

# What Is Trans Philosophy?

TALIA MAE BETTCHER

*In this article, I explore the question “What is trans philosophy?” by viewing trans philosophy as a contribution to the field of trans studies. This requires positioning the question vis à vis Judith Butler’s notion of philosophy’s Other (that is, the philosophical work done outside of the boundaries of professional philosophy), as trans studies has largely grown from this Other. It also requires taking seriously Susan Stryker’s distinction between the mere study of trans phenomena and trans studies as the coming to academic voice of trans people. Finally, it requires thinking about the types of questions that emerge when philosophy is placed within a multidisciplinary context: (1) What does philosophy have to offer? (2) Given that philosophy typically does not use data, what grounds philosophical claims about the world? (3) What is the relation between philosophy and “the literature”? In attempting to answer these questions, I examine the notion of philosophical perplexity and the relation of philosophy to “the everyday.” Rather than guiding us to perplexity, I argue, trans philosophy attempts to illuminate trans experiences in an everyday that is confusing and hostile. Alternative socialities are required, I argue, in order to make trans philosophy possible.*

---

I can only speak for myself. But what I write and how I write is done in order to save my own life—Barbara Christian

In an important sense trans philosophy didn’t exist at all, perhaps as recently as five years ago.<sup>1</sup> Back then, I would have described my own research as situated at the intersections of disciplinary feminist philosophy and the inter- and multidisciplinary field of trans studies. The expression “trans philosophy” wasn’t quite available, or at least, it didn’t say very much. Perhaps that seems remarkable now.

For so long there had been so few trans folk working on trans issues in the profession: There was the pioneering work of C. Jacob Hale, Miqqi Gilbert, and Jamie Nelson Lindemann in the 1990s. Loren Canon, C. Riley Snorton, and I were writing in the mid-to-late-2000s. But trans philosophers were few and far between. Admittedly, an anthology on trans issues and personal identity as well as a special *Hypatia* issue on feminist philosophy and trans made their appearances as early as 2009 (Shrage

2009; Bettcher and Garry 2009). But both milestones demonstrated just how difficult it was to find trans philosophers publishing *at all*, let alone publishing *in the profession*.

Now, however, there's a marked generational change—a wave of trans and nonbinary scholars who have begun to publish or are getting ready to publish in the area—philosophers such as Megan Burke, Robin Dembroff, Grayson Hunt, Stephanie Kapusta, Tamsin Kimoto, Amy Marvin, Rachel McKinnon, Andrea Pitts, and Perry Zurn, to name some.

The turning point was marked by the first-ever trans philosophy conference, Trans\* Experience in Philosophy, that took place at the University of Oregon in 2016, sponsored by *Hypatia*. A “trans philosophy project” has since been sponsored by *Hypatia*.<sup>2</sup> Not only did the project provide funding for a second trans philosophy conference in 2018—Trans Thinking//Thinking Trans—it includes a resource initiative for compiling a bibliography of trans philosophy as well as pedagogical materials for teaching it, and for developing a set of best practices for philosophy organizations that want to support trans philosophers and trans philosophy.

This is not to say, however, that there haven't been some recent “growing pains”—at least not if by “growing pains” we mean “explosive controversies.” Last summer, there was considerable discussion of philosopher Kathleen Stock's so-called “gender critical” feminism that she published online (Stock 2018). Her work was taken up on the *Leiter Reports* and *Daily Nous*, mainstream philosophy blogs.<sup>3</sup> Many philosophers entirely unfamiliar with trans issues or trans scholarship enthusiastically embraced what they took to be the exposure of a politically correct trans agenda that had little intellectual merit. Meanwhile, several trans scholars and largely feminist allies complained that the engagement seemed to ignore the existence of trans studies in general and trans philosophy in particular.

The most notable controversy, however, concerned *Hypatia* itself and, in particular, the publication of an essay about transgender and so-called “transracialism” in Spring 2017. There was a community backlash, particularly on social media, about the essay's lack of engagement with the existing literature in critical race theory and trans studies, its unacknowledged political positioning with regard to race and trans, and deeper questions about how it came to be published in the first place. The controversy blew up enough to be covered in the *New York Times* and, by the end of it, *Hypatia* had been shaken to its core (see Schussler 2017). Regardless of one's thoughts on the controversy—one thing was clear (well, at least to me)—namely, that trans philosophy has (or is) coming of age.

The question “What is trans philosophy?” is therefore timely. This article considers it from a place of long-standing engagement, of seeing some things change and others stay the same. The article has a historical sensibility as well as a practical, political one as I see the increased visibility of trans philosophy in the profession in tandem with a wave of these young, new trans and gender-nonconforming scholars. I'm more than a little worried about the climate.<sup>4</sup>

For me, the question is also deeply personal. My groping toward answers comes from my own experiences attempting to do “trans philosophy” in the first place. Much of what I have to say is a reflection on what I've been trying to do for years

and what I aim to do now. My goal is not to give *the* answers, but simply to shed some light on the question. Or, to put it differently, there are different ways of answering this question, and what I offer here is one.

Despite its idiosyncrasy, however, this article is also not much more than a shiny new version of an old wheel. Much of what I have to say resembles the earlier ideas of philosophers who have been marginalized in the profession in various ways—perhaps most centrally, by way of racism and ethnocentrism, but also in ways that haven't begun to be reckoned with, such as ableism, and ways that have, such as sexism. To be sure, trans philosophy differs from other forms of “philosophies of difference” in some respects. For example, trans people have a rather marked relation to theories that have been written about us by nontrans people and the effect of this authorial-topic arrangement has consequences in our lives. However, I'm not interested in sorting through which things are more specific to trans philosophy and which are not. Such an endeavor rests on some rather problematic views that we will discuss in due course. My hope, instead, is that this article will constitute a “newish” arrangement of a rather old number.

#### I. PRELIMINARIES

The metaphilosophical question “What is trans philosophy?” might be viewed merely as an instance of the general question “What is philosophy?” If so, the only distinctive thing about it would be the subject matter. But that wouldn't tell us anything particularly fascinating about trans philosophy: It certainly won't enable trans philosophy to reveal something important about philosophy in general. Most important, it would simply miss the point.

I take my cue from trans studies—the multi- and interdisciplinary field of study that began in the early 1990s. I start with Sandy Stone's pioneering essay “The *Empire* Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto” in which she wonders “Whose story is this anyway?” (Stone 2006, 229) and “If the transsexual were to speak, what would s/he say?” (Stone, 230). She writes:

The people who have no voice in this theorizing are the transsexuals themselves. As with males theorizing about women from the beginning of time, theorists of gender have seen transsexuals as possessing something less than agency. . . . Transsexuals have been resolutely complicit by failing to develop an effective counterdiscourse. (Stone 2006, 229-230)

And I rely heavily on Susan Stryker's crucial distinction between the mere study of trans phenomena and the field of trans studies proper.

A useful terminological distinction can be made between “the study of transgender phenomena” and “transgender studies” that neatly captures the rupture between modern and postmodern epistemic contexts for understanding transgender phenomena. . . . The “study of transgender

phenomena” . . . is a long-standing, on-going project in cultures of European origin. Transgender studies, on the other hand, is the relatively new critical project that has taken shape in the past decade or so. . . . Transgender studies considers the embodied experience of the speaking subject, who claims constative knowledge of the referent topic, to be a proper—in-  
deed essential—component of the analysis of transgender phenomena. (Stryker 2006, 12)

Putting aside the tricky question how to characterize the difference between “modern” and “postmodern,” I take it Stryker is drawing a contrast between traditional theories of trans phenomena, on the one hand, and trans theories that articulate broader answers to Stone’s questions above or that contribute to this “counter-discourse.”

