

RPR

Volume 10 • Number 1 • 2007

Radical Philosophy Review

Journal of the Radical Philosophy Association

Radical Philosophy Review (ISSN 1388-4441) is published biannually by the Radical Philosophy Association (RPA) in cooperation with the Philosophy Documentation Center. An individual subscription to this peer-reviewed journal includes membership in the RPA. More information about the Association is available online at www.radicalphilosophy.org.

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Editors' Introduction

Eduardo Mendieta & Jeffrey Paris

To the many well-known limitations of Marxist theory and practice in the twentieth century, let us add one. As we can see now, the twentieth-century reception of Karl Marx was circumscribed by the arc of a swinging pendulum. At one extreme of the pendulum we found the claim that Marx was more Hegelian than Hegel, while at the other we found that the true Marx had entirely ceased to be Hegelian, indeed that he had ceased to be a philosopher at all and had ascended to the pinnacle of true science: political economy. (Perhaps somewhere outside of this arc were those Austro-Marxists who, led by Otto Bauer, wanted to rehabilitate a Kantian Marx, but they remained peripheral to what later became known as Western Marxism.) Most Hegelian readings of Marx, beginning with those of Georg Lukács and Karl Korsch, were undertaken when few of Marx's manuscripts were available and the project of compiling his and Engels' complete works was barely underway. So, even by the end of the twentieth century, only a handful of scholars understood that what separated the *Grundrisse* from *Das Kapital* was not only the issue of how to present the phenomenology of capitalism through a dialectical method proper to the social articulation of the commodity form. Also at stake were deeper philosophical issues concerning relationships among exchange value, labor,



reification, alienation, the social totality, and the negation of the negation, that is, the project of the abolition of capitalism.

During the 1980s, Enrique Dussel undertook a detailed analysis of Marx's manuscripts, plunging fearlessly into the thousands of pages of intervening drafts separating the 1957 *Grundrisse* from 1967's *Das Kapital*. (One related project emerging during this period was his remarkable essay "The Concept of Fetishism in Marx's Thought, Parts I & II," published in *Radical Philosophy Review* vol. 6, nos. 1 & 2 (2003): 1-27 & 93-129.) The result was no less than five books of exegesis, reconstruction and analysis—including *Towards an Unknown Marx: A Commentary on the Manuscripts of 1861-63*—that placed the category of living labor [*lebendige Arbeit*] at the core of Marx's conceptual laboratory. In Dussel's interpretive *tour de force*, living labor is a non-dialectical, non-Hegelian category that enabled Marx to discern a pivot for the critique and eventual overcoming of capitalism. He has also argued that living labor is a Schellingian category, one that finds its echo in Emmanuel Levinas's metaphysics of alterity, in which *prima philosophia* is cast as an ethics of response to the other.

Though it remains uncharted territory for most of us in the United States, Dussel's work is slowly finding a reception in the English-speaking philosophical community. In this issue of *Radical Philosophy Review*, Mario Sáenz takes up Dussel's findings to bring them into dialogue with the popular biopolitical critique of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, which has linked capital extraction to the de-materialization of work. Sáenz provides us with a serious and thorough accounting of the Schellingian-Levinasian reading of Marx, sharply describing the "exteriority" of living labor, that revolutionary pivot in this age of grotesque impoverishment. While Hardt and Negri's view of de-materialized labor remains, perhaps, limited by its own eurocentric origins, Sáenz complements their view with the recognition that living labor can oppose the existing regime of "accumulation by exclusion," the exploitation via marginalization that remains paramount in a post-colonial world.

Kathryn Russell, too, brings us new dimensions of Marx-inspired thought. Expanding on Bertell Ollman's original contributions to Marxist analysis, Russell develops a feminist dialectical method that neither subordinates gender nor makes it supplementary. Gender, and the sexual difference that it inflects socially, is an abstraction that is only given meaning and content in specific contexts. As a relational category, gender is always entwined and co-determined, yet remains irreducible. To maintain this claim, Russell reconstructs a Marxist view of legitimate versus alienating abstractions, as read through Ollman, and thereby beautifully demonstrates that to think dialectically means never to think in terms of hierarchies, levels, or sequences. To think dialectically is to remain aware of the intersectionality of human oppressions without prioritizing, and the complementary need to individu-



ate categories of analysis to reveal their rich and singular implications. Thus, in keeping with the Hegelian origins of dialectics, such thought enables us to hold a social totality in thought, while simultaneously realizing that one's view of that totality is implicated in it.

