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Why Race and Gender Still Matter: An Intersectional Approach
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Why Race and Gender Still Matter is a collection of essays that attempts to use the concept of intersectionality in the service of at least four stated goals: (1) the development of a definition of intersectionality or of an intersectional methodology for philosophical investigation, (2) the application of intersectional methodology to specific practical concerns, (3) changing the discipline of philosophy so as to render it more inclusive of intersectional approaches to philosophy, and (4) improving how the discipline of philosophy treats those who currently exist at the margins. Although the anthology succeeds in gathering together a set of essays loosely structured around the concept of intersectionality, it is less successful at achieving its stated goals. After reading *Why Race and Gender Still Matter*, the reader who hoped to have gained clarity on the definition of intersectionality, or on the methodology of intersectional analysis, or to have been enlightened on the topic of the usefulness of intersectional analysis in philosophy may be disappointed. Similarly, the reader who hoped to have found in the anthology arguments in favor of treating those who currently exist at the margins of the discipline of philosophy more respectfully or more inclusively may be disappointed as well. Finally, it is unclear after reading the book how a collection of essays on the topic of intersectionality can or will, in and of itself, "change the discipline of philosophy" so as to render it more inclusive of intersectional approaches, as the editors suggest. Still, despite not having achieved its stated goals, *Why Race and Gender Still Matter* nevertheless operates successfully as a snapshot of the concept of intersectionality as it is currently being discussed in certain circles in philosophy, and almost inadvertently contains a nugget of wisdom here and there that adds to the conversation on the topic of how intersectional methodology might help us understand and combat oppression.

The body of the book is divided into two parts: one dedicated to theory and one dedicated to praxis. According to the editors' introduction, the five essays in the first part of the book "tend to the conceptual work of expanding and clarifying the definition of intersectionality" and the six

essays in the second half "engage in the activity of applying intersectional analysis" (9,10).

Part I contains five essays: two devoted to grounding the concept of intersectionality in early black feminist thought (Kathryn Gines's "Race Women, Race Men and Early Expressions of Proto-Intersectionality, 1830s-1930s," and Kristin Waters's "Past as Prologue: Intersectional Analysis from the Nineteenth Century to the Twenty-First"), one in which the argument is made that intersectionality is useful for understanding the nature of oppression (Kristie Dotson's "Making Sense: The Multistability of Oppression and the Importance of Intersectionality"), and two expressing skepticism about the usefulness of intersectionality to combat oppression (Anna Carastathis's "Reinvigorating Intersectionality as a Provisional Concept" and Tina Chanter's "'Big Red Sun Blues': Intersectionality, Temporality and the Police Order of Identity Politics").

The essays that ground intersectionality in the history of black feminist thought are illuminating in terms of historical origins but less helpful in terms of expanding and clarifying the definition of intersectionality as a way of approaching philosophical theory or a method of philosophical praxis. Gines's essay, for example, succeeds in identifying a series of points in the history of black feminism and black nationalism where acknowledgment was made on the part of early activists that the experiences of oppression of black women were different from the experiences of oppression of both white women and black men. Rooting her analysis in black feminist thought, Gines defines "proto-intersectionality" as "identifying and combating racism and sexism . . . as systems of oppression that work together and mutually reinforce one another, presenting unique problems for black women who experience both . . ." (14). Although all of this perhaps correctly locates the origins of intersectional thought in black feminist thought, it is unclear what we can do with this information going forward. How does defining proto-intersectionality in this way help us develop a useful definition of intersectionality or a clearly defined intersectional methodology?

Much of Waters's essay simply restates information in the Gines essay, and in this way also does not move the overall goals of the text forward. However, Waters's essay takes the added step of reflecting upon the history she presents, suggesting rather compellingly that based on the history, a "fully fledged" epistemology can be developed. Such an epistemology, for Waters, would combine what she calls "strong intersectionality" (epistemology designed to address and rectify unequal power relations in the creation of knowledge) with a phenomenology of experience. This added level of analysis provides a hint of what might be a key component of a well-developed intersectional methodology, that is, an epistemology grounded in the experiences of the oppressed. How such an epistemology might provide something more (or at least other than) traditional standpoint epistemology is left undeveloped, however.