I put it this way. We trans people live under constant “theoretical pressure.” Theories float on high, dogging our moves, questioning our motives, limiting or opening our options. Some of these theories are hostile; they’re like hovering weapons taking shots at us while we try to get through the business of life. Others are friendlier; they come to saturate our lives. We avail ourselves of them to explain ourselves to others or to make sense of our own lives. We breathe those theories, try to embody them. Sometimes, we just try to figure it out on our own. We have an intimate relation to theory. It gets stuck to our bodies. One of the reasons trans people exist under theoretical pressure is precisely that we don’t conform to everyday expectations—we’re considered anomalous. But, from the other side of the theory, we “anomalies” want to know what’s going on. For us, our very relation to theory needs to be subject to inquiry. It’s an important question: What is it to philosophize *from underneath* the theory, on the *other side* of theory?<sup>5</sup>

Crucially, although trans studies often does concern trans people and trans issues, it’s also much broader. General and often deep questions arise when we reconsider what has been taken for granted, when we bring a broadly “trans-perspective” into focus. How should we understand gender itself? What about sexual orientation and sexuality more generally? What does gender have to do with personhood? What effect does the acknowledgment of trans oppression/resistance have on how we understand multiple forms of oppression? What is to say that gender oppression is not reducible to sexist oppression? What question does this raise for the important concept of intersectionality? The list goes on.

If trans *philosophy* is understood in light of this, it obviously cannot be determined by subject alone. It must be undertaken, rather, with an overarching aim of exposing and combating trans oppression, of illuminating and enacting a kind of trans resistance. Otherwise, what’s the point? This in turn greatly affects one’s philosophical approach: *one’s methodology*.

To pursue these methodological effects, I consider three related questions in this article. First, what is philosophical about trans philosophy? Second, on what is trans philosophy grounded? Third, what is the relation of trans philosophy to “the literature”? Other questions, of course, could be posed. Alas, it’s not possible to enumerate

and explore these methodological questions exhaustively in a single article. I'll limit my discussion to these.

In considering them, one of my major goals is to illuminate the contrast between trans philosophy and mere philosophizing about trans phenomena. The other is to shed some light on philosophy more broadly. Obviously, the first question is relevant to the questions "What is philosophy?" and "What makes an inquiry philosophical in character?" The other two concern methodology specifically. One points out that philosophy cannot plausibly be construed as an empirical science and then asks what grounds its claims. The final one asks about the relationship between philosophizing and "the literature."

Before I proceed, some clarifications are in order. First, I'm not interested in questions such as "How is this philosophy?" I'm not interested in the *defending* the view that trans philosophy is philosophy (although I suppose my description of its philosophical character might end up counting as a defense by accident). Nor am I focused on why this question gets asked so often within the profession, usually of diverse practitioners Kristie Dotson has identified what she calls "a culture of justification" that pervades the profession—one that presumes the existence of commonly held, univocally relevant, justifying norms (Dotson 2012). I do not feel a need to add to what she has already elucidated.

To repeat, my project is simply to shed some light on the difference between trans philosophy and philosophizing about trans issues and, in doing this, perhaps to shed greater light on the practice of philosophy itself. I want to avoid any firm boundary-setting about what trans philosophy is (and what it is not). I'm not presuming any commonly held, univocally relevant, justifying norms. On the contrary, I see what I'm doing as congenial to Dotson's notion of a culture of praxis in which "one will no longer be asked to justify one's project according to some set of justifying norms, but rather one does need to identify a point of contribution within contemporary philosophy, outside of contemporary philosophy, and/or in our surrounding worlds" (Dotson 2012, 17). Specifically, this article contributes to the disciplinary literature on philosophical method, to the multidisciplinary field of trans studies, and to emerging trans philosophy itself.

The contributions are interrelated. For example, to the multidisciplinary field of trans studies, I pose the questions: What are we to make of "trans philosophy" now that it has become more apparent in the discipline? What might it have to contribute to trans studies? These questions are likewise relevant to disciplinary questions about philosophical methodology. When one represents one's work as philosophical to a multidisciplinary audience, one has some explaining to do. The things that philosophers get to take for granted when we talk among ourselves can no longer be ignored. There is something about having to explain oneself to nonphilosophers.

First, once one can no longer rely on some supposed shared understanding with one's interlocutors, basic assumptions are more easily identified. Second, once a philosophical project becomes a multidisciplinary contribution, methodological questions become *part* of the project, rather than a distinct subject matter, at least insofar as they cannot be dispensed with: Keeping one's eye on the "metaphilosophical"

becomes constitutive of one's methodology. Finally, the types of questions one might ask about trans philosophy become framed in a distinctive way. Consider the three questions.

"What is philosophical about trans philosophy?" becomes "What makes a contribution to trans studies philosophical?" A related question now comes into focus: "And what is its value, if anything, as a contribution?" "On what is trans philosophy grounded?" becomes more pressing in light of the various possible disciplinary contributions to trans studies. Given that philosophy is not traditionally thought of as an empirical science, how can it hope to contribute anything of use at all? *Why* take philosophy seriously? And "What is the relation between trans philosophy and 'the literature?'" likewise becomes pronounced given the larger available literature in trans studies. Does trans philosophy have a *distinctive* literature? What value does that literature serve?

Let's consider the three questions, then, in just this way.

## II. WHAT CAN TRANS PHILOSOPHY OFFER?

One tempting answer, at least for analytically trained philosophers, is that trans philosophy can offer trans studies conceptual clarity; it can draw distinctions, dispel confusions, and so forth. This, to my mind, is a deeply disappointing answer. I'm loath to tell other trans scholars that they need us to straighten out "their muddled thinking." Besides, the "clarity suggestion" doesn't capture the point of my proposal since it's not going to be a particularly good starting point in helping to understand the difference between trans philosophy and philosophizing about trans issues. At least, it would suggest that any methodological differences between trans philosophy and philosophizing trans are superficial or at least not specifically philosophical in character.

### PHILOSOPHICAL PERPLEXITY AND THE WTF

I begin with Graham Priest's far more illuminating account of philosophy, if only to complicate it. In arguing against both Wittgenstein's and Rorty's accounts of philosophy, Priest writes:

Philosophy is precisely that intellectual inquiry in which anything is open to critical challenge and scrutiny. This, at least, explains many of its salient features. Philosophy is subversive. Time and again, philosophers have shot at religions, political systems, public mores. They do this because they are prepared to challenge things which everybody else takes for granted, or whose rejection most people do not countenance. (Priest 2006, 202)

How exciting! Of course, the quote raises pertinent questions, like "What happened to philosophy? Why is its failure to live up to this promise so spectacular?" and "How

might trans philosophy do better?" But Priest *does* capture a sense of what philosophy is (or is supposed to be) that appeals to both philosophers and nonphilosophers alike.

According to Priest, philosophy has both a negative and positive side. The negative side (the side that critiques other theories, the side that asks penetrating, relentless questions) is primary. The positive side (the side that provides theory, answers questions), though important, is secondary and subservient to the former: One of the main values of a positive theory is precisely that it gives added heft to one's critique of contending theories. That is, constructive philosophy is ultimately subsumable under the critical aspect of philosophy. Crucially, what makes philosophy distinctive is that *anything* is up for criticism. There are no disciplinary or methodological restrictions.

