

## INTRODUCTION

### INAPPROPRIATE PHILOSOPHICAL SUBJECTS?

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George Yancy

I found that it was extremely important to legitimate the production of philosophical knowledge in sites that are not normally considered the philosophical sites.

—Angela Davis

It is difficult to hate people whose culture is understood, but easy to hate people who are imagined to embody a label that means “inferior” or “dangerous.”

—Naomi Zack

The vision for *Reframing the Practice of Philosophy: Bodies of Color, Bodies of Knowledge* emerged from a conversation with Jorge J. E. Gracia. We discussed the paucity of African Americans and Latinos/as in the field of philosophy in the United States despite the fact that the twenty-first century had arrived. Our goal was to create a critical space where both groups would come together to discuss critically a collectively important defining theme, a common problem—our marginalization within the profession of philosophy, which is one of those “inappropriate” philosophical subjects. We conceived that this critical cadre would come together in the form of a session at one of the American Philosophical Association (APA) meetings. The idea was exciting and the fruitful possibilities endless.

As we continued to think about this, I thought that I would also edit a text that brought together African American and Latino/a philosophical voices. Initially, I thought that the text principally would reflect the concern that Jorge and I had contemplated with respect to the APA session—the concern regarding such appallingly low numbers of African Americans and

Latinos/as in the field of philosophy. The book would function as a textual site that raised critical questions about the status of African Americans and Latinos/as in the predominately *white* and *male* field of philosophy. The idea was to locate and interrogate ways in which the profession of philosophy actually militates against the presence of these two groups. After thinking through the project with greater conceptual precision, however, it grew into its current form.

The text indeed does succeed in bringing together African American and Latino/a philosophers within a single text. Yet, the critical and conceptually complex and diverse yield was unexpected. In this sense, the project itself is truly dynamic. The attempt to explore and explicate the lack of African Americans and Latinos/as in the field of philosophy actually resulted in a much broader and comprehensive text that uncovered complex and multifaceted issues such as alienation, institutional prejudices, insidious racism, canonical exclusion, linguistic exclusion, nonrecognition, disrespect, white hegemony and power, discursive silencing, philosophical territorial arrogance, and indignation. In short, what emerged was a powerful and multilayered exposure—by these two collective critical philosophical voices—of the implicit and explicit ideologically and philosophically myopic exclusionary practices that shape and inform contemporary philosophy as practiced in North America.

I began to see just how important the text had become beyond the scope of low numbers, particularly in terms of the text's forward-looking dimensions. The text constitutes an important site—a textual balm of sorts—for blacks and Latinos/as currently pursuing degrees in philosophy and who, as a result, may feel isolated, “out of place,” and marginalized. Moreover, the text speaks to future philosophers of color who might need confirmation of their sanity, a collective voice that says, “We also know your pain, your blues.” Yet, it is a text that encourages—valorizes—the importance of “talking back.” As bell hooks writes, “It is that act of speech, of ‘talking back,’ that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject—the liberated voice.”<sup>1</sup>

As the text continued to take shape, what also began to emerge was a parallel between many of the issues that black and Latino/a bodies experience within the everyday world of social perception as linked to pervasive *de facto* racism, and the refined and intellectually highfalutin world of professional philosophy. This confirmed what I had always thought to be the case. Philosophical academic spaces are, in so many ways, continuous with everyday, politically invested, racially grounded, prejudicial, social spaces. Such normative (white) academic spaces are shot through with much of the same racist toxicity that configures black and brown bodies as outside the normative (white) Demos. Blacks and Latinos/as are seen/depicted as

possessing an “essential” (noncontingent) tendency toward “laziness, drug abuse and dealing, poor linguistic skills, unreliability, and so on.”<sup>2</sup>

White-dominated intellectual spaces permeate with such stereotypical perceptions. In the halls of academia, black and Latinos/as continue to be made to feel like outsiders, as unwanted, as unfit, unprotected. They are deemed lazy and unreliable as agents of knowledge production. So, black and Latinos/as traverse both academic and nonacademic social spaces where the white gaze continues to operate, to deform, and to depict them/us in degrading ways, perhaps as “niggers” and “spics”/“wetbacks,” as exotic bodies fit for “different” work, but *not* philosophical work. As Linda Alcoff relates, “As a new assistant professor, I was loudly called a ‘bush’ in front of graduate students by a senior colleague, and my complaints to the chair seemed to have no effect on his subsequent regular editorial comments.”<sup>3</sup> Anita Allen relates how her white dissertation advisor, philosopher Richard Brandt, positioned her as a maid, a stereotyped mammy figure. According to Allen, after tilting her face up to his, he said, “Anita, you look just like a maid my family once had.”<sup>4</sup> In 1981, Allen, while in Washington, DC, also relates how she was stopped by white police officers as she walked alongside of a white male philosopher named Harold Hodes. She says that “they suspected we were prostitute and John! They forced me to show identification and asked me where I worked.”<sup>5</sup>

Within this context, the image of black and Latina women as sexual objects and sexual workers abound. In the white imaginary, African Americans and Latinos/as are stereotyped as dangerous dysfunctional criminals on a par with our so-called dysfunctional and criminal hoods and barrios—places that many of us affectionately call home, places where many of our loved ones continue to live. As Ofelia Schutte notes, “Many of us [both blacks and Latinos/as] are part of nonacademic communities where the ‘we’ includes people who are oppressed and/or discriminated against on a daily basis.”<sup>6</sup> Hence, blacks and Latinos/as often experience nonacademic and academic spaces as a distinction without a difference. Writing of his identity as a Latino faculty member in philosophy, Eduardo Mendieta discloses, “I have suffered racism, both overt and covert, tolerably subtle and snarlingly blatant.”<sup>7</sup>

