously, I began to take a range of fascinating classes in Berkeley’s Rhetoric Department. Through the spectrum of readings, from imperial novels, to Roman law, to modern political theory, suddenly questions that I had about how rights were proven or anchored were being articulated and answers to them were broached. These were not entirely satisfactory answers, but I’d found discourses that showed me how questions about the limits of rights and of inclusion gave form to question of the “we,” and to

the contours of what a political imaginary might look like. One new young faculty member encouraged my writing and thinking during the last two years of college; for the first time, I allowed myself to believe that I might be worthy enough for graduate school.

At that time, I was still considering law school, but realizing that I had no desire to practice. My interest in law was conceptual and intellectual. After some drawn-out considerations and half-starts, I finally traveled back east to enroll in a graduate program in philosophy. I chose the New School Graduate Faculty, in part because it came the closest to offering a liberal arts PhD program.

Beginning that graduate work, I was interested in political, legal, and social philosophy, considered from a range of interdisciplinary perspectives, but I did not have critical perspective linked to my identity as a philosopher of South Asian descent. At the time, the question of identity as a vehicle of philosophical exploration was denigrated by the Marxist and structuralist faculty and hence by a number of my white classmates as well. In retrospect, that was a core moment in what we now think of as the battle over “identity politics,” which was typically derided by both the white, non-feminist left and the right. “Identity politics” was a term of disparagement, used when insisting that there were sounder principles than identity from which to think philosophically. Likewise, designating the camp of identity politics allowed “real” philosophers to police the borders of what constituted “real” philosophy. Race in the US context was not a common category at the time, even though we read texts by Hannah Arendt, Walter Benjamin, and Albert Memmi in relation to the persecution of Jews during the early twentieth century. Race, like identity, was still considered an unsound basis by which to engage in (again) “real” philosophy, even as gender and feminist philosophy had become more commonly accepted bases for social and political philosophy.

And yet, from the beginning of my graduate work, the questions that involuntarily bubbled up often had to do with political and social exclusion; with the limits of the imaginary “we”; and with the role of force as it masqueraded as consent. I did not “discover” the philosophy of race until I was nearly finished with my dissertation, a good decade after I began graduate school.

I’m still not sure I understand what it meant, back then, to be a philosopher of Asian descent, but I do understand what it meant to be a nonwhite student—a brown woman, a student with limited means, and an immigrant. I experienced—I still do experience—having my comportment and questions met with perplexity or suspicion by a number of faculty and classmates. There was a certain sense of entitlement that went hand in hand with being seen as a “serious young scholar”: feeling as if one had the right to take up a professor’s time, to take up space in their office, to ask questions for which one did not have answers. Doing political philosophy, let alone doing the philosophy of race, or studying the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion was not obviously on the side of the “real” or the “serious” then, even before one began to interrogate how one’s experience shaped and was shaped by categories.

I still don't consider myself to be a philosopher of Asian descent. In part, this is because the term "Asian" is primarily associated with those of East and Southeast Asian descent, at least in the US. Still, I appreciate that the term "Asian American" has radical origins, inspired through the 1960s politics and the Black Power Movement, as a way to unite Japanese, Filipino, and Chinese students.¹ If at all, I refer to myself as "South Asian" these days, mostly as a resistance to my parents' generation of defining themselves in nationalist terms. The politics of being "Indian" is implicitly a way to distinguish oneself from being Pakistani. This is a distinction that is still less than one hundred years old and borne through the politics of colonialism and of battling "colonized intellectuals," as Frantz Fanon refers to them.² The colonized intellectuals, or the colonial bourgeoisie, carry on the divisive practices of their British colonial forbearers—so even "South Asian" is more a term of resistance than easy description.

Becoming the sort of philosopher of South Asian descent I am, then, has included reading eclectically as I reconsidered a different approach to identity—or to race and racial divisions. I began to think about what I call a "technology of race," which became the basis of my first book, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2009). When I began writing it, I was concerned about the way that, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Muslims in the US from various ethnic and national backgrounds—Indian, Afghan, Egyptian, Indonesian—were facilely grouped together as a population as if they had been a race. Moreover, the grouping clearly wasn't an innocent error, but part of a narrative of vilification; as if they had been a coherent group who threatened the safety and security of (non-Muslim) Americans. I saw that the positioning was similar to the production of other groups in history who were perceived as threats—Japanese-Americans, Chinese-Americans, and, of course, African Americans, for whom this kind of targeting has been continuous and unceasing.

I was also reading Martin Heidegger's writings on technology³ and Michel Foucault's writings on technique⁴ as I considered that these identities were products of history, social context, and political tensions. So I began to understand race not as a biological or descriptive category, but as a politically fluid and expedient category, which could function semiotically to signal certain social hierarchies. I tried to test the soundness of this approach by researching how particular racial identities were produced by historical and political divisions, and how divided populations were then the attempt to manage through deceptively neutral, liberal procedures such as constitutional frameworks, laws, and public policy. I used the occasion of writing that book to argue that there was a subterranean political ontology that supported certain exclusionary understandings of rights. Liberal rights were not the neutral frameworks of ideal theory; they were regularly deployed to include or exclude certain populations as convenient to secure state power. I researched and studied a wide-ranging set of examples of technologies of racialization and their political and economic contexts. One of the examples that I drew upon was that of Punjabi-Mexicans (or Mexican-Hindus, as they were also called, even as many of the Punjabi men were Sikh or Muslim), a group that emerged through the

constraints of Alien Land Laws, anti-miscegenation laws, and tactical attempts to avoid being the target of the state's wrath for both Mexican women and Punjabi men who had migrated to the western coast of North America. My argument in that book emerged from my attempts to grapple with the complexity of race and ethnic identity and the realization that identity is too complicated to be static or stable.