In the third essay of part I, Kristie Dotson defines intersectionality as "a conceptual tool that issues a methodological demand to identify 'relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations'" (44). Dotson's thesis is simply that intersectionality is useful because it is fluid and open enough to grapple with the fact that axes of oppression intersect. This thesis is probably correct, but, once again, does not tell us anything new about intersectionality itself, nor does it move forward the project of developing an intersectional methodology. Anna Carastathis is concerned about the recent mainstreaming of the concept of intersectionality and about the deleterious effect this may have on the goals and

projects of black feminism, its theoretical home. Her solution is that we should approach intersectionality as a "provisional concept" that "disorients entrenched and essentialist cognitive habits," but not as an effective tool for combating oppression. That task, for Carastathis, "still lies before us" (60-65, 66).

Tina Chanter is skeptical as well about the usefulness of intersectionality. Pointing out that it can operate as a form of identity politics that operates in favor of a police order, Chanter suggests that if we are to achieve the ostensible goals of intersectional analysis (for example, combating the essentializing and otherwise limiting epistemological frameworks for analyzing oppression rooted in Enlightenment thought), it may be necessary to "get beyond" intersectionality (as an abstract ideal) and back into the specific particularities of the individual lives of the oppressed. Chanter poignantly writes,

It is not about striving for an abstract unity, it is about putting out your hand, and reaching across a table, it is, finally about touch, senescence, it is about holding the hand of someone who is suffering, it is about helping them move out of a violent, dangerous and threatening situation, it is about creating safe spaces within this unsafe world, it is about allowing oneself to be held, forging friendships, creating sometimes transient, fragile, fleeting communities, which do not ignore race, gender, class or sexuality, but work through them--with all the ambiguity that the phrase "working through" maintains (85).

Chanter's essay, then, among all of those in part I, does the most philosophical work for an intersectional methodology. Rather than merely identifying the concept's origins or rehashing commonly understood features of it, Chanter casts a critical gaze on the work currently being done in the area and calls us to stop and think about what we're doing. If we want to do the work that intersectional analysis is intended to do, Chanter seems to be saying, we have to take *particularity of experience*--especially the highly particularized experiences of oppression of members of multiple oppressed groups--more seriously than the current intersectional framework will allow. Chanter then takes a stab at doing the added work of offering the beginnings of what a proper positive intersectional methodology might look like: caring and focused attention on the problems of the unique oppressed person (or persons) before us, including, of course, the myriad ways in which various axes of oppression are at work in the person's immediate factual experience. Chanter seems to be saying that such caring and focused attention would include an openness and flexibility that would enable one to truly understand the problems at issue, which is, of course, the first step in trying to help solve them.

Part II contains six essays: one provides an overview of some of the ways in which intersectionality has been used in European feminism (Iveta Jusová's "Continental Feminist Philosophy Meets Intersectionality: Rosi Braidotti's Work"); one demonstrates how intersectional analysis has tools to help dismantle what the authors call "purposeful nonsense" (Melissa M. Kozma and Jeanine Weekes Schroer's "Purposeful Nonsense, Intersectionality and the Mission to Save Black Babies"); one attempts to use intersectional analysis to understand personal identity, specifically transgender identity (Marie Draz's "Transitional Subjects: Gender, Race and the Biopolitics of the Real"); one argues that the black, female body challenges the reality of a black female's sex-gender identity as a woman (Janine Jones's "Caster Semenya: Reasoning Up

Front with Race"); one makes the case that when we combine the denigration of affect in the history of philosophy with the fact that "what established philosophers care about is what counts as philosophy, and what counts as philosophy is what established philosophers care about" (157) what we get is a kind of dangerous cocktail where intellectual and professional stasis is preserved and maintained (Heather Rakes's "Philosophical Happiness and the Relational Production of Philosophical Space"); and the last one argues that "[w]hen knowledge is deemed credible because it is recognized and validated by those with an already privileged view, it is complicit in the harms of epistemic injustice"; it also reminds us that intersectional approaches are preferable for dismantling oppression because "[t]heory construction that avoids the difficult labour of attending to alterity," the author writes, "can reinforce a racist and misogynist culture" (189) (Jennifer Scuro's "Theory Can Heal: Constructing an Ethos of Intervention").