It is important to note that it is not my aim to reinscribe a black–white binary, where anti-Latino/a forms of racism are subsumed under anti-black racism, where racism shown toward Latinos/as is the same as racism shown toward blacks. Such a view would only further the logic of the black–white binary, grouping Latinos/as on the black side, as it were, and would fail to give critical attention to the *different* (while certainly overlapping) ways in which black and Latino/a bodies experience white racism, cultural exclusion,

philosophical exclusion, and so on. Within the context of this introductory framing, I only wish to create a space for intersubjective recognition of overlapping configurations of alienation, marginalization, and caricature experienced by Black and Latino/a philosophers vis-à-vis racist normative assumptions and circuits of desire that are operative within white hegemonic philosophical spaces.<sup>8</sup>

The voices within *Reframing the Practice of Philosophy: Bodies of Color, Bodies of Knowledge* are multiple; they provide clarity and unearth deep layers of disciplinary hegemony, sites of crisis, and inspiration. For example, one layer of disciplinary hegemony is revealed through interrogating certain assumptions regarding canon formation and biases against certain languages. Spanish, for example, often is scorned. Joe R. Feagin notes, “Mocking Spanish involves whites, frequently in the middle and upper classes, creating derisive terms like ‘no problema,’ ‘el cheapo,’ ‘watcho your backo,’ and ‘hasty banana,’ as well as phrases like ‘numero uno’ and ‘no way, José.’ Such mock Spanish by white English speakers generates, overtly or subtly, a negative view of Spanish, those who speak it, and their culture.”<sup>9</sup> Such biases that stipulate certain languages as *the only* legitimate media for philosophical expression are revealed as sites governed by raced (white) conceptions of linguistic intelligibility. Elizabeth Millán argues that such forms of exclusion result in the deformation of the spirits of those *who* exclude. Part of what constitutes such exclusions, according to her, include “historical myopia, an exclusionary gaze, and rigidly prohibitive borders for a field that should be ever striving to expand and grow.”<sup>10</sup>

Many of the voices critically deploy autobiography as a way of articulating the *lived* interiority of what it means to be black and Latino/a within the field of philosophy. Alcoff argues that “Latinas in philosophy often live without the sort of cultural and social recognition that would provide an uptake or confirmation of our interior lives.”<sup>11</sup> As a black woman, Donna-Dale Marcano reveals how she walks into introductory philosophy courses and how young white boys in those spaces take up the role of philosopher with ease vis-à-vis the complicated way in which she takes up that role. Drawing from black women’s standpoint epistemology, she argues that philosophy has failed black women, and, I argue, other women of color as well, because they are situated vis-à-vis gender and race and various ostracized communities.<sup>12</sup> Oscar R. Martí notes that “Everyone who works in an ‘ethnic’ philosophy—Black, Chicano, Latin American, and so forth—is familiar with the blank stares or dismissive smiles from colleagues when we talk about our fields.”<sup>13</sup> Martí captures what it no doubt feels like to be a Latina/o philosopher and to do Latin American philosophy in the following expression—illegal alien worker. Nelson Maldonado-Torres found it necessary to do philosophy *elsewhere* as he faced forms of epistemic exclusion from

“the sacred space of Euro-versal reason.”<sup>14</sup> Charles Mills suggests what he calls *conceptual* tokenization in the profession of philosophy. It is a process “where a black [and I would add a Latino/a] perspective is included, but in a ghettoized way that makes no difference to the overall discursive logic of the discipline, or subsection of the discipline, in question: the framing assumptions, dominant narratives, prototypical scenarios.”<sup>15</sup> So, even as we gesticulate, voice, write, publish important articles and monographs, and physically move into historically white academic spaces, we remain on the margins. We might be physically present, but still epistemological outsiders. Gregory Fernando Pappas is succinct, “Hispanic philosophers suffer from marginalization. I have experienced this in my own career and in the lives of the few Hispanic graduate students that I have directed.”<sup>16</sup>

What became clear is that for both groups the color line continues to thrive within philosophical spaces. And even as Black and Latino/a bodies attempt to make their presence felt and to usher in different philosophical voices, traditions, epistemic assumptions, it is important to remain cognizant of John McClendon’s warning that the mere inclusion of blacks or Latinos/as into philosophical spaces, say, philosophy departments, sessions at the APA, editorial boards, and organizational positions, does not necessarily create a shift in *power*. Hence, if inclusion “does not change the balance of power relationship central to white supremacist oppression then the Color Line remains intact despite the occasional appearance that the line had been broken by the entrance of individuals into white academic [spaces] organizations.”<sup>17</sup>

*Reframing the Practice of Philosophy: Bodies of Color, Bodies of Knowledge* is an eye opener. The idea of “reframing” suggests the sense in which one steps back and takes another look, realizing that the current frame excludes all that does not fit within the demarcated limits of that frame. In fact, that which is outside the frame is constituted as that which is unintelligible and ersatz. This form of framing actually deforms, delimits, and truncates the very power of philosophical imaginings. To reframe the current practices of philosophy, then, functions to reveal the limits of its current practices, its current assumptions, its current conceptual allegiances, and its current self-images. The aim is to expand the hermeneutic horizons of what is possible, philosophically. The text challenges fundamental normative assumptions about philosophy, *doing* philosophy, *coming* to philosophy, and *staying* in philosophy. The voices within the text speak to various gate-keeping assumptions and practices that actually thwart the love of wisdom, diminish the capacity to “world travel” and to be critically self-reflexive.

