

**Mariana Ortega: *In-Between: Latina Feminist Phenomenology, Multiplicity, and the Self*, State University of New York Press, 2016. Pp. 296, paperback \$24.95.
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by Stephanie Rivera Berruz

Mariana Ortega's *In-Between: Latina Feminist Phenomenology, Multiplicity, and the Self* gives voice to the rich tradition of Latina feminist thought as she develops an account of the multiplicitous self. Drawing on an in depth analysis of the philosophy of Gloria Anzaldúa and María Lugones in conversation with the phenomenology of Martin Heidegger, Ortega develops the view that selves are multiplicitous and best understood as beings-between-worlds and beings-in-worlds. The position developed through the length of this text aims to account for the experience(s) of identities that sit at the margins, the border-dwellers, the *atravesadas*; that have historically been omitted from philosophical theorizing because their experiences do not track a unified sense of identity. More pointedly, Ortega provides an account of the self that seeks to capture the many dimensions of identity that inform what it means to be Latina in today's world.

Ortega's book is monumental for many reasons. First, it takes at its focal point the phenomenological experience of Latina's in the United States as its point of departure. To date very few books, if any, in philosophy have taken on this task. Second, the book is oriented around the use of the Latina feminist tradition to make its central claims, which makes it unique for a field that often charges Latina feminism for being non-philosophical. Third, it provides an in depth philosophical analysis of the thought of María Lugones and Gloria Anzaldúa. Contemporarily, even within the tradition of feminist thought, these two figures remain under-theorized or problematically tokenized. Ortega's analysis begins to fill part of this lacuna. Finally, and on a more personal note, Ortega's book gives life to the rich experiences of selves that exist at the intersections between race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. It is rare that I find myself reflected in a philosophy text and this book provides a space from which to theorize my identity as a queer Latina in philosophy. It further opens a space from which one can account phenomenologically for the many dimensions, at times conflicting and painful, that make up who we are. In the paragraphs that follow, I will expand on these points, arguing that Ortega paves the way for scholarship that privileges an intersectional approach to philosophical practice. In doing so, I offer points for further development as the book sets the stage for critical dialogue on selfhood, identity, and Latina identity.

Ortega puts forth a *mestiza* theory of identity that makes the case for multiplicitous selfhood, which she characterizes as a *being-between-worlds*, a *being-in-worlds*, and a *being-with*.^[1] For Ortega the self is multiplicitous, and even though all of us are multiplicitous, some multiplicitous selves (e.g. multicultural, queer, immigrant,

border dwellers) experience their multiplicity more sharply and violently.[2] Hence, Ortega's conceptualization of the self as multiplicitous accounts for moments of contradiction and ambiguity with one's identity, which produces what she refers to as a *thick* sense of not-being-at-ease. Nevertheless, moments of contradiction or ambiguity experienced do not result in the rupture of the self. Rather, Ortega notes that the multiplicitous self experiences existential continuity that makes a sense of "I" possible even amidst dimensions of contradiction within one's identity.[4]

The self articulated by Ortega is one which is situated in particular social/political circumstances, but also always in a state of making.[5] Ortega uses the term multiplicitous in order to capture the complexity of the self.[6] The self is not necessarily a homogenous unified entity, but rather encompassed by dimensions of complexity that make up our sense(s) of who we are. Distinguishing her view from Lugones' sense of self, Ortega maintains that the multiplicitous self is ontologically one self. However, the multiplicitous self is being-in-worlds. Building on Lugones' concept of worlds, Ortega reminds her readers of the importance of worlds for theorizing the self. Briefly, worlds, for Lugones and Ortega, are places inhabited by people (real or imaginary), conditioned by culture, power, varying constructions of life that produce gender, race, sexuality, class, ability. Worlds do not encompass the totality of being, but rather are incomplete constructions of life with shared meanings and languages, and are always open to interpretation.[7] Worlds are multiple and we traverse worlds on a daily basis, many worlds in fact. But how we fare in the worlds we traverse varies based on our social location(s), our comfort within worlds, and our ability to navigate them comfortably. For many people, Latinas in particular, world traveling is a necessary component of existence and survival. How each of the worlds we travel through is related to the self is of utmost importance for Ortega because it brings to the fore the importance of the multiplicitous self. In fact, the multiplicitous self is connected to many worlds. Hence, Ortega maintains that the multiplicitous self is also a being-between-worlds. The multiplicitous self can inhabit and have access to various worlds, and at times requires traversal between worlds in order create sense(s) of belonging.[8]

One of the most important contributions that Ortega makes with the concept of the multiplicitous self is the way in which it can account for the inter-meshed nature of social identities, which also entails the intertwining of oppression(s) that make some worlds harder to navigate than others. For instance, as a queer Latinx philosopher, I travel through many worlds: the world of academic philosophy, the classroom, the lesbian community in my home city, Puerto Rican diasporic communities, Latino communities. In each of these worlds, I fare differently depending on my positionality. In the academic philosophical community, my ethno-racial situation coupled with my queerness create conditions of alienation. In traversing the Puerto Rican communities of New York City, where I currently reside, I am at ease with my ethnicity and my race, but my queer identity can call forth moments of terror because the act of holding my partner's hand can transform us into objects for male imaginative consumption. Ortega's account of the multiplicitous self gives voice to these experiences without collapsing into ontological plurality. I am not a different person in each of these scenarios, but, rather,

the complexity of my multiplicity is captured through the ways in which different dimensions of my identity are highlighted or brought to the fore as I traverse various worlds. In Ortega's words: "The multiplicitous self as a self in process is flexible and decentered and does not *necessarily* need to be fully integrated. In terms of social identities, the multiplicitous self can shift, or as I prefer to see it, *highlight* different identities in different contexts." [9] Therefore, depending on the worlds that we are traversing, different aspects of our identity are highlighted, but we still retain a sense of mine-ness (as Ortega terms it) of our experiences that provides us with existential continuity that continues to hold the self together.

