

Jennifer McWeeny and Ashby Butnor, editors
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Tying together the collection of diverse essays in *Asian and Feminist Philosophies in Dialogue: Liberating Traditions* is a methodology that editors Jennifer McWeeny and Ashby Butnor label "feminist comparative philosophy" (2). The methodology is feminist "insofar as it regards the voices and experiences of women as philosophically significant in a manner that is not sexist or discriminatory, but instead promotes the expression and flourishing of those who have been oppressed due to this social location" (4). It is comparative "insofar as it regards the ideas of more than one disparate tradition of thought as philosophically significant in a manner that respects each tradition's individual integrity and promotes its expression" (4). Taken together, feminist comparative philosophy is "the practice of integrating feminist and non-Western philosophical traditions in innovative ways, while still being mindful of the unique particularity of each, in order to enact a more liberatory world" (3). The last phrase speaks to the notion of performativity that guides the methodology's practical application. As McWeeny and Butnor explain: "An essential principle of feminist comparative methodology is that philosophical works should be assessed both in terms of their explicit content and in terms of the claims that they *perform* within the wider social-political contexts in which they are situated" (2). This review will consider the performative dimension of the collection by exploring the different perspectives each chapter offers on what it means to enact this "more liberatory world."

The collection is divided into five parts (on gender, consciousness-raising, standpoint epistemology, ethical self-cultivation, and transformative discourse), although I will discuss the chapters out of the order in which they appear in the book, beginning with a cluster of contributions that engage feminism from the Western continental tradition. In the second chapter, "On the Transformative Potential of the 'Dark Female Animal' in *Daodejing*," Kyoo Lee explores Daoist imagery surrounding "the spirit of the valley" (*gushin* 谷神) and "the dark female animal" (*xuanpin* 玄牝). She instructs: "Witness a transformative movement in feminist phenomenology" (58). By inquiring not into "the Dao of sex" but into "the sex of Dao," or the "sexuated" and material aspects of Dao (58), Lee draws attention to the palpable force of what the *Daodejing* names as the dark or obscure (*xuan* 玄) source of all existence. As Lee shows, in the long history of interpreters of Dao, some have read *xuanpin* as a kind of primal mother, assigning Dao a sex

based on essentialized gender norms (that is, the female as maternal and nurturing). Others have glossed over the obvious vaginal imagery associated with this dark and mysterious valley or gate from which life emerges and, accordingly, the connection between Daoist emptiness and actual women's wombs. Of course, the allusions to the female body are not denied, but these latter interpreters seem to reject the possibility that Dao is indeed sexed in any way but metaphorically (61–62). Lee opts for neither gender essentialism nor the erasure of gender, instead seeking to articulate the seemingly contradictory sense in which Dao is anatomically sexed as female while simultaneously being the originator of sexual differences (64). In the end, Lee quite brilliantly brings the conversation back around to contemporary phenomenology, asking "is not the mystery of life more interesting, more intricate even, than the finality of death?" (73). On Lee's reading, more sophisticated attention to the sexed Dao provides a step outside of the phallogocentric "thanatological economy" that often marks phenomenological inquiry (71).

In the first chapter, "*Kamma*, No-Self, and Social Construction: The Middle Way between Determinism and Free Will," Hsiao-Lan Hu uses Buddhist teachings on *kamma* (Sk. *karma*) to argue against those who accuse poststructuralist feminism of determinism. As Hu discusses, the Buddha of the Pāli canon rejects a deterministic theory of *kamma* but upholds the teaching that past events do shape present circumstances. Hence, improving present circumstances involves not simply atoning for past *kamma* but modifying one's own habitual behaviors that reinforce persisting negative conditions (40–41). According to the doctrine of no-self, the volitional aggregate, which is part of the complex construction conventionally termed "self," is both a generator of *kamma* and an expression of this freedom a person has to modify behaviors and affect present conditions (42–43). Hu draws an analogy with poststructuralist feminism, including the work of Judith Butler: "The classical Buddhist teaching of no-self and poststructuralist theory of subject formation, though temporally and spatially apart, both point to the constructedness of individuals and the role that repeated actions play in the construction" (45). Buddhist teachings, then, give poststructuralist feminism tools for addressing issues of agency and empowerment by reinforcing the idea that the socially constructed and performative self can indeed learn to enact itself in less disempowering ways. Hu comments: "To overcome a problematic habit, one simply has to consciously stop the problematic action in question at every turn" (41). But, of course, this is often easier said than done. Following Hu's lead, future writers might focus on those specific Buddhist practices that make possible the self-discipline necessary to enact concrete changes in ourselves and our world.