It is exactly here, it seems to me, that philosophy is to be distinguished from other intellectual inquiries. In religion one is explicitly not allowed to question certain things. In history, one is not allowed to question the view that other historians have minds. And in science one may be expected to be critical of novel ideas and results, but one is not encouraged to question well entrenched and established parts of the scientific corpus. (201–02)

To be clear, Priest does not require that all philosophy be primarily critical. He recognizes that philosophers differ in approach: some are chiefly critical, whereas others are builders, yet others are both. His claim, rather, is that the positive theory-building is ultimately parasitic on unfettered philosophical criticism. The latter best captures the spirit of philosophy, its distinctive feature.

I find myself dissatisfied, however. I don't see my philosophical projects as ultimately serving the project of critique; I see them as ultimately serving the project of illumination. And I suspect that my departure from Priest concerns a fundamental disagreement about the nature of philosophy itself, a disagreement concerning the relation between philosophy and the everyday world of common sense that is worth taking some time to elaborate.

Philosophy has a reputation for spinning its wheels, for beating its head against unsolvable problems, for losing itself in quicksand. The notion of "philosophical perplexity" has been a long-standing philosophical topic that reaches back at least to the early modern philosophers: What's wrong (or right) with philosophy such that it seems not to make scientific progress? There have been many answers about the source of such perplexity. One is just that the subject matter is so extraordinarily challenging that it's easy to take a disastrous misstep, a wrong turn, that could lead one in the wrong direction for hundreds of years. Another is that many of the questions philosophy seeks to answer are simply beyond the limits of human understanding: We're just not cognitively constituted to answer some of these questions, so confusion and a lack of progress is to be expected. Yet another says philosophy itself creates the problems and confusions when everything was just fine to begin with.

Regardless, there's considerable agreement that philosophy plays an important role in *leading* us to such perplexity, forcing us to consider tough questions, forcing us to

explore ever deeper. Even if philosophy isn't itself the *source* of perplexity, certainly it's our *guide*, the practice that strips back a seemingly coherent common-sense reality to reveal a seething cauldron of confusion, and it does so by asking so many critical questions.

There's something intuitively appealing about this view; it gets at a deep conception of what philosophy is. As Bertrand Russell explains:

The man who has no tincture of philosophy goes through life imprisoned in the prejudices derived from common sense, from the habitual beliefs of his age or his nation, and from convictions which have grown up in his mind without the co-operation or consent of his deliberate reason. To such a man the world tends to become definite, finite, obvious; common objects rouse no questions, and unfamiliar possibilities are contemptuously rejected. As soon as we begin to philosophize, on the contrary, we find, as we saw in our opening chapters, that even the most everyday things lead to problems to which only very incomplete answers can be given. (Russell 1912, 157)

What I want to suggest, however, is that this conception of philosophy rests on a highly controversial assumption: namely that for the “prephilosophical man” the “world tends to become obvious” and “common objects rouse no questions” and that this man is “imprisoned in the prejudices derived from common sense.” In short, this is to assume that all appeared well and good before philosophy arrived on the scene: Our common sense, our everyday understanding of the world was, if superficial, happily undisturbed. In other words, this is to assume a close fit between individuals and their “everyday.”

This assumption is baseless.<sup>6</sup> The baselessness is plain to those of us for whom this everyday has seemed utterly confusing—often hostile. It is hard to make sense of oneself as a trans person. Coming out to oneself and transitioning can be brutal. For us, the so-called everyday and any common sense that accrues to it does not suit us, is disorienting at best and violent at worst. It is shot through with questions.

What does it mean to say that I'm a woman, I've wondered? And why does so *much* appear to hinge on it? How do I make sense, for example, of being assaulted in the middle of Santa Monica Boulevard by someone who wanted to prove I was really a man? (Bettcher 2015). Why do people want to kills us? WTF?

SERIOUSLY—WTF?

We trans people live an “everyday” shot through with perplexity, shot through with WTF questions. We *live* in the WTF. We did not need philosophy to uncover its perplexity. It was already there. If philosophy is going to give us anything at all, it had better be answers or at least some partial, provisional illumination. Otherwise, it cannot help us. In this light, therefore, I do *not* see the chief function of trans philosophy as negative or critical. I see it as primarily constructive, positive, illuminating,



and orienting. I do think here that philosophy is uniquely positioned to address WTF rather than, say, sociology or psychology or anthropology—precisely because the WTF is so all-embracing, so personal, indeed, existential in nature. Or, in other words, I think *the attempt to provide illumination in response to these WTF questions is necessarily philosophical*.<sup>7</sup>

Crucially, this is not to say that this constructive approach aims to answer all questions—as if that were possible. In attempting to illuminate that which perplexes, new questions invariably arise—questions that cannot be readily answered. And of course, this unearthing of new questions is part and parcel of the philosophical enterprise. It is to say, however, that these new questions serve as breadcrumbs on one's way to answering those original questions with which one began—questions that were present *before one began philosophizing*.

The key thing is that for what I'll call “ground-bound” philosophy, perplexity isn't philosophical because it is exposed through philosophical critique but, rather, because it cries out for philosophical illumination. One difficulty with Priest's view, then, is that it recognizes only what might be called “pristine philosophy”—a philosophy that leads us to a state of perplexity through philosophical practice itself, whereas the “prephilosophical” was, to begin with, happily undisturbed. This is less the fault of Priest, however, and more a reflection of the pervasive underlying conception of philosophy. By challenging this conception, we become open to the possibility that the relations among perplexity, philosophy, and the everyday are not uniform.

By recognizing both pristine and ground-bound philosophy, we have a preliminary way of making sense of the difference between trans philosophy and philosophizing trans. In the latter we should expect to see trans phenomena as the topic of or possibly used as part of some critical philosophical intervention. What such an approach will invariably lack is any hint of an effort to confer intelligibility upon trans experiences in the WTF. And this, of course, is because a particular conception of philosophy is presupposed.

#### DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE

This emphasis on positive intelligibility-conferral in trans philosophy hardly leads to the foreclosure of critical intervention, of course. It leads, rather, to the view that such critique is often beholden to the task of philosophical illumination. Critical intervention is built right into the project of shedding light on the WTF. Specifically, the critical assessment and possible rejection of prevailing theoretical models, political frameworks, and taken-for-granted assumptions that impede our capacity to shed light on the WTF is plainly required. Indeed, when viewed in this way, the very failure of some positive account to provide adequate illumination constitutes a serious philosophical challenge to it.

This means that not only must we challenge prevailing conceptions of the world that fail to provide illumination, we must also challenge *some of our own* assumptions and treasured theories. Indeed, we must examine prevailing trans-positive theories

that circulate in the public eye, and that are promoted in the interest of trans politics, to determine their philosophical adequacy. Here there's a way in which the spirit of what Priest is getting at is right: Philosophical critique requires a willingness to think it *all* through. To let *everything* be up for grabs, even the taken-for-granted framework of current trans theory/politics. What does trans philosophy have to offer? Fearless, even iconoclastic, *illuminations* of trans experiences in the WTF.

Yet this is not to deny that there are starting points built right into trans philosophy. I see it as a necessary starting point that we take trans self-identities as at least presumptively valid: It should be taken for granted, for example, that if a trans man says he is a man, he is, indeed, a man. This opens me up to the charge of being “dogmatic” and ultimately “not philosophical” insofar as I'm not allowing for everything to be up for grabs. It is important to see why this is not so.

