
Here and Elsewhere: The Question of Ontology in World-Traveling

Introduction

...This multiplicity [in our selves] has been buried in philosophy given its quest for not only more traditional, unitary accounts of selfhood, but also for notions of selfhood that bypass particularities of our raced, gendered, and classed everyday existence. I invite you...to bypass preconceptions about what kind of theories and philosophies belong together and to pay attention to the intricate ways in which Latina feminist phenomenology and Heideggerian existential phenomenology cross paths so as to disclose the self's multiplicity.¹

This project begins on a dual terrain: on the one hand, it stems from a curiosity concerning the travel and transport that distinguishes the temporal character of human life, and on the other, it issues from an effort to think about under what sorts of conditions human beings not only do travel but are compelled to travel by conditions of life that necessitate movement between worlds. Put another way, I am curious about how we can be at one moment, here, and at another elsewhere—i.e., I am *curious* about the conditions for the possibility of our movedness—but at the same time, I am *concerned* about how, in the lives of some marginalized folks, such conditions play out with an urgency that demands further attention. In bringing my curiosity and concerns to word, I have found particularly significant resources in the work of Heidegger and of Latina feminist phenomenologist Mariana Ortega, whose recent book brings Heidegger together with those thinkers most influential for her, María Lugones and Gloria Anzaldúa. What I propose to do is to offer two constellations of problems from out of my larger project, each of which engages with Ortega's reading of Heidegger as it comes to life in response to María Lugones' conception of "world"-travel.²

Before we begin, however, there are two caveats: first, it is *not* my intention to align Lugones' definition of "world" with Heidegger's in *Being and Time*; I would contend, rather, that their understandings of "world" are fundamentally different, though not entirely at cross-

¹ Ortega, Mariana. *In Between: Latina Feminist Phenomenology, Multiplicity, and the Self* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2016) [hereafter IB], 6.

² Footnote citation to the *Hypatia* article and to PP, explaining the difference between the two and my working primarily with the former.

purposes. Working out the similarities and differences of these two accounts of world is an entire project in and of itself, and not the project I am undertaking here. Second, when Lugones speaks of “world”-travel, she is not talking about the rather trivial and largely expensive practice of getting on an airplane and flying to an “exotic” destination as a tourist who seeks to spice up their otherwise bland existence with a “taste” of the “authentic” other. This type of “travel” is in fact, for Lugones, not travel at all, as it involves no real transport between “worlds,” and remains consistent with the logic of domination and the practice of imperialism.

A closer look at her argument is necessary to get a better sense of precisely what Lugones *does* mean by “world”-travel. Allow me to share the following observations in summary and in brief (*see number one on the handout—ML’s Conception of “World”-Travel*):

1) Lugones’ considerations of “world”-travel serve a larger purpose in her overall project: to establish cross-cultural and cross-racial loving, the (ethical) practice of which affirms the plurality both *in* and *among* women as, she insists, “central to feminist ontology and epistemology” (3). As we shall soon see, the link she establishes between plurality and ontology is significant, so we do well to make note of it before we advance.

2) The concept of world-travelling *first* emerges as a way to explain the shifting or exercise of flexibility that enables outsiders to the mainstream to move between hostile and more accommodating “worlds” (*refer to strand one quote*). But “world”-travelling comes to take on a different—though not unrelated—significance once Lugones takes on the concept of arrogant perception (*refer to strand two quote*).³ This is to say that Lugones recognizes arrogant perception as a failure of love, and “world”-traveling, animated by an attitude of playfulness, acts an antidote to that failure. In that sense, traveling is not solely a flexibility exercised of necessity, but when playful, an opportunity to see with the eyes of the other, to identify without fusing by recognizing their subjectivity as such from within their (own) world. And yet, Lugones continues (*number two on your handout*):

³ Cite Lugones citing Frye etc.

In explaining what I mean by a ‘world’ I will not appeal to travelling to other women’s worlds. Rather, I will lead you to see what I mean by a ‘world’ the way I came to propose the concept to myself: through the kind of ontological confusion about myself that we as women of color refer to half-jokingly as ‘schizophrenia’ (we feel schizophrenic in our goings back and forth between different ‘communities’) and in my effort to make some sense of the ontological confusion (8-9).