For example, in the ninth chapter, "The Embodied Ethical Self: A Japanese and Feminist Account of Nondual Subjectivity," Erin McCarthy issues a forward-looking call for greater attention to practices that might enact an ethics grounded in nondual philosophy: "Imagining the forms of bodymind practice that would cultivate embodied ethical selfhood is work that remains to be done in the future . . . and provides new motivation for comparative feminist philosophy" (221). McCarthy locates this sense of nonduality in both recent Japanese philosophy and feminist theory in areas such as poststructuralism and phenomenology. Philosophers such as Watsuji Tetsurō and Yuasa Yasuo provide an account of nonduality that avoids a totalizing holism or monism by preserving a productive sense of difference. This framework derived from contemporary Japanese philosophy is aligned with feminists such as Luce Irigaray and Elizabeth Grosz, who critique the dualisms—mind and body, male and female, rational and emotional or affective—that tend to mark traditional Western discourses.

Chapters 4, 5, and 10, in many respects, answer McCarthy's call for more attention to practice. In "Mindfulness, *Anātman*, and the Possibility of a Feminist Self-consciousness," Keya Maitra gestures toward debates in analytic philosophy of mind, highlighting a feminist intervention supported with phenomenological, poststructuralist, and Buddhist resources. "The task for a feminist philosopher of mind," as she says, "will be to articulate a self-consciousness that is not purely private, which, I argue, is a necessary step for any robust articulation of feminist consciousness *tout court*" (102). Maitra defines feminist consciousness as "the consciousness that a woman has in being and becoming a feminist" (103), going on to engage work by Sandra Bartkey on this topic. Maitra then compares this to feminist *self*-consciousness, which is a self-critical mode that "refers to the individual feminist's personal engagement with factors of her social reality" (108). Referencing work by Linda Alcoff on feminist subjectivity, Maitra goes in to discuss how such self-consciousness both precedes and makes possible the more general feminist consciousness (108–09). Picking up on Alcoff's critique of essentialism, Maitra asserts that feminist self-consciousness both reflects on and constitutes the very self doing the reflecting. Here Maitra sees Buddhist mindfulness practices as tools for opening up the self to its own constructedness (116–17).

Jennifer McWeeny's chapter, "Liberating Anger, Embodying Knowledge: A Comparative Study of María Lugones and Zen Master Hakuin," also looks to Buddhist practices as resources for developing feminist political consciousness. She focuses on experiences of anger as "ways of knowing" that intervene in dominant epistemological paradigms (124). McWeeny begins with Lugones's notion of a "second-order anger": whereas first-order anger might result from perceptions of injustice, and might demand rectification according to the terms of the "prevailing world of sense," second-order anger reflects a deeper disagreement with the "metaphysical presuppositions" of the prevailing order (125). A key point is that second-order anger does not result from a so-called higher self reflecting on a lower one. Rather, according to the terms of Lugones's discourses on world-traveling, it results from one self reflecting on another within the multiplicity of identity; second-order anger arises through the incommensurability of the worlds that these selves occupy and move between. Hence, second-order anger is "fundamentally epistemological," because it enacts "a shift in perspective" that allows us to "experience objects as contextual and tied to 'worlds' rather than as simply given" (128). Drawing on the basic Buddhist denial of a core "self" grounding the various iterations of constructed selves, McWeeny is able to make a compelling link to Zen Master Hakuin's teachings on anger and liberation. Hakuin chides those who would equate enlightenment with dispassion, instead upholding stories of practitioners who become enlightened after bouts of anger, illness, or injury (130–31). Such disruptive experiences trigger a shift in perspective that reveals the constructed nature of all selves and all worlds, producing a sort of "self-less anger" that enacts liberation from present conditions (133). McWeeny discusses *kōan* study as the Buddhist practice that cultivates this epistemological disruption. As McWeeny concludes, neither "second-order" nor "self-less" angers seek to resolve the incommensurability that produced them; rather they invite "traveling to places of possibility that are without structure and between worlds" (138).