I suspect that many white readers (philosophers or not) are not familiar with the ways in which philosophers of color face their “professional dilemmas.”<sup>18</sup> I have attempted, with varying degrees of success, to get my white

philosophy graduate students to grapple with the ways in which philosophers of color face various professional and personal challenges and dilemmas by encouraging the former to think about exactly why they do philosophy, why they desire to do philosophy, and how they see themselves within the overall context of philosophy as a site of various critical discourses, professional practices, values, assumptions, and worldviews. I often begin by asking them to discuss openly their philosophical interests. Some are very clear and specific about what they want to do, how they desire to flesh out some particular philosophical issue. Others are somewhat inchoate and often have a rather broad range of philosophical interests. Nevertheless, they usually respond without much hesitation. I then request that they relate their philosophical interests to their identities. I ask, "So, how do your philosophical interests relate to how *you* understand who you are, how you see yourself, the person that you take yourself to be?" From the appearance of scrunched eyebrows I assume that the question is not often asked of them or considered by them. I find myself looking for any response, no matter how vague, that will provide me with a sense of how they understand their identities vis-à-vis their philosophical concerns. Perhaps they think that I mean for them to reveal some personal idiosyncrasy, some quirk. And although I do not rule this out, I am more interested in how such specific identity markers as race, gender, and sex inform, mediate, shape, and encourage their philosophical concerns.

As a way of getting them started, I begin by openly exploring significant links between how *I* am raced (as black) and what *I* do in philosophy, the philosophical issues that *I* think are important, the philosophical issues about which *I* write, and the philosophical issues about which *I* have a passion. Of course, this does not mean that absolutely *everything* that I find of value philosophically is related to how I have been raced and how I understand myself as raced. And although I have argued elsewhere<sup>19</sup> for the important dynamics between philosophical reflection, on the one hand, and doing philosophy from a specific *positional here*, on the other hand, and how philosophy is not something done from nowhere, there is no attempt to maintain that *all* that is of philosophical importance must be linked to one's raced/ethnicized and gendered identities. After all, our identities are more complex than our specific raced/ethnicized and gendered identities. Yet, I am critical of those who argue that our raced/ethnicized and gendered identities have entirely no connection to our philosophical intuitions, sensibilities, and worldviews. Indeed, I argue that many of our philosophical sensibilities are precisely and fundamentally linked to such sites of identity.

I suspect that many of my white students are seduced by the idea that they can rise above such identity designations because such markers are believed to have no purchase on their "real" selves.<sup>20</sup> The invocation of an autonomous liberal self—a "nontribal" self, one that is cosmopolitan—within

the dynamic context of race suggests forms of obfuscation and bad faith. As *white* graduate students studying philosophy, the social world of philosophy will typically open up differently to them than for persons of color studying philosophy. As white, as socially located, my students' (white) *visual* bodies signify a multiplicity of meanings that are always already stacked against the *visual* bodies (and the *audible* voices—think about Spanish accents and the so-called Negro dialect) of persons of color. If white students move and have their being within predominantly white philosophical spaces where there are social interactions through their (white) visible identities that work “to organize the social world's responses to and interpretations of [their] behavior, this is surely what it means to be [them], this is [their own-ness].”<sup>21</sup>

After I have explored how I understand the connection between my black embodied existence *and* my own philosophical passions and concerns, my students begin to appreciate, even if at times vaguely, what is at stake meta-philosophically. Questions about their own whiteness begin to emerge. I ask, “So, how do you think that *your* whiteness relates to *your* philosophical passions?” Then again, it is the *problem*, the *conceptual conundrum*, which really matters—so, one might claim. It is about attempting to gain intellectual clarity about some philosophical issue, to make a contribution to philosophical perennial problems that we “all” face, problems that are uppermost for “all” epistemic subjects. There often is the hidden presumption that the concerns that they deem philosophically worthy are universal concerns, the intelligibility and meaningfulness of which are supposed to be given as such. In other words, my sense is that many of my white students understand the importance of certain philosophical problems and the practice of philosophy itself as disconnected from *their* raced, gendered, and sexed embodied selves. Hence, there is no real appreciation for interrogating various complex markers of identity vis-à-vis how certain philosophical problems become valorized *by them* and of significance *to them*.

I often have shared with my white students what it is like to move in and out of spaces at APA conferences.<sup>22</sup> I share with them how alienating this experience can be for someone of color—in my case, black—within such monochromatic (white) spaces, how it feels, existentially, to be an “inappropriate” subject situated within a sea of white faces. Some look puzzled. Others look with new insight. None of them, however, have experienced this feeling of alienation, a reality, I might say, that makes *my* experiences stand out, even more hyperbolically, as simply anomalous and marginal, something of no real importance. Often, there doesn't appear to be any shared points of meaning. Alcoff also has expressed this sense of alienation. She notes, “Neither my general lived experience, nor my reference points in argumentation, nor my routine affective responses to events, nor my philosophical intuitions are shared with most people in my immediate milieu.”<sup>23</sup>

African American philosopher Jacqueline Scott also expresses a sense of fragmentation, how philosophy militates against her identity. For Scott, “The discipline [of philosophy] in which I house myself does not want all of me to settle in and fully join the community.”<sup>24</sup> Scott finds, as with Alcoff, that the complexity of her identity, with all of its rich epistemic importance, is placed under erasure within academic spaces governed by white normative frames of reference. As black, as Latina, from the perspectives of many white gatekeepers, these women did not fail (through their own acts of agency) to be “appropriate” subjects fit for philosophy; rather, they were never fit to be “appropriate” subjects for philosophy in the first place. The indictment of their philosophical competence was not *a posteriori*, but *a priori*.