I ask that you consider this alongside two further remarks that bookend her stipulations as to what does (and doesn’t) constitute a ‘world’ in her sense (*a brief list of these is offered for you on the handout*):

Remark One: I want do not want the fixity of a definition at this point, because I think the term is suggestive and I do not want to close it too soon (9).

Remark Two: In describing my sense of a ‘world,’ I mean to be offering a description of experience, something that is true to experience even if it is ontologically problematic. Though I would think that any account of identity that could not be true to this experience of outsiders to the mainstream would be faulty, if ontologically unproblematic (11).

Two things immediately command our attention: first, the ontological confusion regarding herself as a woman of color and outsider to the mainstream extends—for Lugones—to her description of the ‘worlds’ to which she travels. Insofar as her own status as a woman of color is ontologically confused, what she means by ‘world’ remains ontologically problematic. Second, she turns away from ontological certainty decisively and deliberately to opt instead for fidelity to experience—and again, this signals the ethical dimensions of her project and its larger goal, which, we recall, is to facilitate a practice of loving that affirms plurality and reveals the possibility of a pluralist, feminist ontology. Something in this ontological confusion that links self and world, then, opens the ethical dimensions of a project which takes its cue from fidelity to the lived experience of outsiders to the mainstream.

As I began to think through Lugones’ problem of “worlds” further, especially in light of the deliberate choice to leave them ontologically vague in an effort to remain faithful to the experience of women of color as outsiders to the mainstream who of necessity (and sometimes playfully and willfully) travel between them, it became clear that there was no

thinking her phenomenon of ‘world’ without a corresponding conception of the self that travels.

It was here, and to my profound delight, that I discovered the work of Mariana Ortega, whose project comes together around a central concept, viz., the multiplicitous self, which brings Heidegger and Lugones together by weaving certain key elements of the former’s existential analytic with the latter’s notion of “world”-travel. With this we are poised to advance to:

Constellation One

Ortega takes a first step in negotiating the Lugones/Heidegger relation (or even the possibility thereof) by way of the ontological difference. This involves two strategic moves: first, Ortega understands that in order to sketch a project in which Heideggerian phenomenology will play a key role, the ontological difference—which in her terminology refers to the distinction between “ways of being” and “entities or particular facts regarding those entities”—will take center stage (10). Ortega acknowledges, “this distinction is tricky and may be confusing for those not trained in Heideggerian philosophy” (10). Nevertheless, while the distinction enables us to think through a tricky minefield, we should be careful, she cautions, not to think that categories of existence stand outside experience in some otherworldly realm. She encourages us instead to think of “ways of being or faring in the world or worlds that are always connected to concrete, particular acts of existence” (11). Thus, consistent with *Being and Time*, being is always connected to beings or entities and the ontological is always connected to the ontic—there is a relatedness backward and forward between them (11; Ortega references BT, 28/8).

The second strategic move, however, goes beyond acknowledging ontological difference and the strange, connective tissue it weaves between entities and their ways of being even as it holds them apart. It goes beyond acknowledgement insofar as—in my view—Ortega’s relation of Lugones (and Latina feminist phenomenology writ large) to Heidegger *turns* on the ontological difference. This is to say, Ortega is critical of Heidegger and aligns with

Lugones on the grounds that Heidegger's project lacks attention to the dimension of lived experience, particularly in the case of those who, existing at the margins, do *not* move through their worlds pre-reflectively and with ease until such time as a piece of equipment breaks and ruptures the spell of absorption. She writes (*number 5 on your handout*):

While Heidegger painstakingly explains major ontological, existential characteristics of a self that is *thrown*, he unfortunately does not explain the specific ontic situations that are of concern for the self that is 'there' and that dwells in that world. His primary interest remains in fundamental ontology, in finding general or ontological characteristics of human beings, even if it is an ontology that is always connected to the ontic or specific characteristics of humans. Anzaldúa and other Latina feminists [including Lugones], however, underscore the ontic, specific material characteristics and conditions of human beings (53).