In the years since the publication of that book, I have continued to explore the way that racial divisions were managed through the vehicle of national security policies, including, for example, the USA PATRIOT Act, various related "safety" measures used to target and harass Muslims. This scholarship, too, is built on the notion that race is a technology used to produce certain kinds of social identity and political outcome.

I have recently completed another book, provisionally titled *The Veil: Dismissal, Excruciation, and the Racial Politics of Neocolonialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming), which deepens these same considerations. There, I approach the production of identity by complex external forces; forces I study with an approach I call "interstitiality." Interstitiality builds on the notion of intersections as described by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, but suggests that we likewise consider the invisible institutions, such as building codes and regulations, that inform the design, history, and background for the (institutional) buildings inhabited by people on city blocks.⁵ These interstices intervene to amalgamate or disarticulate group identities in light of external institutions such as anti-discrimination laws, labor markets, hiring processes, and other public policies. So, for example, I explore the way that Muslim women of color and Black Muslim women who wear the hijab are regulated and disciplined in the US.⁶ These contestations are not visually explosive or spectacular, but rather procedural and orderly. They take place in workplaces and courtrooms, through dress codes and judicial opinions, and allow for actors in liberal judicial and economic contexts to deny that they are engaging in discipline.

While I can't trace a direct trajectory between my racial self-awareness and my work as a philosopher, my attention to the relationship among identity, power, and race has certainly been compelled by the tensions of inhabiting a nonwhite body in the US and informed by a variety of philosophical tools. I continue to be gripped by the complexity of identity and power and their political consequences.

NOTES

1. Caitlin Yoshiko Kandil, "After 50 Years of 'Asian American,' Advocates Say the Term Is 'More Essential Than Ever,'" *NBCnews.com*, May 31, 2018, accessed June 19, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/after-50-years-asian-american-advocates-say-term-more-essential-n875601>.
2. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 44.
3. Martin Heidegger, "Question Concerning Technology," in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).
4. Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-76*, trans. David Macey (New York:

Picador Press, 2003). See especially January 14 and 21 and March 17 lectures.

5. Falguni A. Sheth, "Interstitiality: Making Space for Migration, Diaspora, and Racial Complexity," *Hypatia* 29, no. 1 (Winter 2014): 75–93, especially 80.
6. Falguni A. Sheth, *The Veil: Dismissal, Excruciation, and the Racial Politics of Neocolonialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

“Wogs” and Philosophers

Saam Trivedi

BROOKLYN COLLEGE
TRIVEDI@BROOKLYN.CUNY.EDU

1. EXPERIENCES

Like some philosophers I know, in general I do not enjoy most philosophy conferences very much. There are several reasons for this.

First, it is an open secret that the vast majority of sessions at many philosophy conferences are just not very good, philosophically; I have even heard some very distinguished philosophers say they go to conferences mainly for the locations or to meet old friends. Indeed, it is often more stimulating philosophically to browse through book exhibits, if any, at conferences rather than to attend many of the sessions; and usually more fun to talk with philosophers one-on-one or in small groups. Of course, as many say, conferences are mainly about networking, and that is perhaps a necessary evil one has to indulge in if one is a graduate student or in the early stages of one's profession or trying to promote one's career or work; and speaking of evil, an internationally renowned philosopher once said that there is a stench of evil around some of our biggest conferences.

Second, many conference locations have been described as the cultural backwaters of North America, where cheap hotels seem to be the biggest draw for organizers. For example, I was at a conference in a much vaunted town some years back, and my lasting memory is of sitting in a dive by the hotel, chugging cheap beer, and looking at the Confederate flag.

Third, and perhaps most pertinent to this special issue, racism and xenophobia have not yet been completely eradicated in our society, and philosophers are, for better or worse, not completely immune to social influences. A fair bit has been written in recent years about the sexism and misogyny faced by women in our profession, or the racism that Black philosophers have to deal with. These discussions are all very welcome, of course! But in addition, we must also look at the experiences of members of other marginalized groups such as LGBTQ people, Muslims, the disabled, immigrants, Native Americans, Mexicans, Latinx people (who incidentally, as a group in the US, numerically surpassed Blacks some years back, even if many philosophers seem not to have realized this), multiracial people, working-class philosophers, philosophers who are first-generation college graduates, and Asians. As a member of the last of these named groups, let me elaborate

by listing some episodes below; though I will not name names, considering the tendency of some philosophers to place greater faith in lawyers and defamation or libel lawsuits than in their own philosophical abilities, even though philosophy is said to be excellent training for the law rather than the other way around!

