

points of family resemblance. John McClendon's advice, friendship, and scholarship speak for themselves. James Spady, as always, is thanked for his support and prescience regarding the importance of my own philosophical voice. I would like to extend a special thanks to Fred Evans, John Lachs, and Clevis Headley for the time they took to comment upon the introduction to this text. My mother, Ruth, Artrice, Carson, and Brother El are thanked for their support and love. My in-laws are thanked for their long-distance support, fun and extremely helpful visits, and abundant love for the Yaney boys. My family, Susan, Adrian, Gabriel, Elijah, and Joshua, the littlest one to whom this book is dedicated, are all thanked for their patience and persistence at *dispelling the illusion* that to be a productive philosopher one must remain secluded within the private domain of reflective thought.

## Introduction: No Philosophical Oracle Voices

GEORGE YANCY



*There are no transcendental rules a priori that are the essential, thus defining, feature of "philosophy."*

—LUCIUS OUTLAW

*Hey, don't be fooled. Where we live philosophy is white. . . .  
White men, white marble, white hair, white shirts under blue  
blazers and red ties.*

—CHRIS J. CUOMO

I HAD THE RARE and philosophically stimulating opportunity to engage in an extensive conversation with American philosopher Paul Weiss two months before his death.<sup>1</sup> In fact, our discussion took place just two weeks before he turned 101. At 100, Weiss was sharp, engaging, and remembered details from his past with tremendous clarity. We discussed his personal encounters with Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead, and his thoughts on Martin Heidegger, death, what makes a creative philosopher, the meaning of life, why he founded the *Review of Metaphysics* and the Metaphysical Society of America, both of which he started as a direct response to logical positivism, and so much more. I was struck by his philosophical vivacity. I was particularly moved by his conception of the philosopher as one who looks for trouble. This fascinating conception of the philosopher as a "troublemaker" resonated with my own philosophical proclivities and tenacity, and spoke to aspects of my experiences, though in ways that Weiss may not have intended the term to be used. On one occasion, for

example, a white philosopher-mentor of mine told me not to become pegged a philosopher who does African American philosophy. The subtext of his "advice" cautioned me against being *marked*, as it were, as someone who has somehow moved outside the "legitimate" bounds of philosophy. The fact of the matter is that he, however, had been marked; he had been interpellated by normative assumptions governing the nature of "legitimate" philosophical inquiry. His unquestioned assumptions insulated him from examining his own blinkers, effectively insuring a level of opacity regarding how he was implicated in larger, specifically Western, systemic historical and institutional forces and epistemic orders, which helped to form his philosophical identity, and in various value-laden suppositions regarding philosophy, its content, and its aims.<sup>2</sup>

Had I desired and taken steps to become a Kantian scholar, I am sure that he would not have cautioned me against spending my philosophical energies exploring Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* or his deontological ethics. Had I desired to specialize in the area of philosophy of religion, such themes as God's existence, theodicy, the problem of religious language, or the problem of God's foreknowledge and human freedom would have no doubt been granted philosophical legitimacy without question. In short, I would not have been pegged, but encouraged to specialize. His advice that I not become pegged functioned as an instantiation of a regulatory norm that had already shaped his philosophical formation. As philosopher Lisa Heldke notes, "Understandings developed from positions of privilege require their holders to ignore or conceal too much about how the world is understood from other standpoints; in being responsible to such a position, one must be irresponsible to too many others."<sup>3</sup> I was in the process of being groomed to become one of the "philosophical we," those who have accepted what constitutes the discursive parameters of "genuine" philosophical problems without critically "asking who is this 'we' whose problems these are, out of whose experiences do they arise, and from whose perspective are they salient?"<sup>4</sup> It is important, however, that we never forget the processes of "domination and exclusion which are implicated in an abstract appeal to the 'we' who *share*."<sup>5</sup> It might be argued that my white philosopher-mentor did not act "objectively" (that is, he was not less partial) toward my interests. His own unreflective stance vis-à-vis his privileged position as a white male within a white male dominant elitist profession like philosophy created a form of systematic ignorance about the way that power shaped, in this case, his understanding of the distinction between "legitimate" philosophy and "illegitimate" philosophy. "Acting objectively (responsibly) requires understanding oneself and one's connec-

tions with others, in order to make reasoned and reasonable assessments about how to respond to others' needs, desires, and interests, stated and unstated."<sup>6</sup> Within this context, his "advice" did not take into consideration my own philosophical needs, but excluded me as an active participant in my own philosophical formation and also excluded an entire field of philosophical inquiry. On this score, African American philosophy was deemed erstz philosophy and unworthy of intellectual commitment.

