In-Between: Latina Feminist Phenomenology, Multiplicity, and the Self by Mariana Ortega (review)

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Mariana Ortega. *In-Between: Latina Feminist Phenomenology, Multiplicity, and the Self*

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While the lines between literature, philosophy, history, and other expressions of lived experience have not always been sharply drawn, in Anglophone academia it is rare to find a work of philosophy that *does* what it *describes*. By this I mean that few texts are able to enact the content of their theoretical work in an academic setting. Yet, Mariana Ortega's *In-Between: Latina Feminist Phenomenology, Multiplicity, and the Self* carries out such a difficult task. Taking up distinct textures, hues, and philosophical traditions, Ortega brings discussions of the phenomenology of lived experience and theories of oppression into conversation, debate, and at times, playful contrast with one another. More concretely, Ortega's sustained argument for a conception of multiplicitous selfhood draws from the variety of sources, everyday experiences, and disciplinary patterns that have shaped her existential multiplicity. By publishing a work that draws so intimately from Ortega's years of research, mentoring, and coalitional labor with other scholars, this work is an homage to the communities through which the text was created, and it serves as a new point of departure for future generations of Latina feminist philosophy. In what follows, I provide a brief overview of several major themes of *In-Between*, and conclude by discussing a potential area of extension for Ortega's insights in the book.

It is important to note that, as Ortega's first monograph, this text weaves together several important strands of her previous contributions to philosophy. Several chapters of the text draw from the author's previously published writings on the relationship between Gloria Anzaldúa's conception of the *new mestiza,* Martin Heidegger's articulation of *Dasein*, and the practice of what María Lugones calls "world-traveling."[1] Additionally, the conception of "hometactics" foregrounded in the book's concluding chapter is developed out of Ortega's work on this topic that was originally published in a collection of texts on phenomenology and race.[2] We thus find in Ortega's new book a masterfully crafted collection of writings focused on themes that have been evident in her work since 2001. Alongside these carefully repatterned themes in the book, Ortega seamlessly adds new discussions of Anzaldúa's later-period writings, an analysis of DuBoisian double-consciousness, and a rich and sustained engagement with practices of resistance, including what she calls "critical world-traveling" (131–39).

The overarching focus of the book is the development of the notion of the multiplicitous self. Most pointedly, in chapter 2, titled "Being-between-Worlds, Being-in-Worlds," Ortega presents her readers with the difficult pairing or "crisscrossings" of Latina feminist phenomenology and Heideggerian existential phenomenology (51). Drawing on the fundamental Heideggerian insight that "the self is always *in process*, *in the making*," Ortega fluidly moves between conceptions of the "ontic" and the "ontological" (52). Quoting from *Being and Time*, she reminds us that "there is always a 'relatedness backwards and forward' between the ontic and the ontological," that is, between the meaning of being as such (the "ontological") and particular, contingent facts about any given entity's existence (the "ontic") (11).[3] Ortega's approach to phenomenology then offers a framework for understanding how being-in-the-world is experienced by the multiplicitous self as in flux, or as lacking stability. The resources for this conception of self are both from the writings of other Latina feminist theorists and from very intimate moments of multiplicity that the author herself has experienced. In this sense, rather than abstracting or separating the individual self from an articulation of being, Ortega intertwines narratives of the ontic self into the question of being.

Namely, Ortega emphasizes the new *mestiza* as an account of self that is derived from Anzaldúa's experiences in the *herida abierta/*open wound of the Mexico-U.S. border. Ortega states that the new *mestiza* self "experiences a lived struggle because she is split between cultures, races, languages, and genders, all tugging at her, pulling her to one side or the other, demanding alliances or setting down rules, continually pushing her to choose one or the other" (Ortega 2016, 26). Inhabiting such a tense space in between, the new *mestiza* rejects binaries and comes to occupy a space of liminality and instability. This space in between can lead to fear and paralysis, but

also to creativity and transformation. Crossing between worlds, the new *mestiza*, or what Anzaldúa later redescribes in her work as the *nepantlera*, seeks pathways of resistance through her liminal positioning. Moreover, the *nepantlera* importantly "facilitates crossings" for others (38). In this latter sense, the description of being in between offered by Ortega becomes an invitation, or a kind of philosophical pathway between Latina feminism and Heideggerian existential phenomenology.

Ortega also draws from María Lugones's now-classic work on the notion of world-traveling as a way to add texture to the multiplicitous self's sense of being-in-the-world.[4] Rather than the Heideggerian conception of *Dasein,* wherein the description of being is one of "already having a sense of the meaning of being," the multiplicitous self that must travel between worlds "does not have a nonreflective, nonthematic sense of all the norms and practices of the spaces or worlds she inhabits" (57, 59). As such, being-between-worlds is the existential description of experiencing a life of "constant ruptures," and it is here that Ortega links the ontic facts of marginalization and oppression to an ontological manner of being-in-the-world (61).

