Accidentality? Thinking Alongside Mexican Existentialists

In this symposium, Roberto A. Carleo III, Gregory Doukas and Imogen M. Sullivan think alongside Carlos Alberto Sánchez about the contingency of human existence as it is understood in Mexican existentialism. They ask: Should the notion of a metaphysical substance be discarded altogether due to its misuse in the history of European philosophy? Or are there philosophical reasons to avoid ontological uncertainty by, for example, postulating the notion of a non-discrete substance? And if attempts to define human substantiality merely seek to defy this accidentality, should scholars with deviant identities deliberately engage in a wandering beyond dominant frameworks to evade the material and hermeneutical hostility of these frameworks? How should they work alongside others to best take up their responsibility? In his reply, Sánchez considers what the project of accidentalization would imply for each of these carefully-crafted interventions.

Key words: ontological uncertainty; slippery earth; responsibility; Mexican existentialists; Emilio Uranga; huehuetlatolli; Zhuangzi; nepantla; zozobra; Zhu Xi; Dai Zhen; Li Zehou; liberatory trans philosophy

Accidentality: From Mexican Philosophy to the Aztecs and Back Again

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In this symposium we will think about the contingency of existence, or accidentality, with Mexican existentialists. As we do this, I invite readers and respondents not to lose touch with their own traditions or standpoints and consider ways in which the Mexican perspective enhances that standpoint or in what ways it falls short. In other words, my hope is that our considerations are interactive.

According to existentialism generally, we are thrown into an unstable and uncertain world where we create our individual selves and our lives via our choices, our commitments, or our projects. This idea is tied to one where we exist in a constant process of becoming; life offers no guarantees, except one, namely, our inevitable slipping into non-being, or death. Thinking this thought is inevitable; living itself forces us to think about it once in a while. However, some folks put effort into *not* thinking about it, a denial that may result in the creation of certainties not given in experience, of impossible possibilities meant to overcome the anxiety of uncertainty and a future death. Others, however, prefer to keep the stark reality of contingency alive by reminding themselves that it is useful and valuable to remember it if only as preparation for the next possible catastrophe—those

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that do this are usually suspicious of certainties or necessities and have reasons to be suspicious in this way. The Mexican philosopher Emilio Uranga (1921-1988) would say that these folks have developed a consciousness of "accidentality," they have "accidentalized themselves."

In what follows we think about accidentality in the context of Mexican existentialism, or Mexistentialism. This means, however, telling you, first, what Mexistentialism is. Second, I will summarize what Emilio Uranga says about accidentality; in this section, I'll briefly go over Manuel Vargas's recent interpretation of this concept, which amongst its successes is that it shines a much-needed light on Mexican philosophy in Anglophone philosophical circles. The third section represents a "decolonial" turn, one that is not obvious. It is not obvious because at this point you will have been making connections between Uranga's notion of accidentality and the existentialist tradition that begins with Kierkegaard and moves through Heidegger and to Sartre, and you may not be wrong—Uranga is definitely influenced by Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Heidegger (see Sánchez 2021). However, the decolonial turn I'm going to make, traces the notion of accidentality to Nahuatl thought or Aztec wisdom sayings. I will end by making a connection between accidentality, zozobra, and commitment—the three central concepts in Mexican existentialism or Mexistentialism.

1 Mexistentialism

Accidentality is a core concept in Mexican existentialism, or what I've previously called Mexistentialism (Sánchez 2019, 2023). Mexistentialism is not identical to European existentialism. It appropriates and assumes the existentialist attitude for different reasons or purposes (Sánchez 2016), and does not attempt a wholesale replication because, as Leopooldo Zea insists, "our situation is not that of Jean-Paul Sartre. Our situation is not that of the European bourgeoisie" (Zea 2017: 137). This idea follows from a general suspicion about European philosophy and its pretense to universality, a suspicion voiced by Emilio Uranga who says: "*we are not very certain of the existence of the human being in general and, secondly, that whatever passes itself off as human being in general, that is, generalized European humanity, does not appear to us to define itself as accidental, but precisely as arrogant substantiality*" (Uranga 2021:107, emphasis in original).