Dialectics, nevertheless, is not all there is to critique, which as Patricia Huntington reminds us is not only a *techné* or science but a form of *poesis*, undertaken for the sake of a social transformation. By *poesis* we mean nothing more or less than attempting to see the world in a radically different way, a way that is neither underwritten nor warranted by the present social order, and thus *poesis* is also revolution. Critique aims to glimpse a social utopia, one that is not localizable on the present capitalist and possessive cartographies of exploitation and expropriation. In this way, it is also a profoundly spiritual quest and engagement. Huntington offers an incisive and moving portrait of the spiritual dimensions of the Zapatista revolutionary project, combating spiritual deracination and social rootlessness. Combining highly personal reflections with theoretical acumen and historical narrative, Huntington urges us to think of Zapatismo as more than a postmodern revolution *avant la lettre*, but rather as a challenging re-thinking of the Latin American political imaginary, one that recenters insurrectional spirituality.

In the *Reviews* section, Mariana Ortega looks at two recent books that project and develop a post-positivist, realist theory of identity: first, the co-edited *Reclaiming Identity* by Paula M. L. Moya and Michael Hames-García that includes such luminaries of this new paradigm as Linda Martín Alcoff and Satya Mohanty; and second, Moya's own extended reflection on identity entitled *Learning from Experience*. Ortega indicates how these works help to bring together and surpass essentialist and postmodern views of identity and agency. To conclude the issue, Cynthia Willett discovers the hidden, tragic view of life that complicates Anne Cudd's recent work *Analyzing Oppression*. Cudd's social cognition model points to the need for a deeper sensibility and attentiveness to dialectical forms of recognition, such as were theorized by Hegel at his best. And thus we not only find ourselves needing, time and again, to return to Marx in order to advance Marx, but then also to return to Hegel to advance Hegel, to return to dialectics to advance dialectics, and—must we say it?—to return to revolution in order to advance revolution.

Identity Revisited

Mariana Ortega

Review of:

Paula M. L. Moya and Michael R. Hames-García, eds., *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicaments of Postmodernism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000. Pp. 364. Paper, \$27.50. ISBN: 0520223493.

Paula M. L. Moya. *Learning from Experience: Minority Identities, Multicultural Struggles*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. Pp. 247. Paper, \$17.95. ISBN: 0520230149.

Those interested in the concept of identity but disillusioned with the ways in which the identity wars have culminated in some circles—with the death of the concept through postmodernist, poststructuralist accounts or with its reification and glorification through essentialist accounts—have reason to celebrate: the elaboration of the theory of identity originally proposed by literary critic Satya Mohanty. The new theory, awkwardly coined “the post-positivist, realist theory of identity” is discussed in Paula M. L. Moya’s and Michael R. Hames-García’s *Reclaiming Identity* as well as in Moya’s *Learning from Experience*. Both of these texts have much to contribute to the understanding of the importance of the concept of identity for both intellectual and practical reasons. Moya and Hames-García are not just doing theory for the sake of theory here. They claim that the more in-depth, robust theory of identity that they propose promises not only to show the link between identity and social location but also to contribute to a liberatory praxis. The post-positivist, realist theory of identity, according to contributors, is to have an

impact not only on how we understand ourselves and others but on our interpretations of literary texts, our educational system, our possibilities for building coalitions among different racial, sexual, economic groups, and our quest for justice. While the theory proposed here may be deemed outdated or outmoded by postmodernists and poststructuralists who claim to have successfully buried the notions of identity and subjectivity, it offers new grounds for re-assessing our understanding of the role of experience in identity formation and knowledge acquisition. If epistemology has been taken off the philosophical menu by skeptics and relativists of the postmodern persuasion, post-positivist realists are bringing it back with a vengeance, except this time it is accompanied by a newly understood concept of objectivity and an acceptance of error as crucial in the quest for attaining a more accurate understanding of the world.