Trans philosophy is much like queer theory, feminist theory/philosophy, and critical race theory/philosophy. There are certain presuppositions, that is to say, starting points. For example, it would be odd if the question whether homosexuality was immoral were a “hot topic” in queer theory. It would be bizarre to see the question whether women ought to be subjected to the rule of men as the central area of discussion in feminist philosophy. And similarly, the question whether trans people are who we say we are should not be central in trans philosophy. To be clear, nothing that I have said makes these presumptions “out of bounds” in philosophy *in general* (I shall return to this later). At present, I'm simply claiming that if one ends up arguing that such presumptions are false, one is not doing feminist, queer, or trans philosophy at all; one is doing something else. At least on the face of it, this “something else” looks, in part, like an attempt to undermine the validity of these very domains of inquiry. If somehow, some way, it were established beyond doubt that men ought to rule over women, feminist philosophical inquiry would be off the table.

Of course, one might respond that in all of these examples, the acceptance of starting points runs against the spirit of philosophical investigation. Feminist, antiracist, queer, and trans philosophy are all dogmatic. But this is to falsely suppose that philosophy ought to have no starting points at all. It ought to be plain to philosophical practitioners that we invariably rely on starting points in order to conduct our investigations. It's impossible to do philosophy without them.

Furthermore, the methodological segregation of starting points is a general feature of philosophical inquiry. Consider, for example, that in certain domains, starting points are necessary to get the conversation going. In discussions of applied ethics—say, those concerning trolley cases—it's out of bounds to ask how we can be sure we're not dreaming that the trolleys exist, how we can know whether an external world—including other minds—exists, whether there are trolleys at all instead of a collection of particles, and so forth. Indeed, we teachers must train our students not to drag intriguing but methodologically irrelevant questions into some given philosophical inquiry. This segregation of starting points is just one of the key methodological moves we make in philosophical investigation. Thus, although Priest may be correct that philosophy as a whole is free to subject almost anything to critical scrutiny, it is also the case that this can't be done all at once. The acceptance of starting

points is necessary to any philosophical investigation, and the sorts of starting points accepted vary depending upon the philosophical endeavor at hand.

Of course, this analogy isn't perfect precisely because that type of question sometimes is actually addressed in feminist, queer, critical race, critical disability, and trans philosophy, whereas the question whether trolleys actually exist is not raised when we're doing trolley problems. The reason for this is that the starting points have less to do with the segregation of philosophical topics and more to do with approach: whether one is engaged in pristine or ground-bound philosophizing about trans makes all the difference in the world. To make sense of trans experiences in the world in any kind of positive, resistant, and illuminating way, one *must* start with the presumptive validity of trans identities. Otherwise, no such task can get off the ground. Of course, this leaves entirely open the possibility of pristine philosophical investigations that take up trans as a topic in a negative spirit. It also leaves open the possibility of considering the starting points within trans philosophy. It's just that they will be addressed in *very distinctive ways*.

Consider, for example, the quest for illumination in the WTF. As a trans woman, I do want to know *how* it is that I am a woman in this world that denies this. The presumption that my identity is valid hardly answers this. This is to say, even given the presumption, we don't know yet what the universe must be like in order for this to be so. Surely, we would like to know that. That is, I think, a valid question. Indeed, it's one of deep philosophical importance that can—and ought to—be included within trans philosophical investigations.

But here it's also worth noting a significant challenge. There are multiple forms of ground-bound philosophy, given the multiplicities of oppressions and the complex ways in which they intersect with one another. The WTF questions and even the starting points are not the same across the board—they much depend upon one's location. Moreover, each differentiated philosophical approach will invariably harbor distortion and marginalization—even in cases in which the approach proceeds from multiple intersecting forms of oppression—for example, black feminist philosophy or Latina feminist philosophy. Insofar as other forms of oppression are considered in such approaches (trans, lesbian, and so on), they will be considered to a lesser extent, thereby marginalizing those at the intersections. Trans philosophy is no different: In ultimately centralizing trans oppression, it's already limited. This is an important challenge—one not easily met, in my view—but absolutely central to the practice of ground-bound philosophy. We shall continue to explore it as my argument proceeds.

### III. WHAT GROUNDS OUR CONTRIBUTION?

Let's agree that philosophy has never been particularly well-known for its efforts at data collection. To be sure, subdisciplines parasitic on the sciences (for example, the philosophy of quantum physics, cognitive philosophy) avail themselves of data. Indeed, there's a controversial subfield of philosophy called Experimental Philosophy (or X-Phi) that even goes out to collect it—surely the exception that proves the rule.

Traditionally, philosophers simply aren't often that interested in gathering and analyzing data.

I don't mean that some traditional philosophy isn't expressly empiricist at least insofar as it draws on experience (for example, phenomenology).<sup>8</sup> But even in such cases, we don't usually find the sort of data collection that could be modeled after the social sciences, say. Although there's a method, it's not one that can always be subsumed under that paradigm. More to the point, it's still true that not *all* or even *most* philosophy is expressly like that. Indeed, it's not uncommon to characterize philosophical practice as simply the process of "thinking really hard about something." But in such cases, what do we have to go on? To be sure, there's the literature with which we engage. But unless philosophy is to be "free-floating," we need something else.

Unless we have some sort of robust a priori knowledge of the world (which we don't), it seems philosophers must proceed from a place of worldly engagement: We eat, read, sleep. We walk around. We talk to people. Perhaps we buy milk. We live in some everyday, and we possess a worldly perception that I take to include not only our lived experiences, but also our knowledge of local common sense, as well as familiarity with the social practices that shape experiences and in which "common sense" inheres.

Certainly, any philosophical project centralizing some aspect of the everyday—either as obvious or perplexing—as a topic has *ipso facto* deployed their worldly perception. To take aim at "religions, political systems, and public mores" requires a worldly grasp of them. But even philosophical projects that don't focus on the everyday still must deploy their worldly perception to the extent that an understanding of this everyday and the common sense that tracks, shapes, guides, and constrains it—either implicitly or explicitly—is *considered philosophical judgment, regardless of how abstract and attenuated, about what seems right/wrong, implausible, and unimportant.*

There's a sense in which perhaps all disciplines rely to some extent on this worldly perception. But to the extent that philosophy isn't data-driven and not even usually expressly empiricist, this worldly perception surely plays a crucial methodological role—either acknowledged or not. This forces the embarrassing admission that a single person's worldly perception appears to be playing a rather conflated methodological role in much of what passes for philosophical research.

One solution is to reject any philosophy that isn't more solidly grounded in empirical data, of course. Another solution is to simply own it—at least to some degree. What can be said on behalf of the latter?

It has its benefits. In relying on one's worldly perception rather than on some dataset, the worldly contact that guides one's reflections is oriented to practice. The world is revealed through an ongoing engagement within it. Indeed, worldly perception might be said to yield "data" organized in the shape of a life—a life with both a history and a future. There is, in this sense, something inherently first-personal about the worldly perception tethering philosophical reflection to something other than its own literature. It is good, in my view, to have some disciplines like that. Such an approach seems particularly well suited to addressing "WTF" questions that are often

so deeply personal in character. And there's the hint of an undeveloped critical upshot here: namely that philosophizing that maintains an increasingly attenuated relation to worldly perception through repeated iterations of literature engagement alone (informally a "cottage industry") has a greater likelihood of producing obfuscation than illumination.