I encourage my white students to think about the fact that so many philosophers of color feel this incredible sense of alienation. I also encourage them to interrogate how the *absence* of this feeling of alienation speaks to their lives, their philosophical identities, how they see themselves, and how they are positioned by various assumptions that shape the professional field of philosophy itself. There is often silence. Typically, someone will say, perhaps fueled with some nervous hesitancy and self-doubt: “Because we’re white?” I reply, “But of course!”

The absence of this feeling of alienation is further teased out. My white students come to recognize that they are the “philosophical (*white*) we.” The history of philosophy—from Plato to Derrida—is a family relationship; one that welcomes them *a priori*. My white students’ feelings of ownership of “genuine” philosophy and “real” philosophical texts is a given. After all, they are *white*. They are thinkers, potential philosophical geniuses. The philosophers who they have seen look like them; the philosophical traditions are populated by *raced* (white) bodies that resemble their own bodies: Plato, Friedrich Nietzsche, Simone de Beauvoir, Michel Foucault, Willard Quine, and Luce Irigaray. Whether analytic or continental, the monochromatic philosophical players remain the same, even as their philosophical orientations differ fundamentally. There is still the fact that white philosophy graduate students’ perceptual expectations (what “real” philosophers look like, what “real” philosophers sound like, and what “real” philosophers smell like) are shaped through the value-laden mobilization of texts, texts that were written by bodies that reflect their own (my students’) *raced* (white) body images. In this way, my students come to cognize themselves as the genuine audience to whom these texts speak and for whom they were written. The presence of epidermal sameness becomes normative and thus invisible; the specific whiteness of the philosophers’ flesh becomes transfigured as *the* universal body. Hence, white bodies become universal bodies, whereas various *raced* epistemic orders and institutional practices that sustain and reinforce the epidermal sameness of these bodies go un-interrogated.



Through critical lines of questioning, through encouraging them to reframe their expectations regarding the “philosophical we,” there are times when the “curtain,” as it were, is removed, although all too infrequently. And although there is no deceptive wizard discovered, there are forces, historical, epistemic, axiological, and racial. The relationship of a few of my white students’ with the canon, with philosophical texts and philosophical figures, begins to shift, radically so. They begin to uncover and nominate complex layers of privilege, power, and hegemony. They begin to uncover how *I* am implicated within these texts. As black, I was never even imagined as a philosophical interlocutor, a discussant, part of the audience, part of the conversation. Often through the *particularization* of my absence, the *particularization* of their presence is revealed. Hence, their white privilege vis-à-vis philosophical texts and the historical stream of white bodies engaged/engaging in philosophical thought and philosophical scholarship becomes all too uncomfortably visible. As Peggy McIntosh would no doubt concur, my white students can be sure that they will be given *philosophical* “curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.”<sup>25</sup> They also can remain oblivious to the philosophical ideas embedded in “the language and customs of persons of color who constitute the world’s majority without feeling in [their] culture penalty for such oblivion.”<sup>26</sup>

It is unsettling to read a text, to engage it, to feel its texture, its spine, and yet to realize that such a text—say, Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*—wasn’t written for your eyes, but written on the assumption that you were not one of its “appropriate” subjects, *could not* have been one of its “appropriate” subjects/readers. As I have emphasized, my white students have always already been “appropriate” subjects. Even my white female students are not “black from head to toe”<sup>27</sup>—clear proof that what they say and think have some level of epistemic credibility. Alexis Shotwell argues that it is important not to slide from “women in philosophy to women and minorities in philosophy.”<sup>28</sup> It creates a form of elision that fails to take into consideration the differential negative implications of specific processes of racialization on people of color vis-à-vis philosophy. According to Shotwell, “Failing to attend to the real differences between white women, racialized women, racialized men, and other people who fall into the category of the philosophical minority, replicates implicitly the effects of more explicit decisions to focus attention on winning a place at the table for white women in philosophy.”<sup>29</sup>

Despite what my white students might think, what metaphors might govern their self-understanding, they are not abstract minds who simply carve out their philosophical identities *ex nihilo*. The simple act, one that is mundane, but not trivial, of a white hand reaching for a philosophical text is a relationship mediated by history, sanctioned by a philosophical

anthropology steeped in whiteness as normative. Relaxingly reading Aristotle in some monochromatic (white) philosophy graduate lounge is a complex site of effective history—years of repetition, years of calcified habits mediated by raced norms. In fact, to see a white body reading a philosophical text is *uneventful*. This, after all, is what white bodies do. And even if the white body is *poor*, it is still white and is thus granted a certain presumptive capacity to transcend its economic circumstances. Bodies of color are not believed circumstantially incapacitated, but ontologically so. Historically, white bodies read books with no fear of punishment, unless, of course, they read to blacks. As well-known as this point is, it is important to recall that it was once illegal for black people to read, prohibited by (white) law. Hence, a black hand reaching for *any* book, let alone a philosophical text, is an act referentially linked to America's racist history, to the myth of black inferiority and the reality of white power. Furthermore, from the perspective of this history, and from the presumptions about who can and can't do philosophy (or who should and should not do philosophy), sitting in a philosophy lounge reading Aristotle—as a black or Latina—is a sight to behold, something of a spectacle, something of an oxymoron, an aberration, perhaps even a miracle. Indeed, an *event*.