Worried about the inefficacy of both postmodern and essentialist theories of identity in answering important questions related to the intersection between identity, social location, knowledge, and politics, Moya and Hames-García propose a much needed reevaluation—more a reclamation—of the concept of identity that has, in their view, lost its life under the theoretical knife of the postmodernist. In *Reclaiming Identity*, they present us with an examination of the strengths of the post-positivist, realist theory of identity as it relates to numerous issues such as identity-formation, multiplicity, embodied knowledge, the linkage between facts and values, the possibility of progressive social change, the problem of representing and speaking for others, historical methodology, individual agency and identity politics.

The editors do well in starting this much needed re-examination of the concept of identity with the 1993 essay that develops the post-positivist, realist theory of identity as a response to postmodernist approaches to literary criticism, Mohanty's "The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity, On *Beloved* and the Postcolonial Condition."¹ This piece serves as a stepping stone to what is to come in the rest of the anthology, for it introduces significant aspects of the post-positivist, realist theory of identity: (1) its interpretation of experience and identity as socially, linguistically, theoretically constructed and yet not arbitrary; (2) its interpretation of objectivity as a product of particular social practices; (3) its understanding of the

1. Originally published in *Cultural Critique*, no. 24 (Spring, 1993): 41-80.

Portions of this review appeared in *The American Philosophical Association Newsletter*, Volume 03, Number 2, Spring 2004.

Radical Philosophy Review wishes to express our gratefulness for the opportunity to reprint those portions.

interrelatedness between identity, politics, and epistemology; and (4) its ability to distinguish between legitimate and spurious identities—all within the framework of an analysis of the characters Sethe and Paul D from Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, as well as an analysis of Naomi Scheman's example of Alice.² In this piece Mohanty skillfully reads identities as comparable to complex theories about the world that can be evaluated depending on their explanatory power. While he clearly shows how Paul D comes to better understand Sethe's action—which at first he could understand only as the action of a four-legged being—and also how Paul D grows morally, it is not clear whether Mohanty attributes essentialist characteristics to the African-American slave mother. Yet, for the purposes of the anthology, Mohanty adeptly sets up fundamental aspects of the post-positivist, realist view of identity.

Key in the anthology is Moya's essay "Postmodernism, 'Realism', and the Politics of Identity: Cherríe Moraga and Chicana Feminism," which is also the first chapter of *Learning from Experience*. This essay takes Mohanty's theory of identity beyond the arena of literary criticism and situates it firmly in the philosophical identity wars. Moya develops Mohanty's theory and carries out the critique against iconic postmodernists' views on identity (e.g., Donna Haraway and Judith Butler) in order to show the importance of embodiment in identity formation. She attacks these two thinkers' views on the basis of their inability to acknowledge the link between identity and social location. She shows how Haraway misappropriates the myth of *La Malinche*, giving it a positive spin despite the fact that many actual flesh and blood Chicanas do not see the figure of *La Malinche* as empowering. Moya's attack against Butler rests primarily on the claim that Butler fails to view the subject's politics as having a basis in experience.

An important point to be noted here is that Moya, as well as other contributors to the anthology, is carving out a space between two well-known, dichotomous, and what she sees as pernicious positions, the essentialist and the postmodernist. For Moya, being in one of these two positions is problematic—it is ultimately to lose agency, to be contradictory and fragmented, to miss one's connection to a real social and natural world, to homogenize or universalize experience, or to miss the fact that some identities have greater epistemic value than others. Instead, Moya is inspired by Cherríe Moraga's "theory in the flesh," which reconceptualizes the notion of identity as relational and grounded in historical and social categories. Thus, being a Chicana is not about discursivity and performance; rather, it is about being positioned in a specific material location with specific material conditions.