Instead of following his advice, however, I caused trouble. I refused his hailing and thus challenged those philosophical areas of inquiry that have traditionally refused to take seriously the philosophical significance of the Black experience and the philosophical knowledge productions characteristic of a people who have struggled to articulate their own sociopolitical praxes and historical journey. I troubled his unstated assumption that African American philosophy was too marginal, too insignificant, by marking this a primary area of philosophical concern, thus nurturing a philosophical subjectivity grounded within the historical struggle of Black people in America, a struggle that has, among others, epistemological and social ontological resources. On another occasion, a teacher in high school once said to me: "Major in philosophy? You have to be wealthy to pursue philosophy?" Again, I opted to cause trouble. Given the reality that most of my early childhood and teenage years were spent living in Richard Allen Homes, a low-income housing project in North Philadelphia, the prospect of pursuing something as "impractical" as philosophy seemed to ring with some truth. However, as a young teenager, self-sequestered in my room, I spent long days and long nights reading as much philosophy as I could find at the local neighborhood library and at my school's library. Reading Plato, Aristotle, and Spinoza in the hood was already a site of troublemaking, though not from the perspective of those already in the hood, but from the perspective of those who viewed/view Black people within ghetto lifeworlds as nihilistic, hopeless, uneducable, and pathological. To have a voracious desire to read at all created trouble for those who could only envision Blacks in the ghetto as mediocre and anti-intellectual.

Reading the works of Plato, Aristotle, and Spinoza was completely off the map of expectation, even for many of my teachers. My early adventures into the thoughts and works of these philosophers troubled the statistics, assumptions, and theories of those who were/are procrustean in their understanding of Black people. In fact, many of the philosophers that I read at the time had already theorized my incapacity for doing philosophy and, by implication, narrated the inevitable trajectory of my shallow or even non-existent intellectual life. After all, Hume said that any intelligent philosophical

words that came from my mouth indicated nothing more than that I was a good "parrot who speaks a few words plainly."<sup>7</sup> Kant said that my being Black was clear *proof* that anything that I said was stupid.<sup>8</sup> Hegel said that I was incapable of any level of abstract critical reflection because "the Negro is an example of animal man in all his savagery and lawlessness."<sup>9</sup> Doing philosophy in Black skin is always already a site of troubling-making; it is to trouble the mythos of white superiority. Doing philosophy, then, came with a peculiar disjunctive bind. Either I was to settle for what nature itself foisted on me or I was to challenge the laws of nature, as it were, do philosophy in Black skin, and thereby become an anomaly. I troubled both, refusing the view that my personal intellectual narrative had been foreclosed by ineluctable laws of nature, on the one hand, and refusing the role of a philosopher-freak, a monstrosity, on the other.

Of course, this theme of biology as destiny also negatively implicated white women. For example, Aristotle thought that a woman was a "misbegotten male." Tertullian described women as "the devil's gateway," Schopenhauer thought that women were "big children their whole life long,"<sup>10</sup> and Kant observed that a woman's "philosophy is not to reason, but to sense."<sup>11</sup> So, even white women, though not because of their whiteness, trouble the waters as they continue to define themselves and self-ascribe as philosophers within academic spaces that question a priori the legitimacy of their insights and reflections. In short, in philosophy, despite the assumption that many philosophers hold that the body is simply accidental to philosophical engagement, bodies do matter. White male bodies can do philosophy along a continuum from brilliantly to poorly, but they are still capable of doing philosophy. There is nothing about doing philosophy that belies their nature. Within a phallogocentric philosophical universe of discourse, women's knowledge productions are rendered "soft" and thereby not philosophical. On this score, the term "soft" has a family resemblance to such expressions as mild, sentimental, deficient, feeble, illogical, intrusive, dependent, passive, and unmanly.

Women of color in the field of philosophy, however, are deemed walking, talking "bushes,"<sup>12</sup> an explicit reference to the specific area of the genitalia; they are stereotyped as maids and prostitutes.<sup>13</sup> The point here is that passivity and dependency are descriptor terms, for the most part, that have historically been applied to *white* women. For example, while it is true that women of color are also deemed intellectually deficient, it is important to note that Black women have had to fight against images of themselves as matriarchs and whores.<sup>14</sup> In other words, Black women are deemed "hard," independent, sexually voracious and assertive—not innocent, fragile crea-

tures deserving to be placed upon a pedestal. Regarding the image of the stereotypically Black maid, African American philosopher Anita Allen discussed that a white male philosopher once placed the palms of his hands very gently around her face and said, "You look like a maid my family once had."<sup>15</sup> Allen, in effect, became the embodied Mammy figure for this white male philosopher. The dominant Mammy stereotype rendered Allen both invisible in terms of her critical philosophical acumen and hypervisible in terms of the historical distortion and caricature of Black women as protective of white children who were often cared for at the expense of Black children. Allen became someone whose job it was to nurture the white male philosopher without any hint of bitterness. It was not her philosophical brilliance that mattered, but her caretaking abilities, her role as servant, her being as a site of white pleasure and security. It is no easy task for Black women philosophers to be philosophers within such white male spaces of phantasmagoria. Indeed, within these spaces, women of color also become sexually exotic others, deemed always already sexually available, and objects of white male desire and transference. This is not to deny that white women have suffered sexual harassment from male philosophers or have suffered the sting of degrading reductions and name-calling, but it is important not to flatten the differential oppressive histories that were/are operative in the lives of white women and women of color.