Of course, Mexistentialists don't ignore the European influence; in many cases they double-down on it, as when they insist on the fact that philosophy is always influenced by its circumstance—by the *place* of its emergence. Indeed, they find in European existentialism the possibility of asserting their own place, their own circumstance. Villoro writes:

> Definitively, what decides the value of existentialism is its capacity to lend ground to a systematic description of human existence, but not of human existence in the abstract, but of

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> a situated human existence, in a situation, of a human existence located in a determinate geographic habitat, in a social and cultural space also determined and with a precise historical legacy (Villoro 1949: 240).

Existentialism allows Mexican philosophers to focus on their own, specific situation or circumstance, not on some abstract version of the abstract "human circumstance" which may, and previously has, marginalized or excluded them. Existentialism, moreover, tells Mexicans that their present is in a state of flux, of constant becoming, which is good news, since a world in flux or becoming is one where the stranglehold of a colonial legacy may slip, where because history could have been otherwise it could still be otherwise. Existentialism allows Mexican philosophers to re-think that legacy and its impact on the present and how determinate that legacy needs to be. In short, it allows them a choice they previously didn't *know* they had: a choice about the future.

2 Accidentality

In *Analysis of Mexican Being* (first published in 1952), Emilio Uranga appeals to phenomenological existentialism as the means to penetrate the thick colonial sedimentation covering up the being of Mexican persons. Attending to Mexican history and poetry, as well as previous philosophical appropriations, Uranga claims to arrive at an existential state that describes the being of persons who happen to be Mexican, about whom he has proximal, intimate, knowledge (since he is Mexican himself). This state is "accidentality," revealed in psychological complexes, cultural modalities, social relations, and ways of being which are particular to Mexican persons. Accidentality defines how Mexicans, as concrete and temporal beings, exist. Because "[t]he concrete is the accidental" and vice versa (Uranga 2021: 119), then it seems that we are *all* accidental, and not just Mexicans, but all temporal, finite, beings. For his part, Uranga declares: "the being of the human being as accidental is the most important affirmation that we make" (Uranga 2021: 103).

Accidentality, of course, has a long philosophical history. Aristotle says that substance is primary and self-sufficient and that the accident is secondary and dependent. Accidents are accidental to substance. Uranga also thinks that substance is self-sufficient and necessary and accidents are inessential, dependent, and insufficient. In fact, insufficiency is *the* essential characteristic of the accident. This understanding is then applied to persons, and particularly, persons whose self-understanding is that of being less-than, inessential, and insufficient; these are the people that, he says, "through a thousand accidents of history, of culture or society, have been framed by the catastrophic" (Uranga 2021: 185). Those framed by the catastrophic are familiar with trauma and violence and *mis*fortune, and exist as accidents. Uranga suggests that Mexicans in particular, but also, and in general, peoples living in the peripheries of world history, in its margins and undersides, have been framed in this way.

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

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We can think of accidentality, then, in a metaphysical sense as a deficient mode of being. But we can also think of it as describing *individual* life itself as likewise ontologically deficient due to the fact that individual life is not substantial. No matter how self-sufficient I feel, I will always be in a relation of dependence to something greater than myself—whether that is God, the State, Urban Planning, University Administration, and so on. This dependence exposes my temporality, my finitude, and my accidentality.

Uranga thinks that forgetting one's ontological accidentality is bad for the business of life. He proposes that one must recognize it and affirm it, an affirmation that should motivate a positive transformation in one's existence. Such affirmations depend on another recognition, namely, that substantiality, or self-sufficiency, is a mere myth—something unachievable by human beings. Substantiality is not even aspirational. No one can ever *be* substance. While Uranga has in mind the harm caused by the myth of substantiality to the Mexican sense of self, today we can see it play out, for instance, in the United States in those cultural and social conceptions of immigrants and refugees as "insufficiently" human, or insufficiently civilized, compared to "true" or "real" or "authentic" "American" citizens. As insufficient, immigrants and refugees are thus treated as inessential to the social order, and as accidental to it. The truth is, however, that insufficiency is the essence of the concrete, so even the rich, the powerful, "Americans," or "citizens," and so on, can never achieve, nor can they aspire to, the substantial being that they may claim for themselves. We are all insufficient, inessential, and accidental to life, to the planet, to the universe.