Unfortunately, when one lives in deep tension with the everyday, when the prevailing common sense scarcely countenances one's existence, when the deepest questions arise from the ground on which one fails to stand, well before one has even begun to philosophize, one will surely need an alternative worldly perception, and therefore an alternative form of the social. Although the perplexing character of the everyday may make a good starting point in the quest for illumination, it's tough to rely on one's chief source of confusion as one's ground for *philosophical judgment about what seems right/wrong, im/plausible, and un/important*. Trans philosophy needs to proceed from pretheoretical sociality among trans people—whatever form that takes—standing in a relation of resistance to the prevailing mainstream world of WTF. What *else* does one have to draw on that could provide the worldly perception necessary for life-affirming, rather than suicidal, philosophical illuminations?

Recognizing both the centrality of worldly perception in philosophical method, as well as the heterogeneous character of the social, however, forces a frank acknowledgment of the limitations of philosophical inquiry. Philosophers' worldly perception is obviously shaped and limited by their social milieu: It's culturally, geographically, and temporally indexed. I write from my own personal experiences in various Los Angeles trans subcultures from around the mid-1990s to the present. Saying this is important. It's to clarify scope and limitations. But this is no less true for philosophers who fail to announce their locatedness—philosophers who can pretend their worldly perception is universal. To be sure, philosophizing locally seems almost oxymoronic in light of the long history of philosophy's grand aspirations. It's certainly a serious *comedown*. But it's also more *philosophical* if we take philosophy to be at all concerned with the *truth*.

To see what I mean, consider two examples. The first concerns the deployment of philosophical intuitions in conceptual analysis. Consider the question "What is a woman?" then, which is to be taken as a question about the concept of a woman. Suppose one has intuitions that trans women are at best, "hard cases" with respect to the concept (see, for example, see Stoljar 1995; Mikkola 2009.<sup>9</sup> That is, depending upon the particular facts about any particular trans woman, she is going to end up as either only marginally counting or as being "in-between" or as not counting at all.

The problem is that I have entirely different intuitions. My intuitions are that trans women are women and, moreover, that we are not merely marginal women. Furthermore, my intuitions are that this is so regardless of whether a trans woman has a penis or a vagina. Indeed, I think that questions about genitalia and even chromosomes are not relevant to the question of womanhood.

To be sure, my intuitions might be rejected out of hand. But as a matter of fact, they're grounded in my embeddedness in trans subcultures—including my familiarity with trans discursive and nondiscursive practices there. This points to the ways in

which trans philosophy is not only supported by its methodological commitments, but by alternative forms of the everyday that guide philosophical judgment.

The question now, at any rate, concerns which intuitions get to count in conceptual analysis and why. We're pressed toward a broader conversation about the role of intuitions in conceptual analysis. To the extent that the intuitions of trans people are pushed to the side as irrelevant, to the extent that it is taken for granted that only intuitions derived from familiarity with the dominant culture count, a tacit decision has been made to shut down philosophical conversation outright. This is hardly a philosophical attitude, and it's certainly of no use to trans philosophers.

Another example concerns which philosophical questions are deemed relevant and important. To some philosophers, trans people may appear to be fascinating cases to investigate in answering questions like "What is a woman?" and "What is a man?" Because of these philosophers' particular locations, they may not have the same philosophical interests that some trans people do. One interest that some of us have is this: Why do people want to kill us? The presumption that the first question is more philosophically important or at least "fascinating" than the latter is debatable. Alas, the fascinated philosopher may not even be aware of the host of other philosophical questions that arise for trans people—particularly as they are geared toward illumination in the WTF. In fact, they may be completely unaware of the trans WTF as an impetus for philosophical inquiry at all.

If this is right, it seems clear that, in general, philosophy as a discipline needs to acknowledge the locatedness of worldly perception. Moreover, it would seem imperative to promote a deep pluralism with regard to it. It seems a particularly good strategy in mitigating the suspicious move of having a single person's worldly perception playing an inflated methodological role. Indeed, such a methodological inflation can disastrously saturate the entire profession through this homogeneity, virtually reducing philosophy to a work accomplished by only one person. And, of course, such homogeneity has the further effect of obscuring the locatedness of worldly perception, thereby encouraging delusions of grandeur.

If anything, however, it suggests that philosophers ought to get out of the house more often. Specifically, philosophers ought to move outside of their comfort zone in the everyday, make different kinds of friends, talk to new people. What María Lugones calls "world"-traveling becomes integral to philosophy when worldly perception plays such a key methodological role (Lugones 2003). It promotes a double worldly perception; the capacity to be "bicultural" with regard to the "everydays" in which we are embedded is fostered.

This notion of double perception is scarcely new, of course.<sup>10</sup> But what's crucial to note is that it can enable a more penetrating analysis of the social quotidian (as now they are multiple). When one occupies a liminal space between alternative forms of the social quotidian, worldly perception as a double perception enables a deeper, more ruthless interrogation of an everyday by enabling one to look at an everyday from the perspective of another.<sup>11</sup>

Any ground-bound philosophical approach, including trans philosophy, can be said to *proceed* from a double worldly perception—both a perception of resistant forms of

trans sociality as well as a perception of the dominant ones. It is a necessary condition of its existence. In this way, ground-bound approaches are particularly well-positioned to accomplish the challenging of “common sense” that we found in Priest and Russell.

Nonetheless, such double perception is local and therefore limited: It can conceal power imbalances even within a resistant form of sociality. Good philosophizing requires being able to recognize such hegemony and erasure, and this is not possible when one remains static. Although imperfect, such world-traveling is imperative to any ground-bound philosophy—it works to render ever more complex one’s starting point, one’s life experience, one’s fluency in multiple everyday. *In this way, how one lives one’s life, with whom one develops bonds of sociality and intimacy, becomes an integral component of philosophical methodology.* This, in turn, suggests the beginning of an answer to the question just how nontrans philosophers can contribute to trans philosophy in a significant way.

#### IV. WITH WHOM SHOULD WE SPEAK?

In his reading of Derrida, Richard Rorty writes, “There is no way in which one can isolate philosophy as occupying a distinctive place in culture or concerned with a distinctive subject or proceeding by some distinctive method. . . . The philosophers’ own scholastic little definitions of ‘philosophy’ are merely polemical devices—intended to exclude from the field of honor those whose pedigrees are unfamiliar” (Rorty 1978, 142). Although we might take such a claim seriously, we might wonder how he can conclude the following:

We can pick out “the philosophers” in the contemporary intellectual world only by noting who is commenting on a certain sequence of historical figures. All that “philosophy” as a name for a certain sector of culture names is “talk about Plato, Augustine, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Frege, Russell, and that lot. . . .” Philosophy is best seen as a kind of writing. It is delimited, as is any literary genre, not by form or matter, but by tradition—a family romance involving, for example, Father Parmenides, honest old Uncle Kant, and bad brother Derrida. (143)

Specifically, we might wonder whether this conclusion undoes what he has just said by providing us with something that makes philosophy distinctive as philosophy—namely the tradition, that is, the literature with which it engages. If we’re thoroughgoing in this view, perhaps we should even reject the wish to “pick out philosophers in the contemporary world” in the first place—as if there were some clear picture of who the philosophers were. At any rate, we do get what seems to be a rather conservative, albeit highly deflated, account of philosophy requiring engagement in a tradition. Whoever does not write in that genre, engage in that literature, isn’t doing philosophy? What do we say to Dotson, then, who complains (not in reply to Rorty, actually, but to Priest):

What if the positions arising out of criticisms to current theories lie so far afield from or are so alien to my own inquiries, as a black feminist, that to engage them would be a complete waste of time? . . . In graduate school, I could not for the life of me figure out why I should take the respected philosophers of the day (from Plato to Jacques Derrida, depending on the professor) as bedrocks for my own philosophical investigations when a fulfilling engagement with their work did not look feasible to me. (Dotson 2011, 406)

On the face of it, if Rorty's right, Dotson struggles in vain: The only way for her to do philosophy—and why would she?—would be for her to engage with the tradition.