It is here, however, that I am left wondering about the relationship between the multiplicitous self and the process of highlighting. Ortega notes that different aspects of the self may be highlighted given the contingencies of the worlds that they traverse, but I wonder about the epistemic dimensions of highlighting. Ortega does not make note of the conditions of transparency to different dimensions of identity that one must have in order for highlighting to take place. She does note that under particular circumstances highlighting may not necessarily be a willful action. [10] However, it strikes me that in order to create the possibilities of willful highlighting one must have some form of transparent epistemic access with respect to the varying dimensions of social identities. For instance, given the fluidity of sexuality, how might one go about highlighting aspects of sexuality if one does not have access to a coherent sense of knowledge about one's desires? In order to have some form of agency with respect to highlighting, Ortega might need to commit to some stronger epistemic dimensions that she does not readily articulate, but nevertheless seem to go implied by virtue of the possibilities of willful highlighting. In the third chapter she does discuss epistemic shifting through the process of world traveling. However, what carries the distinction between highlighting and shifting remains vague. I am left asking: Does the distinction between shifting and highlighting imply different epistemic dimensions with respect to the self? Is this the upshot of the distinction?

Finally, I would like to note the epistemic value of Ortega's project. It is very rare in philosophy that one finds Latina theorists at the center stage of philosophical practice. In fact, and as Ortega notes, both Lugones and Anzaldúa remain underappreciated and undertheorized in philosophy. [11] Their systems of thought are seldom explored singularly or with great depth. Rather, philosophers make use of them in passing or as words of note when in need of citing a Latina feminist philosopher. Ortega's project does justice to this situation as she not only showcases the theories of both Lugones and Anzaldúa, but she critically engages with them as she develops her own position. Moreover, and of important note, is the way in which Ortega develops her project in conversation with Heidegger's phenomenology. It is often the case that authors of color in philosophy are only ever rendered philosophically legitimate if they are understood through the theory of an established Anglo/European male author. Tommy J. Curry has termed this phenomenon epistemological convergence. [12] One of the notable features of Ortega's book is the way in which she ensures that both Lugones and Anzaldúa do not collapse into the theory of Heidegger. Rather, she makes use of Heidegger as a tool

to better elucidate the phenomenology of the self that is already found and articulated in the work of Latina feminist writers. So, it remains the case that we can understand Latina phenomenology without Heidegger, but his theory provides tools that enable us to better track and understand phenomenological experience more broadly. As a result, Lugones and Anzaldúa stand on their own two feet in Ortega's text as worthy of close philosophical engagement without reliance on European philosophy for legitimacy.

In the afterword to the book, Ortega proposes the development of an intersectional praxis of philosophy, which is mindful of how philosophical texts can be read in light of concerns that link to the complex intermeshed realities of social identity (e.g. race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, nationality).[13] The praxis that she suggests requires that we abandon a notion of philosophy as a pure practice and start creatively imagining the possibilities of philosophy for reflecting on and transforming the conditions of the world(s) that we dwell and traverse.[14] In the end, we should reconstruct how we do philosophy and "let life define what really should be a love of wisdom, not of exclusion." [15] To this end, Ortega has been enormously successful. Grounded in a Latina feminist tradition she has developed an account of the self that aims to account for the complexity of identity. To this effect, I think there is room in her analysis to consider the intermeshing and crisscrossing of Latinx identities more broadly, whose complex identities sit at the border between queerness, nation, culture, race/ethnicity, desire, gender, ability, and so forth. Ortega calls attention to the fact that to theorize identity from these margins is not only a valuable philosophical enterprise; it is necessary. *In-Between: Latina Feminist Phenomenology, Multiplicity, and the Self* is a book that reminds its readers that identity cannot be divorced from how we do philosophy.

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Notes

[1] Mariana Ortega. *In-Between: Latina Feminist Phenomenology, Multiplicity, and the Self* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2016), p. 3.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 50.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 50.

[4] Ibid., p. 50.

[5] Ibid., p. 63.

[6] Ibid., p. 64.

[7] Ibid., p. 65.

[8] Ibid., p. 67.

[9] Ibid., p. 76.

[10] Ibid., p.76.

[11] Ibid., p. 4.

[12] Tommy J. Curry, "On Derelict and Method: The Methodological Crisis of African-American Philosophy's Study of African-Descended Peoples under Integrationist Milieu," *Radical Philosophy Review* 14.2 (2011): p. 145.

[13] Ortega, *In-Between*, p. 218.

[14] Ibid., p. 219.

[15] Ibid., p. 220.