Recently, a different reading of accidentality has been proposed, one not implicated in the existentialist tradition in which Uranga originally situates it. We owe this reading to Manuel Vargas. In his "The Philosophy of Accidentality" published in the *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* in 2020, Vargas deals with Uranga's notion of accidentality not so much as an ontological reality of human existence, but as a particular relation that *some* people may have with what he calls "packages of normative culture" (Vargas 2020: 392-93). These "packages of normative culture" contain "guidance on what to do, about what is valuable, and how one should think of the significance of one's choices" (Vargas 2020: 394). Vargas argues that accidentality is "about the absence of a stable, taken-for-granted relationship" to those packages of normativity (Vargas 2020: 395). You are an accident, or accidentality defines you, if you feel this absence and you come to believe "that it is all contingent, that it is all potentially meaningless and without value" (Vargas 2020: 395). However, the fact that some people do not, in fact, believe this, or believe themselves to lack a "stable, taken-for-granted relationship to normative culture" means that there are people that are *not accidental*. Accidentality is not, on this account, descriptive of *human being*. Vargas says, "it may seem that ready access to information—books, the internet, travel—can make accidentality more avoidable by providing more compelling normative packages" (Vargas 2020: 394). In my reading, which veers from Vargas's somewhat, I insist that substantial being—or being non-accidentally related to stable "packages of normative cultures"—is an illusion. None of us can be so grounded. Packages of normative culture are contingent and the result of historical accidents; all of us, and not just some of us, are precariously related to everything. Ultimately, Vargas reads accidentality as constituted by a disconnect between an agent and the packages of normativity that

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would lend sense and meaning to her world. As I understand Vargas' view, accidentality is then nothing more than being, or existing, at the wrong place at the wrong time, which I think overly limits accidentality to a social relation.

3 The Slippery Earth: A "Decolonial" Turn

As I use and understand the term, "decolonization" refers to a process of destabilizing the authority of Eurocentric conceptions of the world internal to non-European logics. I say "destabilizing" and not "severing" or "overcoming" or "annulling" because I don't think decolonization in this sense is possible. In decolonizing the concept of accidentality I will thus simply read it through a non-western frame of reference. I'm being, in this way, very loose with the term and, you may think, not very "philosophical." This is because all I mean to do here is to think about Mexican philosophy, even for a second, divested from Heidegger, and Sartre, and Camus, and de Beauvoir. If I were serious about decolonizing this tradition, I would not call it "existentialism." But this is not and cannot be my aim for reasons I cannot go into here. I want to call it existentialism and say that we can ground it somewhere besides the European tradition. Specifically, we can ground it on pre-Conquest Mexica, Nahuatl, or Aztec philosophy.

Now, Uranga's proposal is that Mexican being—what the Mexican is ontologically—is accidental, or a being that is always on the brink of falling into oblivion. This is not something that he discovered after the advent of the tradition known as existentialism; this is something that he recognizes as a mode of existence in Mexican culture itself. It is, furthermore, something that can be traced to that other half of the Mexican person that is Indigenous, that which, Uranga says, "is framed by the catastrophic."

In the years after the fall of the Aztec empire in 1521, the Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún took on the monumental task of interrogating survivors of the genocidal Spanish conquest and asking about their wisdom traditions, their *huehuetlatolli* ("words of the elders" or "ancient talks"). Because most, if not all, religious, scholarly pre-Hispanic indigenous sources had been destroyed or repurposed, what we get from Sahagún's efforts (and other Catholic chroniclers) is, today, as close as we can get to a genuine Aztec philosophy.

In one of these *huehuetlatolli*, a noble mother advises her daughter on the proper way to live:

> Behold the road thou art to follow. On earth it is a time for care, it is a place of caution […] We travel, we live along a mountain peak. Over here there is an abyss, over there is an abyss. If you goest over here or if thou goes over there, thou wilt fall. Only in the middle doth one go, doth one live (Sahagún 1982; Quoted in Maffie 2019).

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What prompts this call for vigilance and caution is perhaps the mother's recognition of her young daughter's overconfidence or self-assuredness as she begins to navigate a dangerous world. This is a recognition familiar to parents or caretakers of young children, that moment when we see them acting as if they're indestructible and as if they already know what they need to know in order to survive. For the Mexica, it was important to remember that such confidence and assuredness was dangerous and, even, heretical. According to their cosmology, the world is a dangerous place subject to the unpredictable forces of nature and the whims of gods who may find it insulting that one feels so sure about one's chances. So the mother cautions her daughter not to lose sight of the danger, to remain alert, and stay on the middle of the path (in nepantla), never losing sight of that "abyss" that surrounds her.