Of course, Dotson isn't addressing Rorty, she's addressing Priest. And the latter *does* think that there is something more to philosophy than the literature—namely, philosophy as unfettered critique. Notably, critique need not target philosophical theories. It can criticize “religions, political systems, public mores.” Priest would surely agree that philosophical criticism needn't be published in or even address the contemporary literature at all in order to be “philosophical.”

Nonetheless, Dotson rightfully notes a conservatism even here—one that arises from Priest's conception of philosophy. Although there's considerable pressure in all disciplines to engage with an existing literature that sets the agenda, this is especially so when philosophy is viewed as a primarily critical enterprise. As Janice Moulton notes, such a view simply buries various philosophical approaches (Moulton 1996, 16). But, then, what is it to engage with a literature, if it is not invariably through criticism? And if our decisions to engage are not made on the basis of criticism, on what are they based? To consider some possibilities, I want to examine *the work of philosophy*—something that's likewise obscured in this strict focus on critique.

#### THE WORK OF PHILOSOPHY

Let's return to a pristine “take” on the question whether trans women are women. Suppose, for example, that we're interested in raising philosophical perplexity about the concept *woman* and we think that an appeal to trans women will help. What's going on?

There will probably be a failure to recognize the existence of ground-bound philosophy at all. Specifically, any attempt to confer intelligibility on living while trans in the WTF may not seem particularly important in the glowing light of the intriguing conceptual question, “What is a woman?” The question, “Why do people want to kill us?” will likely not appear on the radar. There will likely be the erasure of trans sub-cultural worlds, or at least a strong presumption that they are irrelevant (rather than methodologically crucial to trans philosophy). The question about which intuitions count and why is certainly off the table.

What work does such an approach *do*? It can have consequences in terms of how trans scholars are actually treated in the profession. It can communicate that trans



identities are up for negotiation “in the real world.” It can erase trans philosophy as a viable approach—it can say that there is no room in philosophy for trans philosophers to make sense of a transphobic world.

Recognizing this can help us better understand the various kinds of work that trans philosophy itself performs. For those of us who live under theoretical pressure, philosophical critique doesn’t always flow from some philosophical penchant for asking questions. It’s life and death once “the literature” starts to have material consequences in our lives. It’s about outright survival. It’s about clearing space.

There are several ways of doing this. One obvious way is pedagogical. It may be necessary to bring philosophers to that place where they’re equipped to engage in a more advanced form of inquiry. At a lower undergraduate level, I may very cautiously raise the question whether homosexuality is immoral in order to show that there is no good argument that it is. However, I wouldn’t dream of raising such a question in an advanced course in LGBT philosophy—for one thing, the posing of the question is heterosexist. I make—and expressly problematize—my concession in the lower division course for pedagogical reasons.

A second way involves replying to the philosopher who barges into a room full of trolley-scholars, points out that the existence of trolleys is a controversial philosophical assumption, and then demands that someone prove that trolleys exist in the first place. Specifically, the critical intervention may involve responding to such philosophers *in their own terms*. This means, very likely, that one will not have the chance to do the careful framing in the pedagogical approach above. Such a response therefore runs the risk of complicity in the centralization of pristine philosophy, in the erasure of trans philosophy.

Another way of responding involves engaging in this problematizing work—*doing* the metaphilosophy. Whereas the first two approaches require accepting starting points and intuitions that are not one’s own, this approach includes exposing this very fact. The danger, here, of course, is that the work will simply be misunderstood. In effect, one argues that before one can take up the question whether P, one must first consider whether Q, only to receive the angry response that one has just given a rather shoddy argument for P. Here, one sees the interesting work that such a response accomplishes—namely it prevents the very discussion of Q. It insists that the only question of importance is P. As Amy Marvin remarks:

Asking people who want to do critical scholarship on this subject to “read the literature” seems to often get dismissed as a near-ad hominem, or as a tactic for uncritical dismissal without any engagement (and thus intellectually shallow). . . . I worry that the difficulty of having a conversation about whether or not trans women are women (it stands out to me, by the way, that this yet again focuses on trans women rather than trans men) amounts to a suggestion that the conversation should not include our scholarly and personal voices, and continue to cast us as people who scholarship should be about rather than with. (Marvin 2018)

Note that in all three cases, a *defensive posture* is taken. Although one is doing philosophy, one is certainly not doing philosophy-as-illumination; one is doing critique. But neither is the critique pristine. I averred at the outset that I don't claim to provide a common feature of trans philosophy; this is one of the reasons why. Trans philosophy can do many things; illumination in the WTF is just one.

Defensive responses are important and require philosophical acumen; however, they don't involve the philosophical depth that illumination of the WTF provides. By contrast, illumination seems useful in guiding these defensive responses. It's nice to have a clearer picture of what's going on before one replies. And, of course, illumination is survival-rich in its own right. Unfortunately, illumination must be undertaken with some caution: There's a danger in even *going there* (or at least going there publicly), since what we say can also be weaponized against us. Indeed, one of the functions of this threat is precisely this foreclosure of self-understanding, of illumination. Keeping us off balance with unproductive battles, and then threatening to use our own self-critique against us, renders philosophical reflection nearly impossible as we are backed into a corner. But this also speaks to the importance of attempting to do just this.

The point, at any rate, is that once philosophy is understood to accomplish different kinds of work, our view of philosophy is rendered more complex. We must concern ourselves not only with what philosophy *says* but also with what it *does*. We must philosophize with our eyes wide open: Whose interests are being served? To what end? What *work* does it perform?

In my view, *reflection* on the different kinds of work a piece of philosophy performs is constitutive of *doing* philosophy at all. This is evident to anyone who does ground-bound philosophy. But it should also be accepted by pristine practitioners. The "work of philosophy" may often be nothing more than a Priest-style back-and-forth debate, but this doesn't mean this is the only work for which philosophy is used. Certainly, in light of what I've said, a purely pristine approach to trans issues cannot be treated as on par with a pristine approach to the metaphysics of time. There's work being accomplished in the former that is not in the latter. By failing to understand this, one fails as a philosopher. Not only does one fail to comprehend how others are using philosophy, one fails to comprehend one's own philosophical actions. In effect, one does not know what one is doing. If one pays full attention only to the back-and-forth of pristine engagement, one fails to comprehend *what is really going on*. Surely, a philosopher wants the full story, not half of it.

Once we open our minds to what's really going on, questions around philosophical practice and the ethics thereof come immediately into view. What do we say of the philosopher who understands that trans philosophers are trying to figure things out for ourselves, who recognizes the importance of ground-bound philosophy, who understands the effect of theories in our lives, and yet who continues to raise pristine questions about whether or not trans people are who we say we are? There's a willful blindness, a patent disregard, that surely should be subject to ethical scrutiny: Why are you *behaving* like that? These discussions about the ethics of philosophical practice are critical, in my view, although now isn't the time to jump into the deep end.