- I have been attending and presenting at philosophy conferences, including some APA meetings, for over twenty-five years now. It has not been uncommon to find people walking out while I am reading a paper. I have also sometimes had rude and incompetent commentators, people who give their comments to you on the spot rather than at least a few days in advance as many conferences request, and who also simply ignore repeated emailed requests to send comments in advance.
- At many conferences and presentations, I have often had male and, yes, sometimes female philosophers too yelling at me. Like many Asians, I have the professional curse of looking younger than my age, as a distinguished philosopher in New York City once noted. There are some no doubt who have looked at me and wondered, even if not always very consciously, “What the heck is this brown kid with an accent talking about?” Such philosophers only generate a lot of heat without any light. They cannot disagree without being disagreeable. I am reminded of an overlooked passage in Plato's *Republic* VI (487c-e) where after he's talked about philosopher-rulers, Plato himself admits that most philosophers are not fit to rule as they either become cranks or are useless. Think about all the philosophers you know, and judge for yourself if Plato is right!
- The dean of a supposedly reputable Midwestern private liberal arts college asked me explicitly about my immigration status when I was one of the three finalists flown in for an on-campus job interview and talk many years back; I am now a naturalized US citizen and believe it is illegal to ask candidates such questions explicitly and use the information as a basis not to hire people because of their citizenship status or national origins.
- The chairperson of a philosophy department once asked me if I count as “a minority.”
- A woman philosopher who holds an endowed chair asked me once to my face if I am Muslim, which I am not, for the record; not that there is anything wrong with it, to borrow the famous line from *Seinfeld*.
- A wealthy, Ivy-League-educated philosopher laughed when I told another philosopher I teach Asian (or Eastern) philosophy and also write in it, and said dismissively that he finds it hard enough to do Western philosophy as is. He just brushed aside the fact that I hold philosophy degrees from universities in three different countries (the US,

England, and India), in three different continents, and so might presumably know *something* about non-Western philosophies.

- Editors sometimes do not respond at all to my correspondence, despite requests for brief acknowledgements; after all, like Barack Obama, I have a funny name! Some editors in New York City have even told me to write to their offices in another country, even though I live and work a short train ride away.
- Editors and referees often sit idly on my work for many months when they know (or figure out) my identity.
- I wonder sometimes if I am not taken as seriously as a generic, blond, blue-eyed, male—"John Smith"—with a PhD from the university founded in 1636 might be. Feminist scholars sometimes talk about a kind of erasure that happens when a woman scholar's work is not acknowledged or cited, and similarly perhaps I am a brown "invisible man" (with apologies to Ralph Ellison).
- I had trouble finding a place to rent in a small town in supposedly progressive New England when I worked there for a bit many years back; many landlords were wary of me.
- My car was vandalized in Boston, the self-styled "university capital of the world," about four weeks after 9/11 when the war in Afghanistan began; I have often been told I look vaguely Middle Eastern, which I am not as a matter of fact. Of course, I condemn 9/11 and terrorism, and in fact I was more shaken by 9/11 than many of my American friends!

Do all of these taken together—and I could add more to this list—amount to a kind of bias, even if not always very overt, explicit, or conscious? You be the judge!

2. SOLUTIONS

So what are you to do if you are a graduate student or junior faculty member of Asian descent, if you have brown skin or East Asian facial features, for instance? You probably will face some typecasting and, dare I say, at least some unconscious bias. But do not despair and abandon hope, for some excellent philosophers of Asian descent such as the late Jaegwon Kim (1934–2019), to whose memory this issue is dedicated, made it to the top of our profession! Here are some ways in which you can deal with all this and even turn it to your advantage.

- Make yourself as marketable as possible. Back in my day, many jobs were in history of philosophy or ethics. Work in these areas if you so desire, though at the same time I would strongly urge you to seriously consider other options in light of your interests, talents, and abilities, because philosophy departments nowadays hire more outside those areas in, for example, logic, metaphysics,

epistemology, philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, philosophy of science, and aesthetics.

- Be prepared to have Asian philosophy at least as an AOC if not also as an AOS on your CV; ditto for philosophy of race, which should not be the province of just Black or Latinx philosophers.
- Stress that Asian (or Eastern) philosophies address the same issues we find in Western philosophy—ethics, society, reality, knowledge, the self, and enlightenment—sometimes in similar ways, and at other times very differently. Here are some similarities. Tell them that about one hundred fifty years before Aristotle, Confucius put forth a very similar virtue ethics that stresses family and friends. Inform them that about two thousand years before Bentham and Mill, the Mohists in ancient China advanced a utilitarian ethics. Explain to them that centuries before Kant advocated a deontological ethics, the ancient Hindu text *Bhagavad Gita* urged a similar duty-based ethics. Inform them that just like in the West, there are debates over universals within Indian philosophy between Nyaya realists and Buddhist nominalists. Tell them that as is the case with Heraclitus and Whitehead, the Buddhists have a process ontology. Spinoza seems to be quite the rage in some philosophical circles these days, perhaps in part because until recently he has not gotten as much attention as the other "canonical seven" philosophers (Descartes, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant) of early modern philosophy, but did you know that some centuries before his double-aspect view, the Visistadvaita (qualified non-dualism) south Indian philosopher Ramanuja put forth a more comprehensive multiple-aspect philosophical position about reality?
- Emphasize that most of the world's population lives in the geographical continent of Asia, which is also the largest continent in the world.
- Stress that China and India put together account for well over a third of the world's population.
- Inform them that China has the world's second largest economy today (after that of the US), Japan the third largest, and India the fourth largest, and so these nations will matter in the twenty-first century, for which we should prepare our students. Learning *something* about the philosophies (histories, cultures, and such) of these nations can only help.
- Stress that many of the figures and texts we deal with in Asian philosophy—Confucius, Laozi (if he existed), the *Upanishads*, the Buddha, and so on—predate Christ by a few centuries, and they are also often temporally prior to Socrates. Christ himself lived in Asia, by the way!
- Emphasize that there is a lot of wisdom in these traditions and they are philosophically very rich

and diverse in their own right, though we should also question them just as we do when we read Western philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Hume, Kant, and Quine.