2. See Naomi Scheman, "Anger and the Politics of Naming," in *Women and Language in Literature and Society*, eds. Sally McConnell-Ginet, Ruth Borker, and Nelly Furman (New York: Praeger, 1980), 1974-87. Alice, in Scheman's article, has joined a consciousness-raising group to mitigate feelings of depression only to find that it was overlaying feelings of anger that became available through a political redescription of her situation.

To summarize her view, Moya provides the following six main claims about the post-positivist, realist theory of identity, claims with which the rest of contributors agree and, some more successfully than others, revisit in their pieces:

1. A person's social categories are causally related to her experiences;
2. An individual's experience will influence but not entirely determine the formation of cultural identity;
3. There is an epistemic component to identity that allows for the possibility of error and of accuracy in interpreting things that happen to us;
4. Some identities have greater epistemic value than others that the same individual might claim;
5. Our ability to understand fundamental aspects of our world depends on our ability to acknowledge and understand the social, political, economic, and epistemic consequences of our own social location;
6. Oppositional struggle is fundamental to our ability to understand the world more accurately.

These claims, which form the bulk of the post-positivist, realist theory of identity, allow contributors to provide important insights to our understanding of the notions of multiplicity, experience, truth and epistemic privilege. The issue of multiplicity (in terms of race, sex, gender, sexuality) is best examined by Michael Hames-García in “Who are Our Own People?” Hames-García examines one of the most important concerns for those interested in defending the concept of identity and appealing to identities in order to gain political currency—how we are to expand solidarity and overcome separation given the multiplicity of identity categories and given the fact that in many cases some identities are privileged over others. This is a crucial question that needs to be answered if one is to reclaim identity but avoid essentialism as well as “restriction” (Hames-García's term to denote the social processes through which selves get categorized in terms of one aspect of their identity only). Hames-García asks us to consider an example from Michael Nava's novel *The Hidden Law*, a gay lawyer who is made to feel as an outsider to the Chicano community because of his sexuality while at the same time this community embraces him on account of his Mexican American heritage. Hames-García explains that the post-positivist, realist view of identity can best handle such complexities of identity due to its commitment to understand the historical character and social functions of both affirmed and excluded identities, and thus to revise and expand current understandings of these identities. The post-positivist, realist view, according to Hames-García, can better account for the intersectionality of race, sex, gender, and sexuality and consequently do justice to multiplicity.

Contrary to claims by thinkers such as Joan Scott about the indeterminacy, inaccuracy, and unreliability of experience, contributors also appeal to the importance of experience in the formation of identity and in acquiring knowledge of the world. For the post-positivist realist, experience is neither nebulous nor absolutely obvious from a first-person perspective. Rather, it is socially constructed and thus its interpretation is dependent on our relationship to others as well as theories that we hold. But this fact does not make it arbitrary since, according to post-positivist realists, our personal experience also refers outward to the world. No longer, then, should we consider personal experience to be unreliable in our quest for knowledge, a claim endorsed by postmodernists. While all of the contributors to the anthology rely on these claims about experience for their analysis, William S. Wilkerson's “Is There Something You Need to Tell Me? Coming Out and the Ambiguity of Experience” stands out due to its careful analysis of the complexity of personal experience in identity formation and its tackling of a major objection to the post-positivist, realist theory of identity. Through his example of the difficulties encountered when coming out, Wilkerson aptly points to the fact that experience may be ambiguous and consequently misinterpreted, thus creating a need for revision in order to attain more accurate interpretations.

This desire to get a more accurate interpretation of experience as well as the claim that it is possible to acquire such interpretations is absolutely crucial for post-positivist realists and a significant part of their critique of postmodernism. A piece that demonstrates the post-positivist realist's commitment to acquire more accurate interpretations as well as the need to apply the post-positivist agenda in area studies such as Asian American Studies is Minh T. Nguyen's “It Matters to Get the Facts Straight.” Nguyen offers a realist reading of Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*, a novel which is, according to her, mistakenly read as affirming postmodernist tenets. By showing how the character Naomi grows morally and politically from her experiences, Nguyen wishes to make clear the link between experience, identity, and historical events such as the treatment of Japanese Americans during and after World War II in Canada. Such historical events are not always clearly understood. Nguyen points to how characters in the novel have to continually reassess their interpretations and revise their views of events in order to “get the facts straight.” But getting the facts straight is no easy matter. The post-positivist realist admits that mistakes will be made and that such mistakes are part of the process, as they open possibilities for reinterpreting experience. Error, then, is not the malicious demon to be avoided at all costs; it is in the path to truth.