Rather, I return to Priest's thought that any assumption is up for grabs in philosophy. This is true. The point I'm pressing, however, is that it still doesn't follow that key ethical considerations don't arise. These questions matter to the practice of trans philosophy as well. Specifically, we might ask what work *we ought* to be doing. Illumination is important. But is that *all* we should be doing? Regardless, can we really do it alone?

#### PHILOSOPHY'S OTHER?

As I begin to wrap up, I want to consider Judith Butler's essay, "Can the Other of Philosophy Speak?" (in Butler 2004) for reasons that will soon be obvious.<sup>12</sup> Butler points to work that is philosophical, that draws from philosophical traditions, and that nonetheless exists outside of the purview of professional philosophy within much broader cross-disciplinary theoretical conversations. This "Other" arises largely due to the efforts of professional philosophy in enforcing its own disciplinary boundaries too obsessively. This, then, raises the frightful possibility that philosophy has lost itself to the very thing it has excluded.

The Other is important since, from the beginning, most of the theoretical work in trans studies has developed *outside the bounds of disciplinary philosophy*.<sup>13</sup> A key question therefore is this: Insofar as disciplinary trans philosophy has begun to come into its own, what exactly is being claimed when it calls itself "philosophy"? How is it understood in relation to philosophy's Other from which trans studies itself has blossomed? Do we ignore all of the pertinent trans philosophical work that does not originate from scholars in philosophy departments? What, then, of Gayle Salamon's crucial contributions (Salamon 2010; 2018). What then, of the groundbreaking work of C. Riley Snorton (Snorton 2018)? Or should disciplinary trans philosophy simply "lose itself" to the Other? After all, to insist upon boundary-drawing between the "real" philosophy and the "other" surely replicates the problem. Perhaps. But if so, we still can't ignore the recent *appearance* of trans philosophy *within the discipline*, minimally because to do so would be to ignore the distinctive issues that confront trans and nonbinary philosophers who are trying to eke out an existence there.

Butler makes it seem that nobody works at the "margins" of the profession in philosophy (Bettcher 2017). She suggests, for example, that all the feminist philosophers have left the profession. But that's not true. There are plenty of ground-bound philosophers working at the margins. To work at the margins of the profession is often to work in the liminal space between philosophy and its Other—a space Butler seems not to acknowledge.

In light of this, there are different ways of sketching the topography. The distinction between pristine and ground-bound philosophy is perhaps more important than the one between philosophy and its Other, as we find both approaches within and outside the profession of philosophy. It's important to remember, after all, that Butler's work, and queer theory more generally, has been criticized by trans scholars precisely for using trans phenomena for conducting more abstract investigations into

gender (Namaste 2000; 2009). We might understand the charge as, in part, the complaint that such investigations fail to recognize the existence of trans experiences in the WTF, trans attempts to find illumination in the WTF.

Most important, however, is the fragmentation of these ground-bound investigations, the inherent limitations and distortions mentioned above, and consequently the possibilities of misunderstanding and misrepresenting one another in our philosophical work. Butler's work can scarcely be described as pristine: Her early, foundational queer theory came from a particular location in queer space—one that concerned misrepresentation of butch–femme relations as mere replications of heterosexuality (Butler 1993, 312). What this suggests is the importance of communication and engagement among different ground-bound philosophies. Such engagement is another kind of important work that philosophy can perform. But here caution is required. If what I have said is right, it cannot be conducted through pristine attempts to referee the conflicts, nor can be it accomplished through ground-bound philosophers passing themselves off as pristine in order to secure referee status.

On the contrary, once we centralize this challenge of communication, the question “What literature should we engage with and why?” takes on a different tone. If something like world-travel is an important practice in opening up one's experiences—experiences that guide one's philosophical judgment—then it might also be that literature travel is likewise crucial. With whom are we speaking and why? One of my complaints about Stock's work was that it ignored the existence of trans philosophy; it did not acknowledge, let alone engage with the literature.

This attitude is revealed in her response to me. In discussing what she calls the “empirical claim that trans women are experienced by many lesbians as exhibiting ‘male energy while in a lesbian space,’” Stock says she “cannot for the life of me see how this worry could satisfactorily be neutralised by acquaintance with this literature” (Stock 2018). I would have thought, however, that reading the literature might help her look at things in a new way. Without reading it, she supposes the literature has nothing to teach her. Suppose somebody referenced the empirical claim that many men experience women as needy and vain. I would have thought that some feminist analysis would help. Why assume that trans analysis won't help? One of the concerns I'm expressing is that Stock's work was not particularly interested in this project of communication at all.

This applies equally to trans philosophy itself, of course. We ought to think long and hard about the literature with which we engage, particularly if we're interested at all in the crucial project of communicating across ground-bound philosophies. Is it most important to engage with pristine philosophers? Is it most important to draw from and contribute to philosophy's Other? *Must* trans philosophy be grounded in a European “postmodern” literature, for example? Might it not, instead, head toward a more decolonial feminism? (for example, see Lugones 2010). With whom are we philosophizing and why?

Such questions matter, in part, because our original question “What is trans philosophy?” is *not* merely the traditional, ahistorical one that could be raised exclusively within the discipline of philosophy. The question, rather, is *living* and *contemporary*,

grounded in part in this doubling of philosophy. This sociohistorically situated rendering of the question asks not merely for the conclusion of well-crafted arguments, but for the bold creation and enactment of new possibilities. If it's metaphilosophical, it's nonetheless also a question of praxis: It's future-oriented. No doubt, the question in the end isn't merely what trans philosophy is, but also what it *could be*.

## NOTES

My 2015 blog piece, "Other 'Worldly' Philosophy" in *Philosopher* contains the origins of these reflections. The article itself began as the keynote talk I gave at the Trans\* Experience in Philosophy Conference (2016). The article was transformed through my understanding of the *Hypatia* controversy as well as my reaction to Stock's work in my *Daily Nous* post "When Tables Speak: On the Existence of Trans Philosophy" (Bettcher 2018). I am ever grateful for the insightful critique of anonymous reviewers. Special thanks to Mark Balaguer, Jay Conway, Ann Garry, Grayson Hunt, Amy Marvin, and Perry Zurn for their support and philosophical insight.

1. Recently, *trans\** has been used as a replacement for the umbrella term *transgender*. One motivation for this is that *transgender*, despite its intended broadness, has tended to be associated with binary-identified trans people. By introducing this new terminology, it has been thought, gender-nonbinary, genderqueer, gender fluid, and agender people may be more fully included. That said, this new term has also come under recent criticism, and its use may turn out to be short-lived. One concern is that it doesn't do the work needed to really have nonbinary people included (that is, the problem that afflicted *transgender* similarly afflicts *trans\**). Another concern is that it is not accessible to and understandable by people who are not already deeply familiar with the intricacies of *trans/trans\** politics. In this article, I use *trans* to include those who do not identify with fixed binary identities, who are gender fluid, who disown any gender identity, along with binary-identified trans people.

2. See <https://transphilproject.wordpress.com/>

3. Stock argued against counting trans women as women in certain spaces—such as restrooms, changing rooms, domestic violence centers, and so forth. Her complaints centered around the UK's Gender Recognition Act. For the controversy, see especially <http://dailynous.com/2018/05/> and <https://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2018/05/index.html>. For philosophical discussion of related issues, see Watson 2016; Bettcher 2017.