- Stress that about 6 percent of the US population is Asian, though this figure is likely to be revised once the results of the 2020 US Census are finalized; many states in the Western US have particularly large Asian populations.

3. “WOGS”

Many American philosophers may not know the word “wog,” featured in the title of this essay, though my British, Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand friends will. Like the n-word, it is a highly offensive word, one that comes from British slang. Its precise origin and meaning are unclear, though you can look up both print and online dictionaries. I have come across suggestions that the word is highly derogatory for dark-skinned foreigners. I have even heard that “wog” may be an acronym—W.O.G.—for “Westernized Oriental Gentleman,” perhaps coined in elite, private British schools at least as far back as the last century; you can imagine the last of these three words being said in a sly, slightly accented way!

There are philosophers who see me as just that—a “wog”—regardless of any qualities of head and heart I might have.

The Story of One Male Asian American Philosopher

Anand Jayprakash Vaidya

SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY
ANAND.VAIDYA@SJSU.EDU

My parents immigrated to the United States in the late 1960s and I was born in Chicago in the mid-seventies. My father’s job as a petroleum engineer took us first to Texas and then, when I was five, to Saudi Arabia. I made a few friends at my international school with whom I played football and soccer, jammed guitar in a heavy metal band, and rode my motorbike in the desert. Because the Saudi government mandated that everyone not born in the country had to leave for at least thirty days each year, our family also spent significant amounts of time traveling, mainly to visit relatives and friends in the US, India, and Germany.

When the first Gulf War began in 1991, my family was living by an army base that was being bombed. My brother was already living in the States. The war was too scary for my mom. She packed me up and moved me to California. I found high school academically challenging. As a young child, I had been diagnosed with dyslexia and now found myself struggling with algebra and writing. In high school, about the only thing I was decent at was playing guitar. But even then, most of my band mates thought it was an oxymoron that I was a “rhythm guitarist” because I had no rhythm—I fell out of time all the time.

When it was time to decide where to go to college, I wanted to be far away from the high school I was at in Southern California. I picked Humboldt State University in Arcata, California, seven hundred miles up north. It was one of the most beautiful campuses I’d ever seen, nestled deep in the redwood forests.

I first discovered the term “philosophy” in an encyclopedia around age twelve. Long before I knew what the study of logic and moral philosophy was, I had found myself attracted to what falls under those terms, such as Charles Sanders Peirce’s law $((P \rightarrow Q) \rightarrow P) \rightarrow P$, which I also found in the same encyclopedia, and Immanuel Kant’s *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, which I stumbled across at a bookstore at age fifteen.

My full conversion to the philosophy major came after I took a class in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy, and was introduced to the debates over faith and rationality, Descartes’s *Meditations on First Philosophy*, and Spinoza’s *Ethics*. I discovered that I didn’t think that evidence settled whether God exists, and also that I am not a Hindu. Later I became interested in the philosophy of law and the phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty because of his discussion of two hands touching each other where one cannot say that there is a subject and an object. I also discovered critical thinking.

My parents grew up in Nehru’s India where the study of science and math was seen as bedrock and, thus, encouraged me towards a profession that would provide a steady income, preferably as a medical doctor, an engineer, or a lawyer. They were worried that my choice to pursue philosophy would be seen as a failure of sorts and I’d be considered someone who simply wasn’t good enough at math and science and had been forced to “settle.” They, like many Indians of their generation, associated philosophy with either European existentialism, theology, or Indian Hindutva—a pro-Hindu nationalist movement that neither they nor I accept. My choice to pursue philosophy was seen as a waste of a prized opportunity. I gathered that their circle of friends would have said, “We have come all the way from India to America so that you can have an opportunity to get a good education, and now you want to study philosophy?”

At the end of my sophomore year, a friend at UCLA encouraged me to apply to their philosophy department because of my interest in logic. I applied and gained acceptance, which was doubly good because my parents had recently divorced and my mom needed me back in Southern California. At UCLA, I was introduced to mathematical logic by Tony Martin and Kit Fine, reintroduced to medieval philosophy by Calvin Normore, the philosophy of language by David Kaplan, Kant and the philosophy of mind by Tyler Burge, and Wittgenstein by Andrew Hsu. I found myself attracted to the content as well as the method of doing philosophy. It felt honest: I was being encouraged to search for the truth, to be precise, and to challenge my classmates to do their best to present and defend an argument.

At UCLA, the standards were high and the readings were difficult. I spent all my time walking, reading, and talking. I would do proofs on the back of pizza boxes at the shop I was working at. Nothing seemed more important to me than understanding philosophy. I liked inspecting the deductive status of arguments: validity and soundness. I also liked to think in terms of basic logics, such as first-order predicate logic. It didn't matter what the arguments were about.

I did find it odd that there appeared to be little respect for phenomenology, and when I asked about Indian philosophy, I was told that the department didn't offer courses in that area. It wasn't clear why these things were excluded, but I went with it, because I found my first love in philosophy: modal logic.

I was fascinated by how possible worlds semantics pushed us to think about the most fundamental questions concerning reality: the relation between the possible and the actual. When a friend gave me a copy of Stephen Yablo's "Is Conceivability a Guide to Possibility?" I remember loving the style of argument and the question: How does our ability to conceive things guide us with respect to knowing what is possible?