Naturally this critique is in the service *both* of taking up Heidegger's conception of selfhood constructively *and* of advancing the ethical aim of her project—to bring to light the experiences of those marginalized folks who are otherwise relegated to the dark, whose stories and struggles remain unseen and unheard, and to make it possible for these experiences to command philosophical attention with ethical urgency. But I remain concerned that the radical separation of Latina feminist phenomenological work from Heidegger's on the grounds of the ontological difference—such that one offers up the ontological and the other the ontic—is at cross purposes with Ortega's aim. I leave the following an open question for discussion: if we say that Heidegger lacks the (ethical) ontic dimension of the lived experiences of folks at the margins developed by Latina feminist phenomenologists because he too heavily favors the ontological, does this position classical theorists to dismiss Latina feminist phenomenology on the grounds that it is not "proper philosophy"?⁴ Are there other ways we can configure this apt critique of a certain poverty in Heidegger's thinking of (oppression and) privilege that will better protect it from dismissal?

⁴ It is worth noting that Ortega is aware of the tendency to dismiss LFP as "improper philosophy," precisely because it offers the testimonials of lived experience in place of the unequivocally theoretical. She writes, "Even existential phenomenological accounts that profess to do justice to lived experience avoid personal descriptions informed by particular social identities, staying within the confines of general categories of existence" (2). But she attempts to solve this problem by redeeming the personal "digressions" on their own merit, by insisting that the devalued term in the dichotomy (whether theory-practice, philosophy-literature, general-particular) stands on its own merit. I am afraid this is insufficient to change the minds of those other than the already converted. I want to take the justification of the inclusion of the lived experience of those at the margins further.

Ortega makes no secret of the fact that Lugones is hugely influential on her thinking and has made a profound impact on her life. That said, Ortega is not without her criticisms. Most are relatively minor, with the exception of one, which is significant for this constellation: Lugones propounds a theory of selves and worlds as *ontologically* plural. Unequivocally, for Lugones, there *are* many worlds, and we—each of us—*are*—plural selves. Ortega finds fault with this claim for reasons that I cannot fully explain here, but let it suffice to say that her chief objection stems from her diagnosis of the problem of self-continuity, i.e., the ability to recognize oneself as oneself across time and a diversity of experiences if we are, in each world to which we travel, in fact an entirely different person.

She opts instead for multiplicity, which, in contrast to plurality's suggestion of numerous selves, denotes a "complexity associated with one self" (64). Hence Ortega appeals to a multiplicitous self as both being-in-worlds (a clear homage to the Heideggerian formulation) and as being-between-worlds (evocative of "world"-travel at least in part). Finally, since Ortega has identified Lugones' position with ontological plurality, she further refines her own concept of the multiplicitous self by appealing to the complexities of its configurations as existential multiplicity expressive of the ontologically singular.⁵

What I find particularly provocative here is that she does not extend the claim to multiplicity from self to world. That is, nowhere does Ortega argue that the "worlds" to which the multiplicitous self travels,⁶ are existentially multiplicitous while ontologically singular. Rather, she leaves the ontological status of Lugones' worlds unproblematized—or, perhaps better, still problematic—and refers to "worlds," always in the plural. Given the fact that the multiplicity of the self is inextricably linked to its ability to travel between "worlds," it strikes me as if not odd, then certainly worth noting that the ontological singularity argued for in the case of the self is not likewise extended to world.

And even if one might imagine certain implications of a singularity of world that could be reductive and altogether pernicious for precisely those selves at the margins whose

⁵ Cf. in particular the discussion that takes place in Chapter Two, under the heading, "Multiplicity" (64-68).