4. See Zurn 2016 for a discussion of the difficulties that trans scholars face in the profession of philosophy.

5. The objectification of trans people in this approach is also usefully explored in terms of curiosity—for example, through what Perry Zurn calls "autopsic" and "therapeutic" modes, in his reading of Derrida (Zurn 2018). This raises the question about the potential for liberatory or at least resistant forms of curiosity. These were discussed by Zurn in "Puzzle Pieces: Shapes of Trans Curiosity" and Grayson Hunt's "Loving Curiosity," both presented at the Thinking Trans/Trans Thinking Conference (2018).

6. See Ortega 2016, 61 for a related discussion of disruptions of the everyday.

7. In some ways, this is similar to Gayle Salamon's notion of queer method as "supposing a diversion or estrangement from the norm and using that divergence as a source of proliferation and multiplication with the aim of increasing the livability of those lives outside of the norm" (Salamon 2009, 229). Notably, she does not see queer and trans gender embodiment as entirely separable from theorizing: "How we embody gender is how we theorize gender and to suggest otherwise is to misunderstand both theorization and embodiment" (Salamon 2010, 72).

8. Particularly, "critical phenomenology" comes to mind. See Guenther 2013 and Salamon 2018 for discussion.

9. Stephanie Kapusta provides an excellent discussion of some of these issues from a trans philosophical perspective (Kapusta 2016).

10. For example, W. E. B. Du Bois's notion of "double consciousness" (Du Bois 1999, 11); Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of "mestiza consciousness" (Anzaldúa 1987, 99–113), María Lugones's notion of "world-traveling" (Lugones 2003, 85–90), and Mariana Ortega's notion of "the multiplicitous self" (Ortega 2016).

11. Of course, much of this is in accord with some of the basic ideas of feminist standpoint epistemology. See McKinnon 2015 for an interesting discussion of this in relation to trans experiences.

12. For related discussion, see Bettcher 2017.

13. Sandy Stone's "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto" draws significantly from the work of Donna Haraway, Jacques Derrida, and Judith Butler (Stone 2006). Jay Prosser's brilliant *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* is deeply engaged with Butler's work as well as the psychoanalytic tradition more broadly (Prosser 1998). Henry Rubin's work draws on the phenomenology of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, as well as on Charles Taylor's views on meaning and identity (Rubin 1998). Viviane Namaste's critique of Butler draws heavily on her reading of both Derrida and Foucault (Namaste 2009). The list goes on. It is perhaps also in this sense that Susan Stryker calls trans studies "postmodern" (Stryker 2006)—it's postmodern insofar as its theoretical basis stems precisely from philosophy's Other.

## REFERENCES

- Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1987. *Borderlands/la frontera: The new mestiza*. San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute.
- Bettcher, Talia Mae. 2015. Other "worldly" philosophy. *Philosopher*. <https://politicalphilosopher.net/2015/08/16/featured-philosopher-talia-bettcher/>.
- . 2017. Through the looking glass: Transgender theory meets feminist philosophy. In *Routledge handbook of feminist philosophy*, ed. Ann Garry, Serene Khader, and Allison Stone. London: Routledge.
- . 2018. When tables speak: On the existence of trans philosophy. *Daily Nous*, ed. Justin Weinberg, May 30. <http://dailynous.com/2018/05/30/tables-speak-existence-trans-philosophy-guest-talia-mae-bettcher/>.

- Bettcher, Talia Mae, and Ann Garry. 2009. Transgender studies and feminism: Theory, politics, and gender realities. *Special issue of Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* 24 (3).
- Butler, Judith. 1993. Imitation and gender insubordination. In *The lesbian and gay studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin. New York: Routledge.
- . 2004. *Undoing gender*. New York: Routledge.
- Christian, Barbara. 1987. The race for theory. *Cultural Critique* 6 (Spring): 51–63.
- Dotson, Kristie. 2011. Concrete flowers: Contemplating the profession of philosophy. *Hypatia* 26 (2): 403–09.
- . 2012. How is this article philosophy? *Comparative Philosophy* 3 (1): 3–29.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. 1999. *The souls of black folk*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Guenther, Lisa. 2013. *Solitary confinement: Social death and its afterlives*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Kapusta, Stephanie. 2016. Misgendering and its moral contestability. *Hypatia* 31 (3): 502–19.
- Lugones, María. 2003. *Pilgrimages/peregrinajes: Theorizing coalition against multiple oppressions*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield.
- . 2010. Toward a decolonial feminism. *Hypatia* 25 (4): 742–59.
- Marvin, Amy. 2018. Comments posted on Feminist Philosophers, May 20. <https://feministphilosophers.wordpress.com/2018/05/17/talking-about-talking/#comment-163853>.
- McKinnon, Rachel. 2015. Trans\*formative experiences. *Res Philosophical* 92 (2): 419–40.
- Mikkola, Mari. 2009. Gender concepts and intuitions. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 39 (4): 559–83.
- Moulton, Janice. 1996. A paradigm of philosophy: The adversary method. In *Women, knowledge, and reality: Explorations in feminist philosophy*, ed. A. Garry and M. Pearsall. New York: Routledge.
- Namaste, Viviane K. 2000. *Invisible lives: The erasure of transsexual and transgendered people*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 2009. Undoing theory: The “transgender question” and the epistemic violence of anglo-american feminist theory. *Hypatia* 24 (3): 11–32.
- Ortega, Mariana. 2016. *In-between: Latina feminist phenomenology, multiplicity, and the self*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Priest, Graham. 2006. What is philosophy? *Philosophy* 81 (316): 189–207.
- Prosser, Jay. 1998. *Second skins: The body narratives of transsexuality*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Rorty, Richard. 1978. Philosophy as a kind of writing: An essay on Derrida. *New Literary History* 10 (1): 228–39.
- Rubin, Henry. 1998. Phenomenology as method in trans studies. *GLQ* 4 (2): 145–58.
- Russell, Bertrand. 1912. *The problems of philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Salamon, Gayle. 2009. Justification and queer method, or leaving philosophy. *Hypatia* 24 (1): 225–30.
- . 2010. *Assuming a body: Transgender and rhetorics of materiality*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- . 2018. *The life and death of Latisha King: A critical phenomenology of transphobia*. New York: New York University Press.
- Schussler, Jennifer. 2017. A defense of “trans racial” identity roils philosophy world. May 19. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/19/arts/a-defense-of-transracial-identity-roils-philosophy-world.html>.
- Shrage, Laurie, ed. 2009. *You’ve changed: Sex reassignment and personal identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Snorton, C. Riley. 2018. *Black on both sides: A racial history of trans identity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Stock, Kathleen. 2018. Response to Professor Talia Mae Bettcher. *Medium*, May 31. <https://medium.com/@kathleenstock/response-to-professor-talia-mae-bettcher-21263ffd87c8>
- Stoljar, Natalie. 1995. Essence, identity, and the concept of woman. *Philosophical Topics* 23 (2): 262–93.
- Stone, Sandy. 2006. The *empire* strikes back: A posttranssexual manifesto. In *The transgender studies reader*, ed. S. Stryker and S. Whittle. New York: Routledge.
- Stryker, Susan. 2006. (De)subjugated knowledges: An introduction to transgender studies. In *The transgender studies reader*, ed. S. Stryker and S. Whittle. New York: Routledge.
- Watson, Lori. 2016. The woman question. *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 3 (1–2): 248–55.
- Zurn, Perry. 2016. Trans experience in philosophy. *Blog of the American Philosophical Association*. August: 11.
- . 2018. The curiosity at work in deconstruction. *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy* 27 (1): 84–106.