James Maffie suggests that part of the mother's instruction would have included the proverb, "*Tlaalahui*, *tlapetzcahui in tlalticpac*," which means: "It is slippery, it is slick on the earth, or "Things slip, things slide, in this world" (Maffie 2019). Saying this would reinforce the idea that even taking the middle ground (nepantla) does not guarantee that you won't fall. Even the middle path is dangerous; falling, or slipping, is always a possibility. And if you slip you may slide all the way to your death. So one must walk with a certain anxiety, one must reserve a certain zozobra, maintain a certain amount of dread about the path ahead (for more on zozobra, see Sánchez 2023). Such caution keeps one vigilant and aware of one's surroundings.

That this was a way of thinking for the Mexica, a way of thinking that seems to have survived the conquest and the annihilation of the *tlamatinimeh* (the wise men) allows one to think that it is part of the Mexican cultural inheritance. It is inherent in any "package of normative culture" to which Mexicans could have access. If so, Uranga could be echoing that inheritance when he describes the accident:

> The accident is fragility: oscillation between being and nothingness. This means that its "fit" in being, its adhesion to being expressed in the modality of being-in, is not protected by an inalienable right, but rather whatever may be the form of its inherence, it is always revocable. The accident is constantly threatened by displacement [*desalojamiento*]. Attached to being, it can always be torn off from its "there," exterminated. Whatever it holds on to, whatever handle it grabs on to, can be removed. It was born to be-in and at the same time to not-be-in (Uranga 2021: 116).

Ontological insecurity is manifested psychologically when one thinks that life is constantly slipping away, in the knowledge that whatever we possess is revocable, and that the whole of reality is itself threatening and overwhelming. This lack of security points to an understanding that the earth is both flailing about in the vast darkness of space and also unstable underneath one's feet.

My point is that in his philosophy of accidentality Uranga tapped into his own historical legacy, even more so than into the popular philosophy of his time: it was part of a Mexican upbringing, already in the cultural zeitgeist as part of what it meant to be Mexican. Jorge Portilla, a

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

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contemporary of Uranga, was more explicit, declaring that "[w]e Mexicans are existentialist from birth" (Portilla 2017: 186), referring to this being born with a consciousness of danger, precarity, falling, the slippery earth, accidentality, and so on. While we can certainly make the case that this focus on accidentality is tied to thinking with Heidegger and Sartre about human frailty, there's also a strong reason to suspect that Uranga was echoing a deep-rooted cultural understanding. A "decolonial" turn, in the sense I understand the term, is thus an easy one to make here.

4 The Project of Accidentalization

A Historical Dimension

Early Mexican colonial history could be seen as a time when Spaniards, in particular, and Europeans, in general, covered over their accidentality by asserting the superiority of both their race and their worldview. Key to their confidence was the belief that the conquest and the colonization were God-ordained, and that their success with both proved it. Believing that one is carrying out a divine mission is a conceit that goes hand in hand with a belief in one's goodness, perfection, and necessity. Those not sharing this mission, but rather being subjugated by it, which in America included Indigenous people, African slaves, and hybrid Mexican mestizos were treated as inferior and disposable, even though, ostensibly, saving their souls was meant to be of utmost importance.

It was easy, then, for the Europeans to think themselves as defined not by accident or finitude but by substance—by permanence, objectivity, righteousness, and necessity—while considering everyone else accidental (and disposable). Of course, non-Spaniards (especially, the indigenous peoples of Mexico as well as those that would become Mexicans) came to internalize this perversion, reading their human accidentality as an inferiority complex. And this played into the colonizing mission because colonialism works better with subjects who believe themselves to be unworthy or undeserving of good things or good treatment. Oppressive systems demand subjects who recognize themselves as subservient and inferior, and who believe, at the same time, in the superiority of their oppressors. Colonialism needs its subjects to exist vulnerably, as perpetually threatened by erasure or extermination. However, those who recognize the primacy of human accidentality don't have to accept the worldview that puts them at the bottom of a hierarchy. They don't have to accept their subjugation. Knowing that their sense of inferiority is an illusion, one that hides a more human contingency is a source of power and sets people on the path to challenging the way things are. This is all part of what it means to take up the project of accidentalization that Uranga comes to propose and why it is such an important idea for Mexicans in particular and all oppressed people in general.