In the tenth chapter, "Dōgen, Feminism, and the Embodied Practice of Care," Ashby Butnor follows up on this epistemological inquiry, with a focus on the ethical and practical dimensions. She begins with an overview of studies of "embodied activity" in Western discourses (224–26).

As she argues, such "embodied, engaged activity is ethically significant" (226). The Zen practice of seated meditation figures as a powerful tool for cultivating what Butnor identifies as "three central elements of this ethical attunement: primary intersubjectivity, empathy, and care" (227). By encouraging attentiveness to present circumstances as well as providing strategies for re-habituating the self toward more liberating ways of being, seated meditation provides training in the embodied "ethical know-how" that Butnor offers as a resource for feminist theory.

Both Butnor's and McWeeny's focuses on epistemological questions tie their contributions to chapters 6 and 7 in the section on standpoint epistemology. In the "What Would Zhuangzi Say to Harding? A Daoist Critique of Feminist Standpoint Epistemology," Xinyan Jiang problematizes the apparent similarities between feminist standpoint epistemology and Daoist writings on the situatedness and fallibility of knowledge. Whereas an early Daoist such as Zhuangzi seems to adopt a sort of perspectivalism (151), a standpoint epistemologist such as Sandra Harding accords feminists a measure of epistemic privilege (156). Jiang argues that, although both Harding and Zhuangzi deny absolute truths, their ideas nonetheless imply some assumed universal values. She concludes by upholding both Zhuangzi's perspectivalism and Harding's standpoint epistemology as critical tools that do not necessarily deny universal truths but rather unmask the unworthy contenders: "To be critical of one's society and improve social conditions requires admitting the existence of both perspectival knowledge and universal truth. To admit the former will enable us to see that many prevailing norms in our society are not universal truths, but mere ideologies to serve the ruling classes" (164). Jiang's chapter invites further work that might consider what universal truths would unite feminist and Daoist agendas regarding social change.

In "'Epistemic Multiculturalism' and Objectivity: Rethinking Vandana Shiva's Ecospirituality," Vrinda Dalmiya examines Shiva's use of *prakriti*, a notion of primordial energy common across numerous Indian religious traditions (for example, Vedanta, Samkhya, Tantra), which Shiva names as a cosmic feminine principle (171). On the one hand, Dalmiya is sympathetic toward critics who hold that Shiva's language of goddesses and nature is politically regressive, encouraging gender essentialism and "neoconservative Hindu fundamentalism" (168). On the other hand, Dalmiya appreciates Shiva's use of *prakriti* as an epistemological tool for mitigating differences between communities of knowers in ways that do not simply privilege rationalism, universalism, and contemporary scientific materialism. She identifies three points in Shiva's work at which *prakriti* intervenes in existing economic conditions: (1) as a vision of metaphysical unity that encourages (or should encourage) better ecological stewardship; (2) as a vision of earth-based living or "rural life" that promotes (or, again, should promote) respect for women's work as creators and nurturers; and (3) as a vision of sustainability that allows us to criticize dominant definitions of economic growth and productivity (173–74). As Dalmiya notes, the first two positions may be readily criticized for encouraging uncritical spiritual holism, gender essentialism, and unwarranted nostalgia for peasant life. However, Dalmiya sees more potential in the third position, which she links to Shiva's standpoint epistemology. In the third position, *prakriti* becomes a tool for expressing the marginalized epistemic standpoints of rural women, especially in conditions of coloniality. Dalmiya expands on this *prakriti*-based intervention in dominant epistemologies by foregrounding the colonial history behind the spread of Western science and its claims to unhindered objectivity. In this context, "Shiva's antisience

rhetoric" (177) does not aim to shield indigenous ways of knowing "from critical investigation, but to open them up for serious discussion" (179).