As women of color trouble the field of philosophy, not only through the sheer fact of their embodied presence, but through the insights that they bring to bear upon such areas as ethics, epistemology, political philosophy, issues of social justice, critical theory, standpoint theory, and the like, they continue to be stereotyped as Mammies and Jezebels. Within the context of an anti-Black racist world, Frantz Fanon notes, "[W]hen I was present, it [reason] was not; when it [reason] was there, I was no longer."<sup>16</sup> Indeed, when reason and philosophy become collapsed as the *sine qua non* of what it means to be human, the ability or lack of ability to do philosophy gets raised to the level of philosophical anthropology. On this score, philosophical reflection is inextricably linked to the question of the *anthropos*; the very meaning of the human.

The philosopher as troublemaker, inflected through my own current philosophical projects and sense of mission, suggests one who is *not* content with the philosophical status quo, the strict policing of philosophical borders, the rigidity of historical and philosophical nostalgia, the encouragement of curricular calcification through the stipulation of myopic criteria for what constitutes philosophy and who its key players are, the illusion of politically and contextually neutral philosophical discourse, and the belief

that one's philosophical assumptions are completely unrelated to one's identity as raced, gendered, sexed, and classed.<sup>17</sup> I would like to think that I have *not* settled for the often superficial, greater than thou, self-adulation of so many philosophers that I have encountered. Of course, even as I write and continue to publish, paradoxically I stand on the precipice of taking myself too seriously, forgetting that the practice of philosophy is contingent upon values that are founded by finite persons trying to make sense of a very small part of reality.

Philosophy as practiced in many universities and colleges in America is ripe to have its inertial tendencies troubled and shaken. There was a time when I lived under the illusion that philosophers were above petty bickering, backstabbing, name calling, punitive retribution at the level of blocking the advancement of another member in the department, racism, sexism, jealousy, propitiating those in positions of academic power for personal gain, and sycophantic worship. On this score, the professional practice of philosophy (the quotidian activities of publishing or perishing, writing furiously to complete that one book that will presumably secure tenure, participation at conferences where you make sure to shine before your colleagues, even if it means trashing another philosopher's work, the political hiring and firing of philosophers, etc.) can be extremely disillusioning. As philosopher Adrian M. S. Piper says, "It's not only that you yourself have to be subject to these power plays, Machiavellian schemes of one-upmanship, back stabbing . . . but it really destroys your ability to believe that the field is about what it says it's about."<sup>18</sup>

One form of troublemaking in the field of philosophy involves removing the veneer that departments of philosophy are these respectful, engaging sites free of deep political and personal fights. What passes as *elenchus* is often perfunctory self-aggrandizement that aims at devouring one's interlocutor, demanding recognition for one's "superior" philosophical talents, and showcasing one's "brilliance" through the enumeration of one's long list of publications. Within this context, a philosopher's racism, sexism, myopia, and xenophobia often go overlooked and unchallenged, while academia continues to run smoothly, producing functional gatekeepers who insure that critical thought has its limits and that what is "philosophically significant" remains defined by certain tunnel-vision norms of selectivity. Within such a context, the stakes are very high. Philosophical standards are established, the philosophical canon is deemed sacrosanct, the discursive lines are drawn, and the battle begins. Many philosophical voices are marginalized and deemed *ersatz vis-à-vis* the dominant philosophical voice. Within the context of this dominant philosophical voice, careers are

shaped, and some philosophers even move completely outside the confines of philosophy departments in order to engage in activities of knowledge production that are deemed extraneous to those "genuine" philosophical problems and themes dominant within those very departments.

The philosophical gatekeepers exert their influences, and through an act of prestidigitration, as it were, certain philosophical discourses, philosophical problems, assumptions, and distinctions, indeed, intelligibility itself, are deemed *given* and unconditioned. Their genesis is obfuscated through processes of normalization. This normalizing process—through canonical repetition, the crafting of syllabi, funding, socially constituted valorizations, and other institutionalizing processes—attempts to blur the reality that philosophizing is immanent and grounded within social and historical practices as opposed to founded upon a transcendental basis. In fact, there is often a sense that some philosophers are on a philosophical crusade to banish forms of philosophy, forms of discourse, and forms of embodiment that belie the philosopher as a pure knowing subject, one who lives the life of the mind free from the contingencies of history, context, and place. Needless to say, many of these philosopher-crusaders are very sincere, but sincerity can also function as bad faith, a form of being-in-the-world where philosophical hegemony is seen as *necessary* to the project of keeping philosophy qua philosophy pure, un sullied by the particularistic interests of those discourses that are best left outside the proper domain of "real" philosophy.

Being "outside" suggests spatially *vis-à-vis* the "inside." The insiders, those who regulate and police both physical and discursive spaces, are those who see themselves as protecting the "purity" of philosophical borders, those who protect, through "imperial" superimposition, a certain conception of philosophy, those who sustain and reinforce familiar ways of understanding philosophical problems, defining philosophical problems, and approaching and addressing them. Even a certain style of discourse is deemed the only medium through which philosophical problems and their solutions can be articulated. The insiders function as what Fred Evans calls "oracles," voices that are deemed "absolute," "non-revisable," "complete," and "homogenous."<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the philosophical oracle voice feels threatened by those philosophically heterogeneous voices that compete for audibility, even as they attempt to be heard from sidelines to which they have been relegated and prejudged philosophically nugatory. The philosophical oracle voice speaks from an identity that is narrow and fixed, unresponsive to different philosophical voices/identities that emerge from different ways of engaging the world, understanding the world, and being-in-the-world.