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

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Ultimately, Uranga proposes that one "choose accidentality" so as to be true to oneself. For Mexicans, choosing themselves as accidental means choosing, as he puts it, "the negation of Spanishness which presents itself as 'substantial.'" For the rest of us, choosing ourselves as accidental means choosing the negation of anything that presents itself as perfect, self-sufficient, and necessary. Nothing has to be the way that it is. Ideas, cultures, politics all are up for radical rethinking and change once you realize the accidentality at their core.

In accidentalizing yourself you set yourself free. Of course, this comes with a cost. Knowing that all is breakable and uncertain, that the past will not dictate the future, is sure to cause anguish and anxiety, what Mexican philosophers called "zozobra." But zozobra, a feeling of ungroundedness and dread that comes with knowing that the earth is slippery, that everything is constantly slipping into darkness, is attached to vigilance, to care, and caution. In other words, the zozobra caused by the recognition of my accidentality does not give way to nihilism or defeatism, but rather to responsibility and commitment because it quickly becomes clear to me that any control or power I may claim to have over this slippery earth will have to come from me.

So, when we embrace our accidentality we can more easily navigate a world we know to be in a constant state of transformation. We may even become comfortable, or at least more at ease, with disaster, with trauma, with the lack of stability and necessity. When we take on the project of accidentalizing ourselves, we will try to recall that our very life is a result of an accidental encounter between two people, that we didn't have to be born, and that any one of these days could be our last. In accidentalizing ourselves we return to our accidental origins. But perhaps this is too heavy of a thought. In that case, a lighter version of this project of accidentalization will involve remembering that *all that we have*, our possessions, our careers, and families are revocable, that they could all be taken away without a moment's notice. A wrong turn at an intersection, an unintentional glance at a stranger, leaving the house ten minutes early—any of these could result in the loss of all that we have or all that we are.

An Existential Dimension

I understand the central project of Mexican philosophy, especially of Mexican existentialism, or *la filosofia de lo mexicano*, as one in a vital struggle with the Mexican historical legacy. The historical legacy, including the social, cultural, and political values inherent in it, shape and have shaped Mexican identity in various ways. I've just suggested that a consciousness of accidentality may be part of it. But this inheritance also includes a colonial legacy, one that divides the world into neat dualisms which almost never benefit Mexicans in particular and Latin Americans in general: inferior/superior, impure/pure, accidental/substantial, and so on. This aspect of the historical legacy comes from Spain and Europe. The pragmatic demand of Mexican philosophy, as I understand it, is to overcome this legacy—i.e., the colonial legacy.

The philosophy of accidentality is central to this project, as it means to challenge the authority and necessity of that legacy. The claim that reality is accidental, that being is accidental, allows for the

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

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thought that the historical legacy is also accidental and need not have the power that it has. It is a way to overcome it while creating the condition for the possibility of newness, of possible other ways. However, the danger is that some people will not want this to happen, holding on to the historical legacy, its values, customs, and traditions with fervor and fanaticism; others will take this opportunity to devalue anything and everything, including the legacy, but even the present, the possibilities. In the first instance, the goal is to "substantialize" oneself, to make oneself a substance; Jorge Portilla calls these people "apretados." In the second, the goal is to devalue everything. Jorge Portilla calls this "relajo." The person in relajo, the "relajiento," accepts the accidentality of life and takes this as a reason to be irresponsible and unwilling. These two extremes lay at the abyss that the mother warns against when she tells the daughter to stay in the middle. The middle is nepantla, a place of caution, vigilance, and self-awareness. In nepantla one is always vigilant.

Being nepantla is to live in the recognition of accidentality while making sure not to fall into extremes or substantializations. It means keeping to the middle where the present can be the focus of our attention and the historical legacy something that can be overcome. While I believe that this is the goal of the existentialist project in Mexico, I also believe that its lessons extend to all of us who are similarly "framed by the catastrophic." Thus, the point on which Uranga insists is that more than recognizing this fact, we must *accept* it and make it part of the way we see our lives and interact with the world around us. In fact, Uranga says, firmly grasping life's accidentality is a healthy way to live. He says that we must *become accidental*. This means shedding existential illusions to necessity, perfection, and that self-sufficiency that belongs to things not affected by history or circumstance.