It was my interest in the work of David Chalmers on conceivability and consciousness that led me to pursue graduate school at the University of California at Santa Barbara, where I worked with Kevin Falvey, Tony Brueckner, and Nathan Salmon. I wrote my dissertation on the epistemology of modality focusing on the work of Stephen Yablo, David Chalmers, and Timothy Williamson. To this day, I continue to work on issues in that field. The majority of my work is exploring how knowledge of essence informs our judgments about what is possible and necessary.

In addition to my dissertation work, I expanded my interests out to the philosophy of economics, moral philosophy, and business ethics. I got my first taste of experimental philosophy when Stephen Stich et al. published their famous study of how, unlike Westerners, Indians don't share the Gettier Intuition (that justified true belief is not sufficient for knowledge). I became curious about intuitions and how culture might shape them, but also wondered why no one was talking about Indian philosophy, but only about how Indians react to examples from Western philosophy. Later in my career I devoted years of research working on intuitions in philosophical methodology with people in experimental philosophy and analytic philosophy, such as Edouard Machery and Thomas Grundman.

After my PhD, I was honored to have been hired by San José State University, where I am now a Professor of Philosophy and former Director of the Center for Comparative Philosophy. I now teach a wide range of courses from philosophy of mind to business ethics. I was fortunate early in my career as SJSU supported my travel to Germany, Brazil, and Australia to do work in analytic epistemology on the topics of modality and intuition. During this part of my career, I was passionate about the philosophy of economics also. When I was up for my first sabbatical, I considered getting a second doctorate in the field. However, my mom

was diagnosed with cancer and midway through a summer school I was attending in Budapest, I decided that I had to go back to California. I couldn't choose a second degree over my mom; she had always been there for me. While my plans for the second degree had failed, my passion for the field didn't. I still teach courses in the philosophy of economics and applied topics, such as the prison industrial complex.

My colleagues at SJSU introduced me to comparative philosophy—the late Richard Tieszen, Carlos Sanchez, Bo Mou, and Karin Brown. My introduction to Indian philosophy came via Purushottama Bilimoria, who had just moved to Berkeley in 2009. I met him at a talk by Hubert Dreyfus at SJSU, where I was responding to Dreyfus's critique of John McDowell. We found we had similar interests and he asked if I wanted to work on a paper for a *festschrift* on the work of Jayshankar Lal Shaw. I didn't know Shaw's work at the time and was initially hesitant, but after reading a few articles that Purushottama suggested on classical Indian epistemology I was hooked by the methodology and clear arguments about the self and perception.

When I discovered that Evan Thompson was teaching a seminar on Buddhism at the University of California at Berkeley, I signed up immediately, wanting to learn more about Indian philosophy of mind. The seminar turned out to be well attended by neuroscientists, philosophers, and Buddhist scholars, and I was immediately attracted to the interdisciplinary vibe there (the excitement I felt reminded me of the first time David Kaplan explained to me the problem of quantifying into modal contexts). I realized I wanted to learn not only about Indian philosophy but also about Asian philosophy and phenomenology in general. I reconnected with my desire to engage a broader range of philosophers in different traditions who could be accessed in English, since I didn't know Sanskrit. When I finally took my first sabbatical, I spent time formally training in Indian philosophy with Jayshankar Shaw (by now I knew him well).

As I got deeper into the discipline, I found myself questioning why these thinkers were never part of the traditional philosophy curriculum (a thought that many people have about the traditions they enjoy, which are left out of the canon). Some of the people I was reading wrote in English and had only died recently, such as Bimal Krishna Matilal and Daya Krishna. In advocating for the need to include Indian philosophy into the canon, I do not want to imply that these traditions are better than other traditions. Rather, I cannot defend the idea that there is a principled reason to exclude them: neither their method nor their intellectual excellence seemed any different from what I had studied.

My early attempts to advocate for Indian philosophy were met with resistance. It was implied that since I had no Sanskrit training and there is no such thing as Indian philosophy (only Indian religion), it was inappropriate for me to advocate for its inclusion.

Surprisingly, the most frustrating conversations I've had were with Indians raised in India. The presumption that many make is that the only reason anyone would talk about

such things is because they are defending Hindutva. They can understand wanting to be a classical Indian musician or artist, but Indian philosophy is backwards-tending to them. It seems unfair that such an amazingly rich philosophical tradition has effectively been hijacked by Hindu nationalists and their religious-nationalist agenda.

It has been ten years since I became reacquainted with Indian philosophy, the last seven of which I have spent trying to make work on perception in Indian philosophy relevant to analytic discussions. I am now in my mid-forties and will perhaps never make a massive breakthrough on a topic as heavily researched as perception. However, I remain convinced that we have a lot to gain from a cross-traditional conversation in philosophy. I hope to synthesize an understanding of perception that cuts through these different traditions and get people to talk to one another.

I've come to appreciate that friction is not always bad. Cross-cultural methods improve analytical and experimental methods by providing a kind of *epistemic friction* that takes one outside of one's philosophical echo chamber in an epistemically responsible way.