The oracle voice is godlike, supposedly surveying the world from the aspect of eternity. The oracle voice is presumed self-grounded and unconditioned; it speaks and sees the world from nowhere, because it is deemed outside the flux of history, context, multiplicity, and heteroglossia. The philosophical oracle voice is deemed above the complex web of contestatory voices; it is unmoved by the play of multiple voices and the diversity of rich forms of life. It functions as Aristotle's unmoved mover. In other words, the philosophical oracle voice determines what counts as philosophy without its own voice being shaped by anything like the multiplicity of other voices entailed in the tradition, that is, by that which is anterior to its emergence. In fact, the philosophical oracle voice is deemed *causa sui*. This raises the issue of perspective and embodiment. After all, the philosophical oracle voice presumes to speak from nowhere. Hence, it functions as if disembodied. But this already renders its voice problematic. Its voice is already suspect, because in presuming to speak from nowhere it undermines its ability to speak at all. Engaging in a form of philosophical reflection that deems itself metacorporeal, or at least completely unencumbered by the body, the philosophical oracle voice has no point of view at all; for it is as embodied that a voice has a perspective, articulates a view. Hence, the philosophical oracle voice is specious; it, as I have implied, elides its historicity, dutifully covering over its ideology of domination, power-lust, value-laden interests, and forms of institutional behavior that give material support to the perpetuation of the notion that what constitutes philosophy is determined by transcendental rules a priori. In short, the philosophical oracle voice is predicated upon a lie and logically undermines its self-ascriptive, oracular standing while simultaneously revealing precisely what it attempts to hide.

From this perspective, the oracle voice assigns other contesting voices to their "natural" place within a hierarchy. It can do this because of its presumed synoptic vision, its grasp of totality. Contestatory voices are appropriated, consumed, and explained away within the "natural" unfolding of the philosophical oracle voice's historical telos. Such contestatory voices are then deemed anthropologically interesting only and lacking in sophistication and rigor. V. F. Cordova argues that questions posed by Native American students in philosophy, who are grounded within a different "spiritual wealth," are typically regarded as questions befitting an anthropologist. Within this context, anthropology, as Cordova maintains, becomes that site for "exploring the esoteric and barely humanoid existence and thought patterns of non-Western peoples."<sup>20</sup> In other words, within the exclusive logic<sup>21</sup> of the oracle voice's self-identity, other voices are

negated through being "pliable, foldable, file-awayable, classifiable."<sup>22</sup> In short, while there is de facto diversity of philosophical voices, it can be argued that the oracle philosophical voice silences these other voices through its assimilative logic or simply remains "indifferent to, and set above in the implied particularism"<sup>23</sup> of such discursive fields as feminist philosophy, African American philosophy, Afro-Caribbean philosophy, Native American philosophy, Asian American philosophy, Latin American philosophy, and lesbian and queer philosophy. Of course, more is at stake here than the *descriptive*. The issue of philosophical heterogeneity must be raised to the level of the *axiological*, where the diversity of philosophical voices is actually valued and encouraged, and where diversity is not predicated upon the superficial recognition of differences for the sake of drawing the circle tighter around the borders of what constitutes "real" philosophy.

The point here is that the philosophical oracle voice can continue to maintain hegemony through the recognition of de facto diversity. Recognition of plurality and curricular diversification is not sufficient to challenge the power of the oracular policing of philosophical borders. After all, African American, Latin American, and Native American voices, for example, can be recognized and included within courses in philosophy, but their recognition and inclusion need not dialectically challenge and actually shape or transform the conceptual and normative spaces that have been configured by the philosophical oracle voice, a voice that reinforces its power precisely through a form of hierarchical juxtaposition. Being "included" connotes a sense of being allowed, as if having a favor extended. In this way, inclusion is still governed by the oracle voice that decides whether to *include* and decides the terms of the inclusion. On this score, Native American philosophical thought, where "philosophical," according to the philosophical oracle voice, remains dubious, is consumed and dabbed with in order to spice up the oracular core of influence within the profession of philosophy without effectively threatening its existing absolutism, rigidity, and hierarchy.<sup>24</sup> The complexity and possibilities of Native American philosophical thought are erased and rendered invisible precisely through its "inclusion." The oracle voice can engage in discourses that celebrate forms of pluralism and diversity that further obfuscate its maintenance of power. Part of the process of this obfuscation is that the securing of the oracle voice's power through its treatment of other philosophical voices as mined in cultural forces and matrixes that render them inferior. The oracle voice, then, is able to remain hermetically sealed within its self-ascribed "universality" and clean abstraction; its so-called univocal purity deemed free from such heteronomous, accidental influences as prejudice