It is notable that one of the consequences of the post-positivist, realist theory of identity is that we should take claims about epistemic privilege seriously. The point here is that, given the fact that identities refer outward to the social world, it is not

possible to simply adopt any identity and consider oneself as oppressed as other identities. Some identities indeed “know” more about suffering and discrimination. Moya does well in explaining this in her response to Butler and Haraway and she does well avoiding the claim that one will have epistemic privilege simply in virtue of being a Chicana. Instead, her point is that being a Chicana yields specific experiences which lead to epistemic claims about the world that others may benefit from knowing. Another contributor that brings in an interesting discussion as it relates to the question of epistemic privilege is Brent R. Henze, in “Who Says Who Says?: The Epistemological Grounds for Agency in Liberatory Political Projects.” Henze urges us not to forget the notion of individual agency in our discussions of epistemic privilege. He tries to show that individual agency provides the epistemic and political grounds for effecting the collective agency of a group.

The anthology closes with Linda Martín-Alcoff’s excellent piece “Who’s Afraid of Identity Politics?,” in which she tries not only to alleviate the fears of adhering to a realist position but also to show that it is indeed fear, “fear of the power of the other,” that has led the tradition to a critique of the notion of identity. As she nicely puts it, “the critical issue here is that a claim of realism in no way presupposes that the real can be drained of its human contributions” (317). And as she says after presenting a powerful genealogy of the notion of identity and how it has come to be attacked due to the “fear of the power of the other”:

The colonizers and the dominant need to deflect the reflection they see in their victims’ eyes, and the victims themselves need to be able to transcend the oppressors’ representations. Thankfully, however, these do not exhaust the possible relationships that can exist between self and Other. Nor do they exhaust the genealogies of social categories of identity. (334)

* * * * *

Those familiar with recent identity-debates should recognize the important contribution that *Reclaiming Identity* makes. It is clearly a much needed collection that promises to engage us in fruitful discussions about identity and to lift us from the mud in which we have been stuck given the choice between essentialism and postmodernism. However, we need to remember that the philosophical discussion of identity covers more ground than that provided by essentialist and postmodernist positions. There are numerous theories of identity coming from areas in philosophy such as phenomenology, pragmatism, and narrative theory. There are also key discussions, as within Marxism, which raise the issue of epistemic privilege, especially as it relates to a liberatory *praxis*. Thus, while the contributions in *Reclaiming Identity* respond to essentialism and postmodernism, they do not engage with

other theories of identity that may prove to be as robust, if not more robust, than the post-positivist, realist theory or with theories such as dialectical materialism which have been notoriously engaged in the process of liberation through an analysis of class and capital. How well post-positivist realism fares when compared with other philosophical positions remains to be seen, especially given the volume’s thin analysis of post-positivist realism as a liberatory *praxis*. Much more needs to be said about the positive contribution of the post-positivist realist view beyond realist interpretations of literary texts, realist methodologies, affirmation and defense of area studies, and epistemic cooperation between academics within university circles.

It is Moya who provides this more extensive examination of the post-positivist, realist theory of identity in her book *Learning from Experience*. In continuity with her chapter in *Reclaiming Identity*, Moya’s concern is to show the inefficacy of essentialism and, more importantly, postmodernism. Thus her first step is to carry out a critique of postmodern accounts of the subject that jettison the concepts of identity and experience. In addition, Moya offers an important and much-needed critique of neo-conservative accounts such as those of Shelby Steele and Richard Rodriguez that call for cultural assimilation. These two critiques constitute a great part of the text, comprising chapters 1, 2, and 3. Chapters 4 and 5 offer what Moya calls a realist proposal for multicultural education and a reading of the work of Helena María Viramontes, respectively. Ultimately, *Learning from Experience* constitutes a defense of Ethnic Studies scholars who appeal to the experience of marginalized subjects in order to attain a more objective understanding of the world and who appeal to multiculturalism to open the possibility of what Moya, following Mohanty, calls “epistemic cooperation.”