The *project of accidentalizing oneself* thus involves keeping accidentality always on the foreground so that you may align yourself more accurately with the reality of your real, human condition. And you must take on this project if you don't want to continue to live *inauthentically*, in bad faith, or in the foolish illusion of self-sufficiency, radical independence, or historical inevitability or necessity. The difficulty with taking on this project, however, is that it will clash with what you ordinary believe about yourself—namely, that you are on this earth *for a reason*, that everything in your life points to it being somehow *destined*. But we must actively work at getting rid of these illusions because the truth is that none of us is sufficient or necessary in the way we've come to believe: we are all accidental.

5 Concluding Remark

To adopt an attitude of accidentality is to forgo the allure of substantialization and commit ourselves to the reality of our concreteness, of our historicity, and our finitude. But it also means that, in accidentalizing ourselves, we commit ourselves to care for our circumstance, for those that we love, for our health, for our work, for our world, since, as accidental, everything stands on an unstable foundation, one that could crumble at any moment. Such vigilance is not due to fear or paranoia

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

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about losing it all. Rather, with the knowledge that accidentality is the natural condition of things, to be vigilant is to care for and love what I have in the here and now, here and now.

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

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Careful Contingency: Confucian Thinking alongside the Mexistentialists

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Throughout Carlos Alberto Sánchez's wonderful explication of the philosophy of accidentality, several themes resonate strongly with Confucian teachings and especially with the concrete humanist strand of Confucian philosophy. I here outline some ways in which distinctive characteristics of the accidental outlook Sánchez advocates align closely with Confucianism, pointing out that both advocate models of *careful contingency*, and in doing so I raise some questions and suggestions for the "Mexistentialist" philosophy. My discussion focuses on the accidentalist rejection of ethics of substance, and it proposes, through outlining how Confucian models embrace the tenets of accidentality as well as strengths of substance-based thinking, that we may not need to or want to jettison conceptions of substance entirely.

1 Accidentalism

At the center of the philosophy of accidentality is its rejection of a common kind of ontology and metaphysics: one that takes certain properties or modes of being human—primarily European—as pure, good, and essential "substance" and in doing so designates other qualities to be corrupt, inferior, and contingent "accidents."[1] The accidentalists—that is, Sánchez and Emilio Uranga, from whom Sánchez develops this philosophy—charge such philosophies, firstly, with coloniality: to posit that particular qualities possess "permanence, objectivity, righteousness, and necessity" valorizes the cultural values and practices of one people and tradition to the exclusion of others. They also charge substantialist outlooks with impoverishing and imperiling the lives of those who supposedly possess these lofty qualities: such certainties are illusory and lead to overconfidence and lack of due caution. Thus, although the accidentalist argument is framed in ontological terms, I read it primarily as an *ethical* rejection of substance: its major premises and motivations center on the practical implications and applications of substantialist thinking. Through hubris and hegemony, thinking in such terms of substance—and more specifically, binary and exclusionary conceptions of it—is bad for the elevated and valorized as well as the subordinated and marginalized.

By instead seeing oneself and others as accidental, we can live *carefully* in two senses of the term: cautiously and with care for others. We become cautious in light of our awareness that things as they are—and us as we are—are not permanent but mere accident. In other words, the world could be and will become otherwise, and so supposed certainties about what is right, however well founded, must be constantly reassessed. The accidentalists describe this ontology *cum* ethic as one

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

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of *zozobra* and *nepantla*, of anxious concern and vigilance in navigating a middle path through the ever-changing circumstances of actual existence. Sánchez does not elaborate, here at least, why this manner of living prioritizes caring for others, though he concludes his essay by pointing to that connection.[2] One possibility is that the call for carefulness entails caring because we cannot rely on abstract universal certainties to guide us, and therefore we must look to the meaningfulness of actual other persons and our relationships to them in order to determine what to do and how to live. This would be the Confucian concrete humanist explanation, at least,[3] and it aligns with the connection that Sánchez alludes to in declaring that:

> [I]n accidentalizing ourselves, we commit ourselves to care for our circumstance, for those that we love, for our health, for our work, for our world, since, as accidental, everything stands on an unstable foundation, one that could crumble at any moment. . . . [W]ith the knowledge that accidentality is the natural condition of things, to be vigilant is to care for and love what I have in the here and now, here and now (Sánchez 2024a).