and various other historical, cultural, political, gendered, and "racial" forces. Within the framework of the argument that is being advanced here, "philosophical pluralism" is a coded expression that strengthens the neutrality of the oracle philosophical voice, the neutral benchmark in terms of which those "other," plural philosophical voices are judged. Indeed, some philosophy departments attempt to remedy this problem by offering "non-mainstream" philosophy courses. Even here, however, the oracular center continues to hold. Again, these "alternative philosophies" are "allowed" to speak. In this way, gatekeepers feel less guilty when faced with issues of encouraging multiplicity, diversity, and pluralism. With a false sense of accomplishment they exclaim, "We encourage alternative philosophical voices!" But instead of challenging the philosophical status quo, such alternative philosophical voices are treated as sideshow performances in philosophical exotic, mere ineffectual sound bytes, pseudophilosophical chatter, and false starts. This simply reinforces the centrality of the master narrative of "true" philosophy. Indeed, "it nourishes philosophers who believe there are two kinds of philosophy—one's own philosophy and philosophies that are wrong."<sup>25</sup>

As a site of power, the philosophical oracle voice resists seeing itself as *different* and *particularistic*. Indeed, it is "strongly invested in not knowing much about" its presumptions, narrow-mindedness, historical genesis, "racial" and cultural investments, and prejudicial underpinnings.<sup>26</sup> One might say that the philosophical oracle voice is an instantiation of what María Lugones terms "arrogant perception."<sup>27</sup> Within the context of this text, the oracle voice as a form of arrogant perception involves the classification of African American philosophy, Afro-Caribbean philosophy, Native American philosophy, Asian American philosophy, Latin American philosophy, feminist philosophy, and lesbian and queer philosophy as peripheral, secondary "philosophical" voices. Such arrogant perception is actually *productive* of a form of ignorance *vis-à-vis* the philosophical fecundity, challenging insights, and uniqueness of other equally legitimate philosophical voices.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the arrogant field of vision of the philosophical oracle voice not only relegates the discursive dimensions of these "intruder voices" to subphilosophical domains, but what might be called "intruder bodies" (Black bodies, Latina bodies, Native Nation bodies, queer bodies, and others) are seen as outsiders, "philosophical imitators," inferior, and are thereby ostracized, to the extent to which this is possible, from the various physical sites where certain privileged bodies (the majority of which are white male heterosexist bodies) exercise their "superiority" and engage in philosophical forms of voicing that are presumed to have

transhistorical implications and significance. At American Philosophical Association conferences I have often felt this sense of bodily invisibility and ostracization, as if I were suddenly thrown into an unfamiliar world. "So, there may be 'worlds' that construct me in ways that I do not even understand or I may not accept the construction as an account of myself, a construction of myself."<sup>29</sup>

The oracle voice speaks as if it has gotten hold of an *essence*, that is, that which is the *sine qua non* of what constitutes philosophy. In other words, the oracle voice claims to have the absolute truth, the unchanging and timeless nature, regarding the meaning, content, and aims of philosophy. Philosophy, on this score, becomes a *universal substantive*, unaffected by context, history, language, custom, sentiment, prejudice, geography, and so on. The latter, as argued above, are deemed accidents, mere contingent factors to which the oracle voice is impervious. On the view developed here, philosophy, in terms of its meaning, content, and aims, is fundamentally indexed to place, time, geography, cultural context, gender, and the like. Hence, within the context of the aims of this text, particularly in terms of challenging the philosophical oracle voice, I am disinclined to ask, what is the *nature* of philosophy? As philosopher John J. Stuhr argues, "Efforts to genuinely re-vision philosophy are distinct from enterprises aimed at finally revealing the so-called 'nature of philosophy' to the clear-eyed and clear-minded (who usually are simply the like-minded)." This re-visioning, rather, is characteristic of a *process*, something unfinished and messy. In attempting to understand the so-called *what* of philosophy, I am not looking for a singular, self-identical substantive. As Stuhr concludes, "A re-vision [of philosophy] must be an affair of multiple re-visions; and philosophy must be an affair of multiple, philosophies."<sup>30</sup>

Instead of excluding other philosophical voices ex cathedra, there is an emphasis placed upon the necessity and significance of telling a richer and thicker narrative regarding the sociological, historical, and material conditions that impact the emergence of styles of reflective thought, the centrality of specific over-beliefs, the metaphors and tropes that inform reflective thought, the content of reflective thought, and what is deemed relevant to reflective thought. This does not mean that one cannot engage in descriptive processes of making sense of the various ways in which the world is differentially and pluralistically engaged philosophically. There is nothing inherently problematic about *describing* activities of philosophical world-making. The philosophical oracle voice, however, instead of operating upon the assumption that "philosophizing is inherently grounded in socially shared practices"<sup>31</sup> and accepting that this assumption also applies

to its own philosophical voice, elides its own discursive historicity and normative structural practices, and argues for its own philosophical purity as if from a priori criteria. Describing, then, the socially shared, though not univocal, configuration of African philosophy, for example, points to a sensibility that requires one to *look*, to explore, to trace the diachronic permutations and relatively stable practices that form the ways in which flesh-and-blood thinkers attempt to fashion a world out of various socially inherited intellectual and existential strategies. "If the epistemic correlate of essence is conceptualization," as Lewis Gordon argues, "then the theoretical or conceptual domain is always situated on what can be called the reflective level."<sup>32</sup> The philosophical oracle voice presumes to engage in reflection *sub specie aeternitatis*. However, the conceptual domain is linked to reflective thought in terms of its positional, situated, and contextual modalities. Hence, the reflective aspects of our lives as situated "always brings in an element of concrete embodiment of relevance. What this means is that theory, any theory, gains its sustenance from that which it offers *for* and *through* the lived-reality of those who are expected to formulate it."<sup>33</sup>