Fit or Flight: Ethical Decision-Making as a Model Minority

Audrey Yap
 UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA
 AYAP@UVIC.CA

INTRODUCTION

I am working on this article about a month into a widespread transition to working from home, as per public health recommendations in the face of COVID-19. But the face of COVID-19 has also been Chinese, an image that has been maintained by a variety of sources, such as media photos and the US president's continued insistence on referring to it as the "Chinese Virus." Overt incidents of anti-Asian racism have been on the rise all over North America, even in my small-ish Canadian city that has among its tourist attractions the oldest Chinatown in Canada. I find myself wondering whether I would want to travel to the US in the future, even when the borders reopen. Worries about racist backlash against Asian Americans have been the subject of various op-eds, and one of note was written by a recent former Democratic presidential candidate, Andrew Yang, who notes incidents of racism that he has experienced personally, but concludes his piece by writing:

We Asian Americans need to embrace and show our American-ness in ways we never have before. We need to step up, help our neighbors, donate gear, vote, wear red white and blue, volunteer, fund aid organizations, and do everything in our power to accelerate the end of this crisis. We should show without a shadow of a doubt that we are Americans who will do our part for our country in this time of need.¹

Now, Yang writes this despite noting that many frontline medical workers are of Asian descent, and that many Japanese-Americans volunteered for service during World War II (which did not seem to prevent them or their families from being sent to internment camps). But his prescription here highlights a longstanding tension that faces many Asian Americans as "model minorities,"² and academic philosophers from underrepresented groups, which is the extent to which we do and ought to try to "fit in." The idea of "fit" is difficult to pin down in the first place. As part of basic equity and diversity training for hiring committees at my institution, we are often cautioned about the extent to which we rely on fit, as an abstract and often unmeasurable idea. A candidate's fit with a department can often mean that they exemplify many of our existing gendered, racialized, ableist, and classist stereotypes about the ideal of a philosopher. Sometimes, committee members will be skeptical about these cautions, thinking that their sense of who would make a good colleague—one of the things captured by "fit"—is just as important as anything else in a candidate's dossier, but many such skeptics are people who have likely never worried about the extent to which they did or did not fit in.

In this piece, I want to highlight a dilemma related to fit that I think Yang's quote illustrates nicely. I do not expect that this will be groundbreaking for many who have struggled with these kinds of issue, but I hope that this way of laying out the problem will at least be helpful. One horn of the dilemma is the extent to which fitting in, to whatever degree possible, might personally enable a person to change a problematic culture overall. This type of strategy might be familiar to anyone who waits until tenure to work on the topics they really want to pursue, topics that they think should be taken more seriously in the field as a whole. While I (and I think World War II history) certainly disagree with the idea that displays of local patriotism by ethnic minorities will mitigate racism in general, they could potentially benefit people as individuals. Hanging a Canadian flag in your window won't solve the problem of racism, but it may make your white neighbors nicer to you and give you the breathing room you need to support your family members. But the other horn of the dilemma is that there are wider ethical consequences to fitting in that reach beyond impact to the individual or even their community. In many cases, when we choose to fit in (instead of refusing to conform or just leaving a community altogether), even when it is to put ourselves in a position to make change, we run the risk of further entrenching the problematic (typically white colonial) standards to which we were being held in the first place.

I will focus primarily on the latter horn of the dilemma, as well as the ways in which these issues of fit play out in the case of Asian Americans, since this is my own background. But I do think that something like this more general problem is also faced by many of those who are seen as "respectable enough" or who might pass as members of more privileged groups.³ I also note that a precondition of this dilemma is that one even has the option of trying to fit in in the first place instead of just leaving, and for many others the situation is much different. But this is not an exercise in comparative experiences of oppression, simply

a discussion of some ways in which it affects some ethical decision-making in some people's lives.

WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE *THIS* PHILOSOPHER OF ASIAN DESCENT?

In terms of my ethnic background, I am an immigrant of Malaysian Chinese descent. My mother's family sometimes identifies us as "*nonya*," referring to people descended from members of the Chinese diaspora, from the Southern provinces, who settled in Malaysia. But I grew up in Canada speaking English and not Cantonese or Mandarin. My vague sense of cultural identity involves the Buddhist temple at Lunar New Year, words for food and family in an assortment of dialects, and trying to fit into my *por's sarong kebaya* so I could wear it at her eightieth birthday party. It involves very little about China, which is where many North Americans suppose I must have been born.

In terms of my academic background, I was relatively lucky, since both of my parents were university educated, and we always had enough money growing up (we were, after all, allowed to immigrate to Canada). Despite stumbling into a philosophy major, and having a distinct lack of understanding about what academic life entails, I also managed to be accepted into a good US graduate program to work in logic and philosophy of mathematics. I was hired ABD at my present institution back in Canada to teach logic, and this remains about half of my teaching load (though I now work primarily in feminist philosophy and social epistemology). But with respect to my early career, I probably could not have done more to fit in to mainstream North American philosophy if I had tried (I still don't know if I was trying), and I have no doubt that this benefited me in ways I likely still don't understand.

THE ETHICAL CONSEQUENCES OF FIT

The ethical consequences of fit are perhaps best illustrated by an example. It is often the case that racialized immigrants want to ensure that their children fit in to their new countries. This often means trying to eliminate traces of foreignness, such as accents or non-anglicized names. Many of my cousins and I, who either were immigrants as children or were born in Western countries such as Canada, the US, and Australia, speak very little of any Chinese dialects, and were not taught the language as children. But with our families conscious of the stereotype of the maladjusted immigrant, "fresh off the boat," we often did not question the wisdom of this move until we were older. The impact of this on us, our family, and our communities is certainly worth considering, as are the ethical costs of choosing one type of life over another more generally.⁴ But I will focus on the potential consequences to those beyond our communities.

One thing that I was never taught as a young Asian Canadian was that the land I had come to live on (Musqueam then, though I now live and work on unceded Lekwungen territory) had been taken from people whose descendants were still living. Anything related to Indigenous people had to do with the past, and traditional ways of living that were presented simply as history. The fiction that I was raised with was that the rightful Canadians were the

white settlers I wanted (consciously or unconsciously) to resemble. And the more I came to accept (though not in those terms) that whiteness set the standard to which I would need to conform, the more complicit I became in colonial oppression.