⁶ The "worlds" that, it seems to me, are first opened from out of the self's multiplicity...

experiences ethically demand recognition, are there inherent dangers in extending to worlds an existential multiplicity and complexity they enjoy on the basis of ontological singularity? Especially when that singularity is, for a thinker like Heidegger, not a *what* but a *how*?⁷

This is the point at which my current work could enter into the conversation Ortega has opened. I contend that in his 29/30 lecture course *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger offers us a notion of “world”-travel in the temporal movedness of the human being transported between its here and elsewhere by the awakening of a fundamental attunement. The “worlds” the human being travels in the Heideggerian sense are of course not commensurate with *the* concept of world, but this tension needn’t haunt a claim to existential multiplicity and ontological singularity, as Ortega has demonstrated as regards the self. Furthermore, as I argue elsewhere and at length, the profound boredom that attunes *Fundamental Concepts* is only realized when the Dasein *in* the human being—Heidegger’s portrait of the multiplicitous self, existentially complex and ontologically singular—awakens. Intriguingly, the condition for the possibility of *its* travel is finitude—the closure of its time as a tear in the seamless landscape it traverses so that experiences that bring it into close contact with its mortality (like the attunement of *Angst*) take it elsewhere.⁸

In provisional response to some of the questions I have raised here, I would like to speculate on a possibility. If we fully recognize that life threatening experiences of folks at the margin (Ortega’s thick sense of not being at ease) necessitates that they travel between “worlds,” *further* tearing the fabric of existence,⁹ can we speak then of a multiplicitous world? If so, then it seems to me that the deeper our understanding of a multiplicitous world, the more enhanced our insight into the ontological conditions for its possibility. The experiences that articulate these tears are more than the *mere* ontic, then, and require our attention not only because they are ethically urgent—though certainly this is enough to warrant it. They require our attention *also* because they are avenues to understanding that point to, for one, “conditions of need” far more pressing than boredom, however deadly Heidegger insists it

⁷ Credit to Jen Gammage for this pithy formulation.

⁸ It is worth noting, whether to the reader or merely for my own devices, that it is here that Anzaldúa resonates. A more in depth treatment of attunement and horizontal negotiation of what I call the double self alongside Anzaldúa’s conception of *la nepantla* and *la nepantlera* and the way Ortega reads these in light of both the pain and the deeper insight of *la facultad* would certainly be worth developing.

⁹ Note that it would be interesting to explore the possibility of what thin not being at ease would look like with respect to the fabric. If it does not make mortal tears, does it fold? Bend? Certainly discomfort can be enough to elicit travel.

might be. Thus, while boredom may get us to the horizons of an originary temporality, certain blind spots in Heidegger's vision keep him from the abyssal ground of multiple "worlds," requiring the testimonials of those at the margin. Thank You.

...This multiplicity [in our selves] has been buried in philosophy given its quest for not only more traditional, unitary accounts of selfhood, but also for notions of selfhood that bypass particularities of our raced, gendered, and classed everyday existence. I invite you...to bypass preconceptions about what kind of theories and philosophies belong together and to pay attention to the intricate ways in which Latina feminist phenomenology and Heideggerian existential phenomenology cross paths so as to disclose the self's multiplicity.¹⁰

(1) *María Lugones' Conception of "World"-Travel*¹¹

—A weaving of two strands reveals the possibility of a pluralist, feminist ontology affirmed by the ethical practice of cross-cultural, cross-racial loving. "World"-travelling plays a central role in this weaving.

(A) *Strand One (Outsiders to the Mainstream)*

"...the outsider has necessarily acquired flexibility in shifting from the mainstream construction of life where she is constructed as an outsider to other constructions of life where she is more or less 'at home'. This flexibility is necessary for the outsider but it can also be willfully exercised...I recommend this willful exercise which I call 'world'-travelling and...also [that it be]...animated by an attitude that I describe as playful (3).¹²

(B) *Strand Two (Arrogant Perception)*

"...this paper makes a connection between what Marilyn Frye has named 'arrogant perception' and the failure to identify with persons that one views arrogantly...a further connection is made between this failure of identification and a failure of love, and thus between loving and identifying with another person...the identification of which I speak is constituted by what I come to characterize as playful 'world'-travelling" (4).

(2) In explaining what I mean by a 'world' I will not appeal to travelling to other women's worlds. Rather, I will lead you to see what I mean by a 'world' the way I came to propose the concept to myself: through the kind of ontological confusion about myself that we as women of color refer to half-jokingly as 'schizophrenia' (we feel schizophrenic in our goings back and forth between different 'communities') and in my effort to make some sense of the ontological confusion (8-9).