Within this framework, the meaning of philosophy implicates existential and ontological vectors. For the human, *to exist* and *to be* is to do philosophy; is to be tied to particular historical lifeworlds of particular "racial," gendered, ethnic, and geographical groups that engage in forms of reflection/world-making that are shaped by various socially negotiated norms.<sup>34</sup> As negotiated, these norms are not *transcendental*, though tracing the genesis of certain norms may remain relatively obscured due to complex historical confluence. Devoid of a transcendental basis does not mean that philosophical practices are not predicated upon consensus formations and rule-following. Indeed, "since a discipline is an inherently *social* enterprise in which some degree of consensus—at the very least—is necessary, that in itself requires rules."<sup>35</sup> Moreover, in the absence of epistemic *foundations* this does not mean that various philosophical lifeworlds are bereft of arguments, rhetorical strategies, self-corrective strategies, and persuasive maneuvers that insure the avoidance of conclusions reached willy-nilly. It is also important to acknowledge that "it is possible to have norms that transcend particular groups such that they cover the 'intellectual' and 'social' life-praxes of different groups in ways, even, that make it *possible* to resolve what otherwise might be 'fundamental' disagreements."<sup>36</sup> On this score, the location of our historical and cultural existence and being "give our philosophizings their prismatic character."<sup>37</sup> To argue that there is an *essence* that defines all practices of

philosophizing, as the philosophical oracle voice presumes to do, can deteriorate into forms of "cleansing," which can have deleterious implications for those that I have designated "outsiders."

A few years ago, I recall a philosophy student once telling me that she and other students at her university were discouraged from examining the work of Kant through the prism of gender or race. The critical works and insights of feminist philosophers and philosophers who explore issues of race, in short, were being excluded, treated as outsiders, "cleansed" from the classroom. It was as if the professor actually held in contempt these "outside" voices; it was not simply a question of philosophical disagreement. These "outsider" interpretations of Kant were treated as inconsequential, sociological glibberish. After all, or so the oracle voice would claim, philosophers who do feminism and those who do philosophy of race do so for purely ideological reasons. For the oracle voice, such approaches are grounded in the mire of a form of self-serving identity politics that has absolutely nothing to do with either philosophy qua philosophy or Kant's pristine philosophical disinterestedness. Within the context of this particular classroom, the pristine knowing subject that is Kant and the "generic" knowing subject of traditional epistemology were both deemed transcendent and beyond the interstices of socially and historically embodied subjectivity, which is mediated by gender and race. Instead of encouraging a broad, critical subjectivity within the context of a course on Kant's philosophy, the oracle voice policed the borders of what doing "proper" Kantian scholarship is all about, thus foreclosing an appreciation for the possibilities inherent in philosophy as an open engagement with ideas that may very well challenge one's own. "If a professor's pedagogy is not liberatory," as bell hooks notes, "then students will probably not compete for value and voice in the classroom."<sup>38</sup> This raises the larger issue regarding the expectations that philosophers bring to the educational ethos of classrooms and what they desire for their students. Do we want to encourage students to play it safe, fanatically abide by party lines, stand in fear of having their disciplinary borders breached by outside "contaminants," or do we want to encourage students of philosophy to become future philosophers who are open to appreciate and take seriously multiple voices and who believe that "there is no fundamentalist love of empire in honest love of wisdom?"<sup>39</sup> It is my sense that students of philosophy should be encouraged to cultivate philosophical "identities rooted in understandings of themselves and their relations to others that increase their ability to be responsible participants in inquiry."<sup>40</sup> This suggestion admits of fallibilism. While intended to be persuasive, it does not pretend to *police*; it is not

a question of possessing absolute truth but encouraging a sense of responsibility.

In an effort to keep plural philosophical voices alive within my introductory philosophy courses, I expressly make it a point to emphasize the specifically *Western* and *white male* philosophical works that will be explored. While it is true that introductory philosophy courses are typically introduced to students through various philosophical works written by “dead white men,” it is not enough to note that they are *dead* white men. I point out to my students, the majority of whom are white, that philosophy is still dominated by white men and that most of these white men engage in dialogical exchanges with other white men. My larger aim is to instill a sense of uneasiness among my students. I do this by also pointing out that many of these same white men advanced arguments to the effect that white women were incapable of doing philosophy. After pointing this out, I often receive a heightened look of interest from my white female students. At times, I challenge all of the students to provide the name of a single (dead or alive) white female philosopher. The silence is typically deafening. I also make a point of stating that while we will explore the works of the specifically *Western* philosophical tradition, there are non-*Western* philosophical traditions that are equally significant. In this way, I make the point that Descartes, for example, inhabited a conceptual world where so-called universal, generic, self-evident philosophical problems were not shared by those living in Africa in 1619. The objective is to make broad connections between geography, experience, and a particular philosophical ethos. My aim is to get students to think about the possibility that *Western* philosophy embodies a form of philosophical chauvinism, a form of myopia that often fails to see beyond its own historical assumptions. Later in the course, I typically introduce various philosophical themes neglected within introductory courses in philosophy. For example, I turn to those experiential and existential points of embarkation from which African American/Africana philosophical voices evolve. During the transition, I get the sense that my students feel as if we have just made a significant leap from philosophy “proper” to this other, nonphilosophical and messy area called race. *Naming* is a powerful tool. I make it clear to them that *whiteness* is inextricably linked to the invisible normative core of modernity and that race was always already present as an institutional and material force during this period. I make it clear that many of the so-called major Anglo-American and European contributors to *Western* philosophy, like the “founding fathers” of America, were white males, steeped in white political and institutional power,