The arguments of Ortega's book are many layered, and I will not attempt to show them all in their entirety here. Rather, I hope to open one area of the text for critical analysis with the goal of seeing what further patterns might emerge from Ortega's conception of the multiplicitous self. One theme that surfaces throughout the work is the conception of temporality. For those familiar with Heidegger's work, the functions of temporality and historicity are no doubt significant. Ortega too notes that both the new *mestiza* and *Dasein* always project themselves upon future possibilities (52). As selves in process, each being is a temporal being. However, as Ortega notes, "while Heidegger highlights the fact that Dasein is a historical being by virtue of being temporal, Anzaldúa is interested in resurrecting and reinterpreting the ancient history of myths that have informed Mexican and Mexican American culture" (57). As such, *specific* histories are not what comprise *Dasein's* historicity. Instead, *Dasein's* thrownness into a world is what provides the factical "having-been" of a world that is no longer present, namely, a world that is past (King 2001, 303). Magda King writes of Heidegger's conception of historicity: "It is an obvious ontic fact that no generation creates its tasks and opportunities from nothing, but inherits them from preceding generations, so that even the new departures from and break with tradition are grounded in the 'past'" (Ibid.). The difficult question for Heidegger, King proposes, is thus "how can a factical here-being [*Dasein*] disclose not only his own having-been in his own world, but go back to other existences who have-been-here before him in *their* world?" (Ibid.). Heidegger's response to this is that, as a being-with-others, *Dasein* turns to a common set of possibilities, or common destiny [*Geschick*], by which it and others are thrown (Heidegger 1962, 436 [SZ 384–85]). Moreover,

"in communication and in battle" this conception of common possibilities becomes free (Ibid.).

The conception of historicity and the accompanying notion of a common destiny raises a complicated series of questions in the scholarship on Heidegger.[5] Similarly, questions of historicity also raise further inquiries within Ortega's conception of the multiplicitous self. Consider, for example, how the multiplicitous self experiences not only several *synchronically* conflicting worlds of sense and meaning, but also several *diachronically* conflicting histories of sense and meaning. This implies that the instability of the multiplicitous self is not only of moving between worlds and the unfamiliarity of where and how to take up specific norms and practices. The ruptures between worlds also indicate temporal discontinuities between experiences of futurity and past. This kind of historical multiplicity, while apparent in some places in Ortega's text, is not as carefully worked out as the synchronic and spatial conception of multiplicity that she so thoroughly describes in the book.[6]

Yet, Ortega is surely aware of this question of historical multiplicity, and at times, she explicitly points to criticisms that make this apparent. For example, she cites the criticism of Anzaldúa by María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo that, through her invocation of ancient Aztec mythology, Anzaldúa "romanticizes the indigenous past [and] actually silences present indigenous peoples and their concerns" (Ortega 2016, 33).[7] This criticism of Anzaldúa's work draws attention to the danger of depicting a presently lived world of meaning as a "having-been" of the multiplicitous self. Elsewhere in Ortega's book, she points to the historicity of the multiplicitous self in a manner that opens possibilities for addressing the conflicting sense of being thrown into worlds of meaning that render our experiences of a possible future, a current present, and a having-been of the past as disjointed. She states in a brief section on "Multiplicitous Selves and Decoloniality" that a "move toward transmodernity or a stage in which Europe is not positioned at the center of all epistemic and cultural projects" is important (Ortega 2016, 115). Here again, it would be helpful to know more about how the multiplicitous self experiences or, perhaps more interestingly, *cannot experience* the centering of a given dominant "common destiny" as a possibility of the self. This is especially important if we consider the violent trope of the "vanishing Indian," or the harms of structural adjustment programs that propose "modernization" across the globe.[8] In such cases, the concern of how the multiplicitous self, as a historical being-between-worlds, experiences itself between differing "futures" and "pasts" would be a welcomed extension to Ortega's already rich framework.

To close on a note regarding temporality, we can return to the opening chapter of Ortega's book. In the introduction of the text, she discloses an anecdote about the manner in which some of her friends have inquired about her interest in Heidegger. She writes: "I have jokingly said to friends who ask

me why I pay attention to Heidegger at all that I wish to shatter Heidegger's account of *Dasein*—to see all the different directions in which Heidegger's view can be taken rather than staying confined within the borders set up by Heidegger's text and those who interpret it—but I am serious" (Ortega 2016, 5). Between humor/seriousness and between theory/praxis, Ortega breaks apart the seemingly smooth contours of traditional Heideggerian existential phenomenology. Her book thus reveals not only the sharp edges of a somewhat violent philosophical conception of being, but also allows readers to note how Heideggerian phenomenology may be more pliable than expected, especially when intertwined with the writings and experiences of women of color. As such, hopefully future generations of philosophers posing hitherto unasked questions of self, time, and oppression will continue to recognize the novel framework of multiplicitous being that is offered through Ortega's exemplary work.

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Notes

1. Cf. Ortega, 2001.
2. Cf. Ortega, 2014.
3. Quoting Heidegger, 1962, 28.
4. Lugones, 1987; Lugones, 2003.
5. Such questions include how to interpret the relationship between a struggle for a "common destiny" of a people and Heidegger's own involvement with National Socialism. Cf. Fritsche, 1999. Ortega also points to this literature on Heidegger and Nazism early on in her book on page 4 and in a footnote on pages 222–23.
6. Ortega does offer a discussion of temporality in response to the conception of self proposed by Paula Moya (180–83) and a discussion of authenticity and temporality in Heidegger (129–31). While affirming many of the points that I make here, these sections are rather brief and do not offer a sustained analysis of historicity and the multiplicitous self.
7. Quoting Saldaña-Portillo, 2001, 420.
8. Cf. Tallbear, 2013; Saldaña-Portillo, 2003.

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