In the history of my own city, Victoria, BC, racism against people of Chinese ethnicity has dovetailed neatly with colonialism, simultaneously excluding the Chinese from "genuine" Canadian identity, while erasing Indigenous people entirely.⁵ This means that Chinese settlers were constituted as alien, while settlers of European descent were constituted as native to the land, and properly belonging. This had the function of naturalizing colonial dominance over the country, and effectively removing Indigenous people from representation, just as they were dispossessed of their traditional lands. This means that the white settler state was able to position itself as the gatekeeper, determining which immigrants were desirable, and which bore further scrutiny. Control over who was permitted to live and work in the territory not only allowed white Europeans to create a community that reflected their needs and desires, but also establish themselves as its rightful inhabitants.⁶

Histories of racism have allowed colonial education systems and other social institutions to justify shunting nonwhite people into subordinate social roles.⁷ The incorporation of hierarchical racialized characteristics into things like school textbooks allowed such characteristics to become common knowledge and part of the fabric of everyday Canadian society.⁸ This means that colonial education systems can use people like me to reinforce themselves, holding up those of us who were able to navigate them with some success. Accepting that this is an appropriate standard to which we should aspire frequently means ignoring the extent to which such standards discriminate. For example, my angsty thirteen-year-old self never questioned the extent to which whiteness shaped the standards of beauty to which I aspired.

In philosophy, those of us who successfully navigate applications, the job market, and tenure might not question the extent to which our comparative success is linked to the ways in which we have successfully fit in to an exclusionary system. Which is not to say that we are necessarily doing something wrong when we meet white colonial expectations; I do not blame my twenty-one-year-old self for having chosen a "respectable" analytic-philosophy path, since I genuinely liked working in that area, and it was absolutely what my undergraduate degree prepared me to do. But I have also had less clear-cut experiences. I am sure other philosophers of East Asian backgrounds have also avoided participating in discussions of "internationalization" and how to attract students from China. When untenured, I was once asked by a visiting speaker whether I was so good with technology because I was so young or because I was Asian (I had been assisting him with some projector issues before his talk). There are any number of ways in which I could have challenged stereotypes but chose not to do so—though I have in mid-career become much more vocal.

CONCLUSION

In this piece, I have laid out a dilemma faced by people at the margins of fitting in. I think this is the case for many philosophers of Asian descent, since as model minorities, our successes can easily be used to reinforce racism and colonialism. So, we face a kind of tradeoff between fitting in and getting to a place where we might be able to better challenge unjust systems, or refusing to put ourselves in a position to be used against others with relatively less privilege. The temptation to fit in, as illustrated by the Yang quote, can be motivated by a desire to work against racism, or at least to feel safer from it. But the important thing to note is that the systems in which we operate ensure that there will always be a cost—if not to us, then likely to others.

This does not mean that we (or others from underrepresented groups) are to blame for the ways in which we do fit in to mainstream North American philosophy, or academia in general. Nor is it to say that fitting in is merely a matter of personal gain. I would hope that this piece has some kind of positive impact beyond my own career (but of course I am only comfortable writing it because I am tenured and happy at my institution). Rather, it is to point out that institutions created under conditions of white supremacy and colonialism will tend to further perpetuate white supremacy and colonialism by encouraging us to believe that they genuinely reward merit, measured by some thoroughly neutral standard. Instead, if there is such a standard, I do not think any of us know what it is, nor do we know how to apply it. And wherever we do end up, to whatever extent we do “fit in,” we need to keep in mind that working against anti-Asian racism should not come at the expense of other BIPOC folks, nor at the expense of others from underrepresented groups. Anti-racism that loses sight of colonialism, patriarchy, ableism, and other kinds of injustice may find itself doing damage, even as it seeks to repair it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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MEMORIAL NOTICE

In Memoriam: Jaegwon Kim (1934–2019)

Paul Guyer

BROWN UNIVERSITY
PAUL_GUYER@BROWN.EDU

Justin Broackes

BROWN UNIVERSITY
JUSTIN_BROACKES@BROWN.EDU

Bernard Reginster

BROWN UNIVERSITY
BERNARD_REGINSTER@BROWN.EDU

It is with great sorrow that the Department of Philosophy of Brown University reports the passing of Jaegwon Kim, William Herbert Perry Faunce Professor of Philosophy *emeritus*, on November 27, 2019. Professor Kim was eighty-five years old.

Born in Daegu, Korea, in 1934, Professor Kim studied French literature at Seoul National University (1953–1955) before graduating *summa cum laude* from Dartmouth College in 1958, with a combined major in French, mathematics, and philosophy. He earned his PhD in Philosophy at Princeton University in 1962. At Princeton Kim was influenced by the teaching of Carl G. Hempel and the publications of Roderick Chisholm; both were among the great American philosophers of the second half of the twentieth century, Hempel in philosophy of science and Chisholm in metaphysics and epistemology; Chisholm was the dominant figure in the Brown department for much of that period. After teaching for two years at Swarthmore College, Kim taught at Brown from 1963 to 1967, as Chisholm’s colleague, and at the University of Michigan from 1967 to 1987, where he chaired the philosophy department for eight years and was awarded the title of Roy Wood Sellars Professor of Philosophy, in honor of one of the great American philosophers of the first part of the twentieth century. He was also a visiting professor at Cornell, Stanford, and the Johns Hopkins Universities during this period. He returned to Brown in 1987 as Chisholm was retiring, in effect as his successor as the central figure of the department, and taught here until his retirement in 2014. He was the chair of the department during a period of rebuilding in the 1990s and spearheaded the appointment of a continuing core of the present department. Kim earned research grants from the ACLS, NSF, and NEH, and was awarded the Kyung-Ahm Prize of the Kyung-Ahm Cultural and Educational Foundation in 2014. Kim was president of the Central Division of the American Philosophical Association in 1988–1989, and a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences since 1991. From 2000 to 2005, Kim co-edited the journal *Noûs* with his colleague Ernest Sosa, who also