After a critique of Haraway and Butler’s views on identity, which have been discussed above, Moya devotes time to the views of Norma Alarcón and Chela Sandoval, each of whom she sees as having a more ambivalent relationship to postmodernism. Nevertheless, Moya aims to show that there is an inconsistency in their adherence to postmodernism while appealing to what she calls “some form of identity-based agency.” Moya discusses Alarcón’s view of Chicanas as “subjects-in-process” who are discursively constituted and contradictory because of the contradictory nature of the discourses that form them. Moya aptly shows the problems that arise when subjectivity is understood as a function of discursivity. She tries to show how Alarcón’s subject-in-process view does not leave room for Chicana self-transformation, or Chicana political agency. Most importantly, according to Moya, Alarcón’s position fails to take into consideration the relationship between the production of subjects and biological attributes such as skin color. As she states, “Unless we can acknowledge that embodied human beings have at least some

preexisting properties that are interpreted, but not ‘produced,’ by the discursive contexts in which they live, it would seem to be purely arbitrary that for example, I, as a native-born New Mexican, have been ‘produced’ as a Chicana, rather than as, say, a Native or Anglo-American man” (72). In the end, Moya’s aim is not to claim an essentialism but to push the problem of identity, “the problem of accounting for how and why certain people are ‘subjected’ to certain discourses” (72).

While sympathetic to Sandoval’s theory of “oppositional consciousness,” Moya also casts doubt primarily by criticizing what she sees as a postmodern drive to consider oppressive any type of project interested in truth and knowledge acquisition. According to Moya, the positive aspects of Sandoval’s view are her attribution of self-consciousness or reflectivity to women of color, and her recognition of the importance of the role of U.S. third-world feminists in politics. Moya, however, thinks that Sandoval’s view has some crucial problems: (1) the claim that differential consciousness (oppositional consciousness) is now available to all first-world citizens; (2) the view that a shift in consciousness involves a shift in identity and/or ideology; and (3) the claim that epistemic projects are suspect. Moya claims that Sandoval, like the rest of postmodernists, undermines herself when she claims both that there cannot be a truth for everyone and that her own claims should be regarded as true (claims such as that some groups have engaged in systematic oppression, that white feminists have illegitimately appropriated the work of U.S. third-world feminists, and that some oppressed groups have developed successful oppositional ideologies).

This last criticism of Sandoval, however, is a standard criticism made of so-called postmodern positions and does not really come to the crux of the issues that Sandoval is bringing to light in her discussion of oppositional consciousness, namely, the radicality of the strategies that oppressed peoples must follow. As Sandoval states,

The “truth” of differential social movement is composed of manifold positions for truth: these positions are ideological stands that are viewed as potential tactics drawn from a never-ending interventionary fund, the contents of which remobilize power. Differential consciousness and social movement thus are linked to the necessity to stake out and hold solid identity and political positions in the social world.³

Sandoval is not interested in getting at the truth; she is interested in providing the best tactic for survival and conversion for oppressed people, regardless of whether it can be said to be universal truth. Moya’s point that Sandoval’s own statements are “positions for truth” is well taken. Yet, it places Sandoval’s position into a framework that is being questioned in the first place. Although Sandoval herself needs to say much more about how her view of oppositional consciousness leads to

3. Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 60.