All of the essays in part II substantively engage with the basic premise of intersectional analysis, that is, that an honest attempt to combat oppression must necessarily attend to the complexities of alterity. And in the spirit of intersectional analysis, each of the essays grapples with a unique manifestation of oppression at work in the world, and attempts to address the unique manifestation on its own terms. In this way, there is a level of care and focus (of the kind described by Chanter) at work in each of the essays in part II. To the extent that such an attendance to particularity amounts to the application of a uniquely intersectional methodology, the essays in part II can be said to have achieved the goal of applying intersectional methodology promised to the reader by the editors, but only sort of incidentally, and not as a consequence of having a clear methodological roadmap from which to work from the outset. Despite the lack of a more carefully worked out methodology, however, the essays in part II do provide examples of the kinds of subjects--and in particular, the kinds of oppressions--that intersectional methodology (whatever it may turn out to be) should be uniquely able to capture and address.

A challenge faced by the anthology is the presumption throughout many of the essays that intersectional analysis or methodology is concerned primarily with the intersection of race and gender, rather than with the intersection of the multiple axes of oppression that operate in the lives of those who are members of more than one historically marginalized, oppressed, or subjugated group. Arguably, the primary attraction of intersectional analysis as a prism through which to examine oppression is that it is able to grapple with novel philosophical problems about the formation of personal identity, the efficacy of antidiscrimination laws as conceived under the liberal, legal paradigm, and the ability of traditional modes of rational analysis to grapple responsibly with oppression as it is experienced by the oppressed. It seems important, then, that when intersectionality is invoked or deployed, the reality of the vast array of existent axes of oppression and the unique ways in which these axes can overlap and merge together should remain a key focus of a given project. Unquestionably, the editors certainly hint at the importance of keeping this complexity in mind, but the work would have been improved by more focus on this topic. A different title of the book, for example, might have helped with this task.

Another challenge faced by the book is that much of it is not so much original as performing a kind of recording function. Although many of the essays certainly make the case that oppression is a complex phenomenon that cannot be understood through a single lens, or alternatively that oppression is seldom if ever experienced by the oppressed as in virtue of only one feature of one's factual embodiment, beyond these sorts of claims, little is done--with notable exceptions

here and there--to create or establish a new methodology for intersectional analysis. A more explicit attempt on the part of the editors to locate and catalogue consistent themes from part I would have been helpful in this regard.

The book would have also been improved by the elimination from the introduction of the more ambitious goals of changing the discipline of philosophy so as to render it more inclusive of intersectional approaches to philosophy, and improving how the discipline of philosophy treats those who currently exist at the margins. It is certainly the case that the discipline would be improved by the achievement of these goals, but the link between collecting together and then publishing a series of essays on the topic of intersectionality and the achievement of these goals seems weak at best. Moreover, such ambitions seem to reflect, almost embarrassingly, a failure on the part of the editors to appreciate the severity and complexity of the institutionalized and systemic nature of the oppression and marginalization that has caused these problems. For the uninitiated within the discipline, in other words, that is, for those who are not currently open (or even privy) to the lessons that intersectional analysis has to offer (who are also, not so coincidentally, those in the higher echelons of power and in a position to change things), this book provides no reasons, arguments, or procedures for adopting an intersectional framework for understanding oppression.

Although *Why Race and Gender Still Matter* succeeds in providing a nice collection of essays that identify the historical origins of intersectional analysis, in laying out the basic ideas contained in current intersectional theory, and in providing a glimpse at the kinds of novel questions intersectional analysis is particularly designed to address, the book would have been improved by (1) the inclusion in the introduction of an account of just what exactly an intersectional methodology might look like, (2) more explicit acknowledgment that intersectional analysis includes far more axes of oppression than just race and gender, and (3) an explanation of just how this collection of essays on the topic of intersectionality can help make philosophy more inclusive or more respectful to those who exist at its margins.