The majority of my white students resist the implications of their normative whiteness vis-à-vis their engagement with philosophy or they fail (or refuse) to bring their new insights to bear upon other philosophy courses. In this way, they elide their whiteness, lie to themselves, and continue to do philosophy as presumed race-less *thinkers*, pure and simple. Even this move, however, is itself a function of whiteness. Bodies of color, however, cannot elide their appearance within contexts that always already mark them as alien, as outsiders. Bodies of color are marked against a background of unmarked normative white bodies. White bodies move through the pristine halls of academia in the mode of ownership. Philosophy departments, philosophy meetings, and philosophy social gatherings are sites of white bonding, forms of bonding that function as confirmation that one has come to the "right place." The casualness of these mundane situations actually militates against the recognition of various absences—that is, the absence of bodies of color, the absence of philosophical and conceptual points of view informed by the social location of philosophers of color. After all, there is nothing out of place; all that matters has already been framed. As suggested, my white students would rather see these spaces as racially unmarked. It is easy for them to do this because their white bodies have been historically constructed as *just* human bodies. They soon forget about (refuse to know any longer) the ways in which they are constituted by power relations and discursive frames of reference. The *self-knowledge* that they come to construct about themselves as philosophers, how they come to *feel* about the profession

of philosophy, the *ease* with which they enter into the profession, is linked to an overall meta-narrative that forms the backdrop of whites' pursuit of philosophy as *their* exclusive (white) destiny.

Charles Mills notes that when it comes down to it “a lot of philosophy is just white guys jerking off.”<sup>30</sup> Imagine the scene: white guys engaging in forms of self-stimulating discourse, articulations that speak to their experiences, theorizations of philosophical frameworks that speak to their existential predicaments and their normative status as epistemic subjects. The scene is one of group self-pleasuring, philosophical narcissism, and philosophical debauchery. All of this is done publicly and rarely with a hint of shame. This is why it is so important to nominate and to mark sites of white hegemony and white myopia publicly once we come to recognize them. Reframing white bodies engaged in philosophy as public displays of moral indecency—something akin to Mills' imagery—might trigger the recognition that it has always been about “us white folk,” our white intellectual titillation, our white mental ejecta. Perhaps they might come to recognize themselves, as James Baldwin wrote, “as the slightly mad victims of their own brainwashing.”<sup>31</sup> As philosophers of color, we mustn't forget that we are not deemed liberal subjects residing above the markers of racial particularity. To engage in public displays of philosophical self-pleasuring, we may find ourselves in the hands of a white lynch mob, the victims of *castration*—cut off from those (whites) who see themselves as giving birth to a nation that sees us (you) as racially antithetical, abhorrent, and nugatory.

Critically engaging my white students, the aim is *not* to stifle their philosophical growth. On the contrary, my objective is to encourage them to think meta-philosophically, to begin thinking critically about how history, a specifically racist history, impacts their lives, how it impacts what they think is philosophically valuable and also what they fail to think is philosophically valuable, how they have come to think and judge what are “appropriate” philosophical subjects and how they have come to think and judge what are “inappropriate” philosophical subjects. As I have intimated throughout, the notion of “inappropriate”/ “appropriate” philosophical subjects is not simply about subjects qua items to be studied; rather, “inappropriate”/ “appropriate” philosophical subjects raises the very question of personhood. Blacks and Latinos/as continue to fight mightily to protect their sense of personhood, to debunk racist images (illegal, uneducated, loud, lazy, fit for menial labor, inarticulate, exotic, etc.) that demean and dehumanize, and to resist a legal system that disproportionately criminalizes and punishes them. *Reframing the Practice of Philosophy: Bodies of Color, Bodies of Knowledge* is a text that consciously acknowledges the political as profoundly ingrained in the philosophical. Questions of personhood, power, canon formation, identity, marginalization and alienation, the privileging of

certain languages as philosophical over others, whiteness and philosophical normativity, and more, are themes that are raised within this text. The text is an effort to reframe, to rethink certain philosophical assumptions and to show how certain bodies and philosophical traditions have been narrowly and problematically conceived. This book refuses the *imperial* philosophical route, refuses its colonial imaginary, its hegemony, and its misanthropy. The text accomplishes exactly what Jorge J. E. Gracia and I initially discussed and does so much more.

#### SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

*Reframing the Practice of Philosophy: Bodies of Color, Bodies of Knowledge* is divided into five sections. However, they are not pure or strict demarcations, but fundamentally overlap in terms of capturing the mutually reinforcing multidimensionality of philosophical themes, concerns, and insights of African American and Latino/a philosophers.

#### I. Colonization/Decolonization: Philosophy and Canon Formation

Linda Martín Alcoff opens this section with an insightful exploration of the dynamics of alienation and marginalization and the impact of these on Latino/a philosophers vis-à-vis their hermeneutic horizons. Alcoff contextualizes the problem of alienation against the backdrop of a more global disrespect for Latin America and the alarming conditions that Latinos/as face in the United States. She rightfully calls into question the idea that de-alienation is to be purchased through assimilation. She also recognizes that hegemonic frameworks, those that often demand assimilation, also suffer from foreclosing other philosophical voices. Through the work of Ofeilia Schutte, Alcoff shows that “otherness” is not the only problem facing Latinos/as, but that cultural subordination compounds the problem. Alcoff suggests that integration ought to be a valorized goal, but not at the expense of Latino/a self-erasure.