“egalitarian social relations,” her point is that people of color deploy this oppositional consciousness every day and that it is a promising tool for social change. Perhaps Moya should have concentrated more on Sandoval’s claims about this type of consciousness being a “performance,” a move that puts her dangerously close to claims that the oppressed always have the chance to choose their consciousness, when in fact we know that, given certain societal, material, and economic conditions, one is most likely going to be pushed toward certain identities or ideologies (a claim that can be well-supported by Moya’s realist theory of identity). Moya does make a gesture in this direction when discussing the idea of *la facultad* (a new type of consciousness promoted by Sandoval, following Anzaldúa), but does not provide enough of an in-depth argument.

In her critique of neo-conservatives, Moya states that people of color do not need to assimilate, as neo-conservatives such as Rodriguez and Steele suggest; rather they can be *asimilao*, they can be part of a “process of multi-directional cross-cultural acculturation” rather than jumping into the “melting pot” and becoming indistinguishable from whites. Moya provides an interesting, strong, and much needed analysis of the problems with neo-conservative minorities’ positions and demonstrates their mistake in adhering to an essentialist view of identity. She skillfully shows the mistake that thinkers like Rodriguez and Steele make in setting “the bourgeois heterosexual Euro-American male subject as the standard of universal humanity” (108), and shows their inability to recognize how material conditions impinge upon minorities and thus undermine their agency (hence missing the link between identity and social location). Most importantly, she points out their main mistake of setting collective racial identity in opposition to individual identity. Here, Moya hits the nail on the head. She is right in seeing that identity is relational, that collective identity cannot be set in opposition to individual identity. As she says, “all identities, including racial ones, are inescapably relational: to know ourselves as *selves* requires us to know ourselves in relation to *others*” (110). But given her claims, she herself needs to say more throughout her book about the role of community and collective identities in her post-positivist, realist theory of identity.

Her insightful discussion of multiculturalism does get to some of the issues that arise regarding the role of community in her theory of identity. Entitled “Learning How to Learn from Others” (chapter 4), the chapter is a welcome addition to her theoretical account of identity. It analyzes recent programs of multicultural education and shows the main pitfalls that plague them: their emphasis on the benefits that minority students will get from them, but qualified by their limited understanding of “culture.” Here we can see that Moya is not just interested in theorizing about identity but that she is committed to practice, to making a difference. After going over the studies on multicultural education she notes that one of the principal mistakes of

the programs is that teachers themselves, even well-intentioned ones, are not aware of their own social location—they do not always understand that they come from a dominant culture and that consequently there are definite political, social, economic, and epistemic consequences of their social location. Thus she presents us with a realist proposal for multicultural education that includes:

1. studying the concept of “culture” as an integral part of a multicultural curriculum;
2. promoting that educators have an understanding of the relationship between culture and identity;
3. encouraging educators to acknowledge that the concept of “value” is always determined with respect to a particular reference group;
4. having the goal of creating the conditions in which students feel empowered to work toward identifying those aspects of different cultures that are most conducive to human flourishing;
5. asking educators and students to approach cultural others with the “Principle of Charity”;
6. structuring the curriculum to give greater emphasis to the cultures and views of non-dominant groups;
7. encouraging educators to incorporate an awareness of the power dynamics of the classroom; and
8. encouraging educators to recognize that conflict is inevitable and necessary and that it serves as a potentially creative, and not just destructive, force.

According to Moya, a realist can use this program of education in order to promote a more democratic and culturally diverse society. Such a program is not to be set in stone; it involves a series of modifications and revisions depending on empirical data pertaining to specific social locations.

In the last chapter of the book, Moya seemingly shifts gears and offers a realist reading of the work of Helena María Viramontes’s *Under the Feet of Jesus* in order to elaborate on the relationship between identity, interpretation, and agency. This chapter points to one of Moya’s contributions to literary criticism: her claim that hermeneutic exercises are not necessarily bound by the discipline’s standard interpretative contexts. Instead of placing Viramontes’s novel in the context of Chicana writing, Moya skillfully places it in the context of American social realism and compares it to the work of William Faulkner, John Steinbeck, and Tomás Rivera. More interestingly, Moya sees the character of Estrella in the text as illustrating major points regarding the post-positivist, realist theory of identity. Estrella is the subject who through a series of interactions with Perfecto, Petra and others comes to consciousness of herself and attains a more critical understanding of her world. Through an interpretive analysis of the narrative, Moya wants to underscore once

more the epistemic importance of social location by showing how Estrella changes as she reacts to her environment. As Moya states, “Estrella’s transformation of consciousness ... posits an adequate understanding of the social world as a necessary precursor to effective social action” (214).