A final cluster of chapters addresses questions of family and gender roles, especially as these relate to larger sociopolitical institutions. In the third chapter, "Confucian Family-State and Women: A Proposal for Confucian Feminism," Ranjoo Sedou Herr provides ample evidence that Confucianism is not necessarily patriarchal but has indeed been employed toward patriarchal ends throughout its long history. She goes on to argue that contemporary Confucianism, with an eye toward the traditional value of "humaneness" or *ren* (仁), must actively advocate for policies that promote gender equality in terms of equal access to the tools of self-cultivation (91–92). Moreover, they should work toward "policies that support and aid households that raise young and/or adolescent children with institutional and/or financial assistance" (95). This notion of providing care for families and caregivers reappears in the eighth chapter, which is on the topic of care ethics. In "Confucianism Care: A Hybrid Feminist Ethics," Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee criticizes Virginia Held's rejection of the Confucian tradition as a suitable partner for care ethics. Instead, Rosenlee builds on the work of an early proponent of Confucian care ethics, Chenyang Li, to argue that "a Confucian ethics of *ren* is immediately able to resolve two perennial problems of care ethics: the limited application of care-based ethics to strangers and the lack of a structural analysis of political institutions" (188).

The last section in the collection, titled "Transforming Discourse," contains a chapter by Namita Goswami as well as an engaging "Feminist Afterword" by Chela Sandoval. In "De-liberating Traditions: The Female Bodies of Sati and Slavery," Goswami begins by crediting postcolonial theorists such as Gayatri Spivak for calling attention to the imperialist and Eurocentric history behind the dominant picture of the thinking, willing, individual subject. But Goswami also notes that Spivak's critique could benefit from a "comparative methodology" that more explicitly engages differences among various colonized peoples (249). Goswami's own comparison focuses on postcolonial and African American feminisms respectively, and she draws attention to the different statuses of Indian, African, and African-American women vis-à-vis the socioeconomic disparities associated with the North–South divide. This chapter raises the important question of why the "East–West" dynamic continues to so dominate contemporary comparative philosophy. In the interest of enacting the "more liberatory world" mentioned at the outset, feminist comparative philosophy must align itself with, for example, African, Latin American, and indigenous scholarship. It must seek to complicate the cross-cultural philosophical project by addressing issues of race, gender, nationality, and ethnicity as these affect the unequal distribution of cultural power and legitimacy within contemporary academia. Only then will the methodology foster the "comparative, coalitional thinking" that the editors name at the outset as their "express goal" (1). In her afterword, Sandoval provides further perspective on this issue by linking feminist comparative philosophy to third-space politics and the "mode of liberation philosophy" that she calls "wisdom politics" (275).

As a whole, the volume encourages readers to reflect critically on what constitutes a philosophical "methodology." We may easily include analysis, hermeneutics, deconstruction, and the phenomenological method. But what about Confucian meditation techniques for settling the mind before reading, or related Confucian practices for memorizing texts? Several authors in the collection discuss Buddhist mindfulness and kōan study as good practices for feminists, but

we may also investigate to what extent these are good *scholarly methods* for *feminist academics* (for example, in the sense that these practices have operated traditionally in Buddhist monastic educational curricula). The future of feminist comparative philosophy may well involve greater attention to the notion of methodology itself, especially as this is used within academia to uphold some practices and discredit others. All in all, this is an exciting volume: the essays that McWeeny and Butnor have collected contribute to what Sandoval calls a "philosophy uprising" (277), providing foundational studies in feminist comparative philosophy as well as resources for continued interventions at the concrete level of scholarly practices.