Charles W. Mills opens his chapter on a somewhat pessimistic note regarding the influence of Africana philosophy within the profession of philosophy, its assumptions and aims. Deploying his own personal journey through philosophy as an important lens, Mills provides keen observations regarding important moments in the progression of Africana philosophy. However, his pessimism is fundamentally linked to the structural hegemony of whiteness within the academy and philosophy’s self-conception. Through a critical and astute analysis of problematic issues around placement, black philosophers employed at top-ranked institutions, questions involving conference presence and publications, and so on, Mills makes the case that

Africana philosophy faces serious long-term marginalization. Drawing on his experiences as the author of the academic bestseller, *The Racial Contract*, Mills argues that the text has had close to zero influence on the way mainstream political philosophy continues to be done. This, among other things, leaves one with a confirmed sense of Mills' pessimism.

Ofelia Schutte's chapter importantly poses the question of Latinos/as in philosophy against the backdrop of the problem of the canon, the issue of "prestige," and the problem of the "we" of philosophy. Speaking in her own critical and wise Latina philosophical voice, Schutte argues against the (white) North American and western European philosophical approaches that refuse to engage in a process of epistemic reciprocity. She critiques the racist and procrustean assumptions that define prestige, assumptions that actually exclude Latino/a philosophical voices. She also insightfully discusses what it is like *not* to feel like the philosophical "we." Schutte ends by critically reflecting on the possibilities of the future of philosophy where the face of the field and its methodologies are more variegated, and where what she calls the "knowledge-regime of Anglocentric androcentricity" effectively loses its power and illusions of a disembodied form of reason.

Jorge J.E. Gracia correctly points out that philosophers are not often drawn to critical questions regarding philosophical canon formation. With the growing number of women and other minorities within the field, however, this question has become a salient one. Gracia raises important questions about canon formation and specifically explores reasons why Latin American philosophy has been generally excluded. He raises many significant concerns regarding the fact that Latin American philosophy is not even part of the philosophy college curriculum in the United States, that there is a paucity of dissertations that explore issues within Latin American philosophy, and the fact that *Jobs for Philosophers*, in the last few years, have had only six job advertisements for philosopher's specializing in Latin American philosophy. When one thinks about the few faculty who are actually trained to teach or direct dissertations in Latin American philosophy, the picture gets gloomier. Gracia goes on to explore and critique reasons why Latin American philosophy has been excluded from the canon. He takes up an important discussion around the issue of tradition and its role vis-à-vis philosophical canons, revealing important implications for Latin American philosophy's exclusion, particularly the fact that the philosophical canon is constituted within "familial" groups linked by practices, that is, traditions. Gracia's chapter both complicates philosophical canon formation vis-à-vis Latin American philosophy and demonstrates various complex factors regarding its inclusion.

Jesús H. Aguilar's chapter explores the possibility of a *distinctive* Latin American philosophy. Aguilar's analytically complex piece shows that such a possibility is by no means simple. He explores an "externalist" approach

to the issue of a distinctive Latin American philosophy and finds it wanting. He then examines an “internalist” approach to the issue, methodically detailing its problems. He concludes the bulk of his chapter by exploring the possibility of using the notion of style as a meta-philosophical category to provide a justification concerning the existence of a Latin American philosophical tradition. He draws the source of this conceptual approach from the way in which the notion of style is employed in the arts and sciences to distinguish different traditions. Aguilar’s chapter places the reader within the fray of some very complex meta-philosophical issues around the existence of a distinctive Latin American philosophy.

## II. Racism, the Academy, and the Practice of Philosophy

John H. McClendon III opens this section with a powerful critique of the profession of philosophy vis-à-vis African Americans in the field. He argues that the present deplorable status of African American philosophers in the profession is a function of how institutionalized racism is intractably tied to power within the academy and the profession. He also explores how the professionalization of philosophy is a class phenomenon rooted in a bourgeois social division of labor. McClendon delineates the specific impact of institutionalized racism through an insightful historical overview of African American philosophers before the 1970s and links this historical overview to the context of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, showing that it is not by happenstance that this link exists, especially within the context of the existence of the racist Color Line.

Eduardo Mendieta powerfully links autobiographical reflections with meta-philosophical reflections. He explores his experiences as a Latin American/Latino philosopher, who is *Mestizo*. He explores the complexity of the fact that he can pass for a swarthy Mediterranean European, or a South East Asian. Yet, he observes that he is not a U.S.-born Latino, pointing out that this duality has been both exploited and used against him. Mendieta also discusses his experiences in the profession in the role of a philosophy professor, who, like the ubiquitous Mexican, doubles as a race, Latin Americanist, continentalist, and the like, expert. Given his identity as a Latin American, and Latino, he argues that he fulfills many rolls: diversity hire, affirmative action hire, and ethnic hire. His chapter provides the much needed *internal* exploration of the complexity of being a Latino in the profession of philosophy as practiced in the United States.