The relationship between knowledge and effective social action is precisely the right issue with which to conclude an impressive work and is the question that lingers after closing the book. One wishes that Moya had said more about social action, but already she has said so much about the importance of the relationship between identity and social location and one can clearly see that she is not merely interested in doing theory while sitting comfortably in the academic tower. An analysis of social action in light of the post-positivist, realist view of identity would be an appropriate next step for Moya. There she could take on two important issues:

Firstly, Moya urges us to recover the experiences of oppressed people. This recovery includes the re-examination by oppressed peoples of their own lives. Contrary to so-called standpoint theory (Sandra Harding), Moya does not think that non-oppressed people should start theorizing from the lives of the oppressed. Instead, she proposes that after an examination of their own lives (a careful analysis of their identity *vis a vis* their social location) oppressed people can *share* their experience with those who have not been oppressed in the same way (132). Presumably, the sharing of these experiences should help members of dominant groups have a better understanding of the oppressed. This is all part of effecting the social change so badly needed in our current society. Yet, what does *sharing* mean? Under what conditions can a member of an oppressed group say that she has successfully shared her experiences? What does it mean for a member of the dominant group to say that she understands the oppressed’s experiences? Is there an implicit optimism here that in fact the members of the oppressed group will be able to understand the oppressed experiences? Consider Ofelia Schutte’s important claim that there is a certain cultural incommensurability.⁴ Moreover, if conflict should be seen as a potential for creativity, as Moya suggests, to what extent can it be seen as resolvable and to what extent can groups understand each other given these conflicts?

Secondly, given the lack of an appropriate treatment of the relationship between knowledge, identity and social location in various theories of identity, Moya’s view is refreshing. But the obvious dilemma needs to be considered: what good is knowledge if one does not have the material conditions that will allow for social change? In other words, the reality of social location is indeed important for one’s understanding of identity but it is also important for one’s possibility of effecting social change. Yet, it is clearly not enough. It is worth asking, Why is so much

4. See Ofelia Schutte, “Cultural Alterity: Cross-cultural Communication and Feminist Theory in North-South Contexts,” *Hypatia* 13, no. 2 (1998): 53-72.



currency given to knowledge? Here we are reminded of Nietzsche's "What in us really wants 'truth'? ... Why not rather untruth? and uncertainty?"⁵ The point is not that it is better to live a lie but that there are times when some oppressed people cannot afford knowing about their circumstances. There might even be other times in which ignorance might serve a better purpose (as when a minority strategically performs the role of the naïve, ignorant minority because that is what is expected of her). Here the emerging work on epistemology of ignorance would be helpful.

Finally, given phenomenologists' extensive work on the question of the self/subject, a question that merits attention is how Moya's post-positivist, realist view of identity compares to existential phenomenological views of self such as Heidegger's and Sartre's. While these thinkers do not always explicitly write about social categories such as race and gender, their views, like Moya's, are committed to doing justice to experience. Thus, they provide accounts which analyze the relationship between selves and the world. It would be interesting to see how Moya's realist position fares in a phenomenological context and how these phenomenological positions could benefit from Moya's extensive analysis of the relationship between identity and social location. *Learning from Experience* as well as her collaboration with Hames-García are indeed major contributions to the debate on identity that promise to take us beyond essentialism and postmodernism and to open the door to new comparative research with other theories of identity that also purport to do justice to experience. Most importantly, these two texts are a reminder that we no longer should divorce theory from practice, although just how much liberatory *praxis* we can gain from a theory remains to be seen.

5. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1989), 9.

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Layout for this issue was done at the University of San Francisco by Jeffrey Paris. Special thanks go to George Leaman of the Philosophy Documentation Center, and to the University of San Francisco.