(3) *Brief List of Stipulations Regarding "World"*

Distinct from utopia, possible world (in the philosophical sense), and worldview (though worldview is involved), a "world" has to be inhabited by some flesh and blood people (though it can also be inhabited by some dead people and some for whom "my world" exists only in imagination). It can be an actual

¹⁰ Ortega, Mariana. *In Between: Latina Feminist Phenomenology, Multiplicity, and the Self* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2016) [hereafter IB], 6.

¹¹ First appearing in her ground-breaking article, "Playfulness, World-Travelling, and Loving Perception," *Hypatia* 2, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 3-19, and consequently expanded with some revision (though revisions to "world"-travelling are not substantial) in the full length book, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 77-102, hereafter PP.

¹² Note that this is formulated differently in PP: "This flexibility is necessary for the outsider. It is required by the logic of oppression. But it can also be exercised resistantly by the outsider or by those who are at ease in the mainstream" (77).

society, given dominant, non-dominant, or idiosyncratic constructions of life, but it need not be whole or complete—it can be a tiny portion of a particular society, or be realized like the negative (this “world”) of a photographic exposure (another) [10-11].

(4) *Two Remarks*

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Remark Two: In describing my sense of a ‘world,’ I mean to be offering a description of experience, something that is true to experience even if it is ontologically problematic. Though I would think that any account of identity that could not be true to this experience of outsiders to the mainstream would be faulty, if ontologically unproblematic (11).

Constellation One

(5) While Heidegger painstakingly explains major ontological, existential characteristics of a self that is *thrown*, he unfortunately does not explain the specific ontic situations that are of concern for the self that is ‘there’ and that dwells in that world. His primary interest remains in fundamental ontology, in finding general or ontological characteristics of human beings, even if it is an ontology that is always connected to the ontic or specific characteristics of humans. Anzaldúa and other Latina feminists [including Lugones], however, underscore the ontic, specific material characteristics and conditions of human beings (53).

Constellation Two

My (Two) Questions:

(6) If we say that Heidegger lacks (ethical) attention to the ontic dimension of the lived experiences of folks at the margins developed by Latina feminist phenomenologists because he too heavily favors the ontological, does this position classical theorists to dismiss Latina feminist phenomenology on the grounds that it is not “proper philosophy”?¹³ Are there other ways we can configure this apt critique of a certain poverty in Heidegger’s thinking of (oppression and) privilege that will better protect it from dismissal?

(7) Given the fact that the multiplicity of the self is inextricably linked to its ability to travel between “worlds,” it strikes me as if not odd, then certainly worth noting that the ontological singularity argued for in the case of the self is not likewise extended to world. And even if one might imagine certain implications of a singularity of world that could be reductive and altogether pernicious for precisely those selves at the margins whose experiences ethically demand recognition, are there inherent dangers in extending to worlds an existential multiplicity and complexity they enjoy on the basis of ontological singularity? Especially when that singularity is, for a thinker like Heidegger, not a *what* but a *how*?¹⁴ In short, can we speak of a multiplicitous world? Is there a transformative possibility for Heidegger when we make him posthumously listen to the testimonials of the marginalized inhabitants of the borderlands?

¹³ It is worth remarking that Ortega is aware of the tendency to dismiss Latina feminist phenomenology as “improper philosophy,” precisely because it offers the testimonials of lived experience in place of the unequivocally theoretical. She writes, “Even existential phenomenological accounts that profess to do justice to lived experience avoid personal descriptions informed by particular social identities, staying within the confines of general categories of existence” (2). But she attempts to solve this problem by redeeming personal “digressions” on their own merit, by insisting that the devalued term in the dichotomy (whether theory-practice, philosophy-literature, general-particular) stands on its own merit. I am afraid this is insufficient to change the minds of those other than the already converted. I want to take the justification of the inclusion of the lived experience of those at the margins further, to argue that the precarity, discomfort, and pain that too often characterize these lives and go unrecognized actually *affect* the fabric of existence, opening existentially multiple “worlds” that point back to the finitude of human time as the ontological opening or tear that first makes world possible.

¹⁴ Credit is owed to my colleague Jen Gammage for this pithy formulation.