Gregory Fernando Pappas explores the very common explanation that Latin American philosophers do not often get “invited or welcomed to the table” because they are Latinos/Latinas and because the “mainstream” in philosophy is white. Pappas recognizes that philosophy in America continues to

be a de facto predominantly white male profession, and recognizes that there are power structures that work against Latin American voices. Although he recognizes the truth in these claims, he worries about the tendency of philosophers to be reductionist regarding the social problems related to the profession of philosophy and Latin American/Hispanic-American philosophers. Hence, Pappas explores how multiple prejudices operate in philosophy, such as *professional* prejudices, *Eurocentric* prejudices, and prejudices in the form of philosophical *methods* and *styles*. Pappas ends his chapter with some important ameliorative suggestions.

Bill Lawson insightfully deploys a linguistic expression, used within African American communities, to speak to the profession of white philosophers/philosophy: "Don't hate the playa, hate the game." Lawson argues that white philosophers who are colleagues, who dislike the accomplishments of minority philosophers and minorities in the academy, more generally, are guilty of "playa hatin'." Instead of questioning the existence of racism in the academy, which Lawson sees as a significant systemic problem within philosophy, white philosophers would rather disparage the abilities of their colleagues of color. Through an analytical discussion of issues around the concept of respect, Lawson unpacks the experience of disparagement as a large part of the academic life of scholars/philosophers of color.

### III. Gender, Ethnicity, and Race

Like other philosophers within this text, Jacqueline Scott opens this section by weaving her personal reflections into larger philosophical and meta-philosophical themes within the profession of philosophy. Scott explores her identity formation as a black, female philosopher in terms of its perils and promises, recognizing that because black, female philosopher is not a ready-made category that one is forced to create and maintain such an identity in the face of both hostility and indifference. She sees this lack of fixity as also holding the promise of creating one's own identity as one sees fit. Drawing from the work of Linda Alcoff among others, Scott contributes to the discourse around making sense of the intersecting identities of black, woman, and philosopher. She concludes by arguing that the creation and embodiment of such a hybrid identity potentially allows for a healthy type of subject formation which in turn could allow for the possibility of creating more vibrant, elastic communities that openly and lovingly reflect the complex identities of their members. She sees this investigation as potentially changing not only the way many in philosophy think about issues such as race, subjectivity, and identity, but changing the philosophers who carry out such investigations.

Donna-Dale Marcano theorizes black women within the context of philosophy through the lens of Black women's lives as raced and sexed,

and as both political and personal. Hence, for Marcano, this leaves black women beyond the universality of whiteness or maleness or “objectivity” within the discipline. Through an insightful analysis of Plato’s *Symposium*, she draws an important parallel between Alcibiades and black women in philosophy. She says that like Alcibiades, black women are “outsiders” to philosophy, especially as they refuse to pursue only the transcendent without the particular, without the physical, and without appearance. Marcano opens up the discussion for an “erotic mode” of engaging philosophy, one that allows for black women to grasp the greatness of philosophy as well as its failures.

Oscar R. Martí also is cognizant of the fact that racialized women philosophers and “ethnic” philosophers are often perceived as abandoning the “noble” philosophical tradition established through the practices and assumptions of white male philosophers. Martí critically explores some of the reasons why “gender and ethnicity philosophers” (his phrase) are deemed ersatz and claimed to be doing “illegitimate” philosophy. For example, he critically and insightfully engages such presumptive claims as “gender and ethnicity philosophers” are opportunistic and ideologically driven, that their arguments are poorly made, that their methods deviate from traditional (“better”) forms of philosophizing, and that their way of doing philosophy violates “good” philosophy.

#### IV. Philosophy and the Geopolitics of Knowledge Production

Nelson Maldonado-Torres opens this section by tracing his identity as a Puerto Rican/U.S. Latino of mixed African descent. He thinks through this identity and explores the discovery that he had to find alternative spaces to satisfy his interests in the field of philosophy. He argues that what he began to find of value in philosophy could only be continued in Religious Studies and Ethnic Studies—two of the fields that many philosophers, as he argues, would consider to be related to a less “genuine” philosophical enterprise. He became interested in modern religious thought and non-Western philosophies and religions, and important questions about the legacy of Western imperial projects and their impact on political life, the academy, and thinking in general. He found that the questions that he valorized as philosophically significant connect with fundamental questions raised by subjects from the Third World and marginalized communities in the First. Philosophy, as he found it, and as it continues to exist in its current constitution could not accommodate questions of liberation, race, and empire. Maldonado-Torres concludes that such shortcomings provide an opportunity to reach out to new associations that help to open up new possibilities for doing work in the discipline, what he sees as characteristic



of the Caribbean Philosophical Association (CPA) where African, Afro-Caribbean, Latin American, Euro-Caribbean, and U.S. scholars meet to discuss, among other things, the decolonization of philosophical reflection by “shifting” of the “geography of reason.”

Lewis Ricardo Gordon takes up the theme of his own identity within the context of shifting geographical and linguistic spaces. He offers insights concerning the arguments that he advanced for the motto (i.e., “Shifting the Geography of Reason”) of the CPA, and also draws attention to the ways in which his own identity underwent/undergoes various shifts. Both Gordon and Maldonado-Torres’ chapters function within the context of larger, transversal connections, philosophical, political, and geographical, especially as both traveled through subaltern regions as a way of meeting other philosophers/thinkers and engaging in South–South dialogues without, as Gordon argues, forming a reactionary relationship with *el Norte*. What Gordon sees as the three dynamics of “subaltern” thought, namely, questions regarding philosophical anthropology, philosophies of freedom, and the meta-critiques of reason, I take to be important discursive and existential sites shared by black, Latino/a philosophers in the United States. Hence, Gordon’s reflections function as an inclusive site, combining insights grounded in terms of his experiences through communities that were not only Afro-Latin American but also Afro-Indigenous Latin American.