spent much of his career at Brown. Literature as well as music remained lifelong interests for Professor Kim, and he devoted much of his time in retirement to reading and writing poetry and listening to music. Throughout his life, Professor Kim was generous to students and colleagues, and beloved for his character as well as admired for his work. He inspired several generations of philosophy students in Korea although he spent his career in the US, and was also recognized as a poet in Korea.

Professor Kim was known for his work in philosophy of mind, metaphysics, and epistemology. His books included *Supervenience and Mind* (1993), *Mind in a Physical World* (1998), *Physicalism, or Something Near Enough* (2005), the survey *Philosophy of Mind* (second edition, 2006), *Trois essais sur l'émergence* (2006), and *Essays in the Metaphysics of Mind* (2010). He was also the editor or co-editor of five anthologies of philosophical essays on metaphysics and epistemology, four of them with Ernest Sosa, and numerous journal articles and book chapters.

Kim explored the challenges for a naturalistic approach to philosophy. He rejected any appeal to the supernatural in philosophy as simply substituting "one riddle for another," but argued that "qualia," the qualitative aspects of mental states, although in some sense clearly *caused* by physical states, could not easily be *reduced* to physical properties of brain-states. This issue led Kim to a rigorous examination of the concept of "supervenience," a term for the relation in which one property is neither strictly identical to nor caused by another co-varies with it. He distinguished supervenience from emergence, the causation of a new phenomenon, and refined previous understandings of it. This work also led to a detailed study of the concept of causation itself, a central concept of metaphysics; Kim was indeed in good part responsible for revived interest in metaphysics after critiques of it from Kant to Wittgenstein had brought it into ill repute. Here his question became how can we maintain a commitment to the causal closure of physics, that is, our assumption that there is in principle an adequate physical explanation of any event in the physical world, and yet maintain the causal significance of mental events, that is, that they are not just "epiphenomenal" consciousness of physical events but play a genuine role in determining subsequent events. In the theory of knowledge, Kim criticized the well-known "naturalized epistemology" of Willard Van Orman Quine, arguing that a purely descriptive approach to belief-forming practices cannot account for the justification of knowledge-claims, although constructing a theory of such justification has traditionally been taken to be the task of epistemology. In all these areas, Professor Kim argued for the necessity of incorporating the qualitative dimensions of human experience and cognition into a naturalistic world-picture. By such arguments Professor Kim clarified and refined concepts often taken for granted, by means of argumentation with a form and content subtly different from that of colleagues close and far who were battling over these and related issues. In so doing, he challenged and inspired several generations of his own students and of philosophers worldwide.

Professor Kim leaves his wife Sylvia, his son Justin, and many students, colleagues, and admirers throughout the philosophical profession in the US and abroad.

ASIAN PHILOSOPHY BLOGS

PEA Soup, an influential blog and forum for philosophers from across the globe to discuss philosophy, ethics, and academia, has a new ongoing series titled "Cross-Cultural Normative Philosophy" (<http://peasoup.us/category/cross-cultural-normative-philosophy>). The goal of the series is to encourage broadly analytic moral and political philosophers to learn about and to engage with Asian and Asian American philosophers and philosophies. Nominations for articles to feature are most certainly welcome. The series editor, Dr. Bradford Cokelet (Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, University of Kansas, USA), aims to identify articles that will interest scholars who are new to Asian philosophy. After choosing an article, he will arrange a critical *précis* by a scholar who works outside of Asian philosophy and contact both the relevant scholars with interests in Asian philosophy and those without in order to promote fruitful discussion and to explore research ideas and teaching practices. If you have suggestions or nominations, please email Dr. Cokelet at bradcoket@gmail.com.

We are also promoting new books in Asian philosophy on the committee-run *New Books Blog* (<https://www.apaonline.org/blogpost/1710515/New-Books>). Hoping especially to reach academic philosophers who are not very familiar with Asian philosophy, we update the blog a few times per year with a list of the latest titles in Asian philosophy published by academic presses. We are especially interested in new titles that deserve to be considered book-review subjects for professional journals in Asian philosophy. A number of journals including *Philosophy East and West*, *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy*, and *The Journal of Confucian Philosophy and Culture* support this blog. If you have any questions or suggestions, please contact the blog's editor and administrator, Dr. Doil Kim (Associate Professor, Department of Confucian Studies, Sungkyunkwan University, South Korea), at philosokim@gmail.com.

Both Dr. Cokelet and Dr. Kim serve on the APA Committee on Asian and Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies and we are thankful for their work on our behalf to promote the direct and constructive engagement between Asian and other philosophical traditions, to help draw out their mutual relevance, and to advance teaching and study of Asian philosophy and cross-cultural philosophy.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

GOAL OF THE NEWSLETTER ON ASIAN 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: A. Minh Nguyen (atnguyen@fgcu.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.