whose philosophical livelihood was often at the expense of those bodies that were Black and deemed subhuman.

This way of teaching philosophy, particularly to white undergraduates, creates trouble for them.<sup>41</sup> It is a form of troublingmaking that is designed to get them to engage in practices of intellectual freedom, to encourage them to de-mask their felt sense of superiority and risk the possibility of radically rethinking *what* and *how* they have been taught. If I am successful, they get a sense of themselves as deeply historical and contingent, and they begin to see themselves partly as the product and confluence of powerful norms and metaphors mobilized for their comfort and privilege, and begin to see that the determination of knowledge and the acquisition of knowledge are dynamic processes. As for philosophy, they come to appreciate the perspective that philosophizing is inextricably linked to those problems and conundrums that have been historically inherited and that the determination of the nature of a philosophical problem is not given a priori; rather, it is tied to and evolves out of a lived historical tradition. And *Western* philosophy is specifically understood as always already situated within a historical context of relevance, interests, purposes, and normative aims. It is within a lived context of concern that philosophical thought evolves and takes shape. Within this context, the questions “Whose knowledge?” and “Which tradition?” presuppose a nonhegemonic, nonuniversal conception of all philosophizing. This understanding contributes to the formation of the important sensibility that I referenced earlier, that is, where acting objectively (responsibly) necessitates understanding oneself and one’s links with others, for the purpose of making reasoned and reasonable judgments about how to act in response to the needs of others, their desires, and interests. This approach, as I have argued, is diametrically opposed to the arrogant perceptual proclivities of the oracle philosophical voice that grasps “at the confirmation of its supremacy through defeating or imposing its existence on others.”<sup>42</sup>

This text was conceived in the spirit of what María Lugones refers to as world traveling.<sup>43</sup> The concept here is used to denote the sense in which the various multiple philosophical voices within this text constitute spaces of philosophical invitation to those who are willing to travel (nonarrogantly) to different sites of critical philosophical constellations of meaning construction. The text is for those who are willing to explore different ideas regarding philosophical identity, particularly identity questions that are not captured by traditional white male constructions of what it means to be a self, to know, to be; to explore how various philosophical spaces are shaped through liberation discourses, how radically



different philosophical agendas are shaped through the existential and experientially informed praxes of different groups, how indigeneity mediates what is deemed philosophically relevant, how the revision of heteronormative knowledge is linked to liberation efforts on the part of those who are deemed "outsiders"; and to explore the relationship between issues of ethnicity, group formation, historical context and canonicity, issues of philosophical knowledge production vis-à-vis the lens of race and gender. Each of these spaces continues to grapple with complex issues of its own constructive and reconstructive philosophical histories, conceptual frames of reference, philosophical identity, aims, assumptions, historicity, and tradition and canonical formation, within institutional contexts that are agonistic and hostile.

This text serves both a pedagogical and a discursive function. Pedagogically, it is an effective ready-to-hand text that will provide scholars and students with a collection of multiple philosophical voices and perspectives that will expose them to important philosophical problematics, traditions, and concerns that are still underrepresented within the institutional confines of philosophy. The text is also designed to broaden my own sense of philosophical formation in terms of what it means to identify with a particular philosophical "we," a critical collective that is not stultified through arrogant perception. This is linked to the discursive importance of the text. The text functions as a particular challenge to the agonistic philosopher-traveler qua conqueror and imperialist.<sup>44</sup> The text, as I have suggested, is invitational; it does not attempt to exclude but invites transactional dialogue, critical imagination, and the desire to travel, to enter those spaces and discursive worlds where the love of wisdom gets inflected through its lived embodiment.

## Notes

1. See George Yancy, "Paul Weiss: Addressing Persistent Root Questions until the Very End," *Review of Metaphysics* 56, no. 1 (September 2002): 123–55.

2. Nancy Tuana notes that feminist philosophical thought is Western philosophy's most recent tradition (see her chapter within this text). While locating feminist philosophy within the context of Western philosophy, however, she points out that feminist philosophy moves from the core assumption that gender is a significant "lens for philosophical analysis that transforms both the content and at times even the methods of philosophical research." The point here is that feminist philosophy, at least within its specifically *Western* instantiation, is still critical of the formation of the oracle, characterologically, white male hegemonic philosophical voice.