## V. Philosophy, Language, and Hegemony

In this last section, George Yancy raises the issue of African American vernacular speech as a neglected topic within the field of African American philosophy in particular and philosophy of language more generally. Yancy argues that black philosophers have not as of yet seriously grappled with the potential meta-philosophical implications embedded within the assumption that African American vernacular speech has the capacity to articulate modes of cognition that are not necessarily captured by so-called Standard American English. This raises significant issues regarding how black English is linked to particular ways of existentially or social ontologically engaging the world. Yancy pulls from the important work of African American linguist Geneva Smitherman to help in framing his argument.

Drawing on the fact that it is no secret that philosophy in the United States is far from inclusive, Elizabeth Millán’s chapter critiques the pernicious exclusionary practice of assuming that only French, German, and English are *the* linguistic sites of philosophical expression, which she argues is the status that they receive in graduate programs where the study of such languages is part of the serious training students undergo to become masters or doctors of philosophy. Millán sees this as a fundamental limitation, one

that assumes that philosophy was born with the Greeks, and reached its culmination in Europe, and then in the United States. Although there are many exclusions made on the way to creating the canon of philosophy in the United States, Millán specifically examines the exclusion of Spanish as a philosophical language. She views the exclusion of Spanish as a philosophical language as resulting in a high cost: the silencing of important philosophical voices from which all of us still have much to learn.

Last but not least, José Medina ends this section and the book. Medina is cognizant of the ways in which Hispanic philosophers lose linguistic capital on the basis of speaking with an accent or if they allow Spanish to impact their discourse within academic settings, specifically within the context of philosophy. Along with this, from his own experiences, he is aware of those who ask questions like: Is there a philosophical tradition in Spanish? The privileging of linguistic sites (say, English, German, and French) is linked to the privileging of philosophical traditions and cultural hegemony. On the way toward locating and examining significant forms of linguistic resistance and subversive negotiations, Medina critiques what he sees as inadequate semantic views, the Monopoly Model and the Free Trade Model. He proposes a Negotiating Model that he argues provides for linguistic interaction without assuming the exclusivity or the universality of linguistic resources. He argues against the constraining and disciplining of diversity and valorizes the importance of linguistic differences and the worldviews that the latter may embody. For Medina, this process of valorization constitutes a site of the proliferation of diversification, and, to use his language, one that is required by justice—one that attempts to heal various omissions and silences.

#### NOTES

1. bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston: South End Press, 1989), 9.

2. Jorge J.E. Gracia, "Race or Ethnicity? An Introduction," in Jorge J.E. Gracia (ed.) *Race Or Ethnicity?: On Black and Latino Identity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 11.

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

4. George Yancy, "Situated Black Women's Voices in/on the Profession of philosophy, in *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, 23, no. 2, (2008): 171.

5. Yancy, "Situated Black Women's Voices in/on the Profession of philosophy," 171.

6. See Schutte's chapter, this volume.

7. See Mendieta's chapter, this volume.

8. For more on the importance of avoiding conflating forms of racism and avoiding the black–white binary, see Linda Alcoff, “Latinos Beyond the Binary,” under articles: <http://www.alcoff.com/>.

9. Joe R. Feagin, *The White Racial Frame: Centuries of Racial Framing and Counter-Framing* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 118–19.

10. See Millán’s chapter, this volume.

11. See Alcoff’s chapter, this volume.

12. See Marcano’s chapter, this volume.

13. See Marti’s chapter, this volume.

14. See Maldonado-Torres’s chapter, this volume.

15. See Mills’ chapter, this volume.

16. See Pappas’ chapter, this volume.

17. See McClendon’s chapter, this volume.

18. See Ofelia Schutte’s chapter, this volume.

19. See George Yancy, “Introduction: Philosophy and the Situated Narrative Self,” in George Yancy (ed.) *The Philosophical I: Personal Reflections on Life in Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002). Also, see George Yancy, “Introduction: No Philosophical Oracle Voices,” in George Yancy (ed.) *Philosophy in Multiple Voices* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

20. Part of this formulation is taken from Linda Alcoff’s work where, within a larger critical discussion about visible identities, agency, resistance, and what it means to be a self, she offers three very insightful responses to her critics. See her “Three Responses,” in *Philosophy Today*, 53, (2009): 63.

21. Alcoff, “Three Responses,” 63.

22. I have written about this in my authored book, *Black Bodies, White Gazes, The Continuing Significance of Race* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), especially in chapter 2.

23. See Alcoff’s chapter, this volume.

24. See Scott’s chapter, this volume.

25. Peggy McIntosh, “White privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women’s Studies,” in Rechar Delgado and Jean Stefancic (eds.) *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 293.

26. McIntosh, “White privilege and Male Privilege,” 294.

27. Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, trans. John T. Goldthwait, 1764; (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 113.

28. Alexis Shotwell, “Appropriate Subjects: Whiteness and the Discipline of Philosophy,” in George Yancy (ed.) *The Center Must Not Hold: White Women Philosophers on the Whiteness of Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 124.

29. Shotwell, “Appropriate Subjects,” 124–25.

30. Charles W. Mills, *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 4.

31. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Random House, 1963/1995), 101.