3. Lisa Heldke, "On Being a Responsible Traitor, *A Primer*," in *Daring to Be Good: Essays in Feminist Ethico-Politics*, ed. Bar-Anni Bar On and Ann Ferguson (New York: Routledge, 1998), 96.

4. For an intriguing discussion of the masculine implications of the "philosophical we," see Naomi Scheman's *Engenderings: Constructions of Knowledge, Authority, and Privilege* (New York: Routledge, 1993), esp. 1–8.

5. Drucilla Cornell, *The Philosophy of the Limit* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 35.

6. Heldke, "On Being a Responsible Traitor," 87.

7. David Hunne, "Of National Characters," in *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader*, ed. Emmanuel Eze (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997), 33.

8. Immanuel Kant, "On National Characteristics," in *Race and the Enlightenment*, 57.

9. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "Geographical Basis of World History," in *Race and the Enlightenment*, 127.

10. Beverly Clack, *Misogyny in the Western Philosophical Tradition: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 1.

11. Clack, *Misogyny in the Western Philosophical Tradition*, 148.

12. Linda Martin Alcoff, "Of Philosophy and Guerilla Wars," in *The Philosopher: Personal Reflections on Life in Philosophy*, ed. George Yancy (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 185.

13. George Yancy, "Interview with Adrian Piper," in *African American Philosophers, 17 Conversations* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 59.

14. Elizabeth V. Spelman, "Theories of Race and Gender: The Erasure of Black Women," *Quest: A Feminist Quarterly* 5, no. 4 1982: 39.

15. Anita Allen, personal correspondence, November, 25, 2006.

16. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lann Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 119–20.

17. Of course, it is important to note that American philosophy in the form of pragmatism was itself insistent upon fallibilism and the significance of the social situatedness and broadly contextual nature of our philosophical claims and various knowledge productions.

18. Yancy, "Interview with Adrian Piper," 59.

19. I would like to thank philosopher Fred Evans for how he has developed the concept of "oracle," specifically its discursive, political, and philosophical importance. See, for example, the characterization of "oracle" in his articles, "Multi-Voiced Society: Philosophical Nuances on Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*," *Florida Journal of International Law* 16, no. 3 (2004): 727–41, and "Voices of Chapas: The Zapatistas, Bakhtin, and Human Rights," *Philosophy Today* 42 (2000): 196–210.

20. V. F. Cordova, "Native American Philosopher," *American Philosophical Association Newsletter on American Indians in Philosophy*, no. 2 (Spring 2001): 5.

21. Cornell, *Philosophy of the Limit*, 24.

22. María Lugones, "Playfulness, 'World'-Travelling, and Loving Perception," in *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1990), 402.
23. John P. Pittman, "Introduction," in *African-American Perspectives and Philosophical Traditions*, ed. John P. Pittman (New York: Routledge, 1997), 7.
24. Philosopher Shannon Sullivan employs this reasoning effectively through her discussion of multicultural pluralism and the power of whiteness to maintain hegemony precisely through its call for greater diversity. See her book, *Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 126.
25. John J. Stuhr, *Genealogical Pragmatism: Philosophy, Experience, and Community* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 80.
26. Sullivan, *Revealing Whiteness*, 128.
27. Lugones makes it clear that she gets this term from philosopher Marilyn Frye, "Playfulness, 'World'-Travelling, and Loving Perception," 390.
28. In a personal correspondence (January 5, 2007), John Lachs provides the insight that while he suspects that some such voices were/are arrogant indeed, other such voices simply live in ignorance and "mean" no harm. They may have caused harm, but more than a few of them shrink back in horror when this is pointed out to them.
29. Lugones, "Playfulness, 'World'-Travelling, and Loving Perception," 395–96.
30. Stuhr, *Genealogical Pragmatism*, 49.
31. Lucius Outlaw Jr., "African, African American, Africana Philosophy," in *African-American Perspectives and Philosophical Traditions*, ed. John P. Pittman (New York: Routledge, 1997), 73.
32. Lewis Gordon, *Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 4.
33. Gordon, *Existence in Black*, 4.
34. Outlaw, "African, African American, Africana Philosophy," 84.
35. Outlaw, "African, African American, Africana Philosophy," 84.
36. Outlaw, "African, African American, Africana Philosophy," 84.
37. Lucius T. Outlaw Jr., *On Race and Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 73.
38. bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 85.
39. Stuhr, *Genealogical Pragmatism*, 84.
40. Heldke, "On Being a Responsible Traitor," 90.
41. When teaching primary texts of Hume, Kant, and Hegel on the subject of race, I have had philosophy graduate students requestion and reassess previous methodological approaches to their texts. Indeed, I have had some graduate students tell me that they feel cheated as a result of having not been taught what these seminal thinkers thought about people of African descent and women, for example.
42. Paget Henry, "Whiteness and Africana Phenomenology," in *What White Looks Like: African American Philosophers on the Whiteness Question*, ed. George Yancy (New York: Routledge, 2004), 208.
43. Lugones, "Playfulness, 'World'-Travelling, and Loving Perception," 395–96.
44. Lugones, "Playfulness, 'World'-Travelling, and Loving Perception," 400.