One can contrast this with philosophies and ethics that seek universal and unchanging principles for understanding and acting in the world, and Sánchez outlines several considerations why the accidentalist outlook may be preferable to such universalist projects.

2 Confucianism

Confucian philosophers have long worked with a similar ontology of dynamic instability and advocated a comparable ethic of careful contingency. Confucian tradition, like the Mexistentist ethic, also emphasizes the importance of finding and following a middle way within the dynamic and constantly shifting circumstances of concrete life. The first of its foundational Five Classics is the *Book of Changes*, which describes the world and the Way as a matter of the dynamic and mutually constitutive interactions of yin and yang. In sections of philosophical commentary attributed to Confucius, it tells us that change "transforms things and regulates them" and that "to take up [the Way of change] and integrate it into the lives of the common folk is the great task of life" (Lynn 1999: 322; Xici 1.12). Within this worldview, Confucian teachings have emphasized both senses of carefulness across the ages. In the classical period, Mencius defined the primary virtue of humaneness (*ren*) in terms of compassion for others, affirming its priority over established rules of ritual conduct and thus the need for judicious reflection about their appropriate application. In the modern era, the New Confucian philosopher Xu Fuguan described Chinese culture generally, and Confucianism specifically, as working from the "concerned conscientiousness" (*youhuan yishi*) laid out in the *Changes*, which Xu understood as a particular anxiety about the world that arises from the care and concern for it.[4] Today, the globally influential scholar and public intellectual Tu Weiming promotes Confucian "Spiritual Humanism," likewise

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

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emphasizing that we ought to deliberate philosophical and moral questions through reference to "the concrete living person here and now" rather than first principles (Tu 2020). All of these versions of Confucian philosophy recognize the dynamic, situated quality of human life and prioritize care and carefulness therein.

The Confucian framework, however, is better termed a philosophy of "contingency" than one of accidentality, because despite this near total overlap with the main tenets of the accidentalist outlook, Confucians typically also celebrate and pontificate theories of substance.[5] At least since the Song dynasty (eleventh century CE), and arguably beginning in the earliest times (first millennium BCE), Confucians have promoted the careful contingency model's view of the world characterized by instability and dynamic change in conjunction with an emphasis on humanity's ontological root (*ben*), substance (*ti*), and root-substance (*benti*)—our existential grounding. The Song Neo-Confucians, first and foremost the authoritative figure Zhu Xi, elevated the classical teachings of the *Zhongyong* (Doctrine of the Mean) and *Mencius* as two of the orthodox Four Books. The *Zhongyong* opens by telling us, "Human nature is born from heavenly mandate, and drawing out this nature is the Way." In other words, humans inherit a fundamental "nature" and the ethical project is realizing that nature in practice. The *Mencius* elaborates this further, pushing us to see that our nature and humanity lie specifically in *goodness* and the more we realize this goodness the greater our value as humans. This dimension of Confucian teachings presents a philosophy of substance that essentializes human nature. Zhu Xi elevates these ideas further, identifying this nature with metaphysical "principle" and the substance of the cosmos. In the centuries of Confucian orthodoxy that affirmed Zhu's interpretation, an ethic of careful contingency is advocated as a matter of realizing not only one's essential humanity but also the substance of all being.

There has also been much debate within the tradition about the value and legitimacy of such appeals to metaphysical cosmic substance, with some philosophers foregoing or even objecting to them. Among the major Song Neo-Confucians, Zhang Zai avoided the metaphysical trend, and among the major modern New Confucians, Xu Fuguan rejected the metaphysical commitments of his friends and contemporaries. More recently, the late contemporary Confucian philosopher Li Zehou lambasted the predominant Neo-Confucian and New Confucian proclivity for metaphysics of substance, insisting that—in line with classical Confucianism and Confucius himself—metaphysical (and substantialist) commitments should be understood and evaluated as components of human culture and psychology. Today, the debate continues. The celebrated scholar Chen Lai, for example, has authored a treatise in response to Li Zehou outlining the substantialist Confucian "ontology of humaneness," motivated by his belief that "affirming values requires a metaphysical basis" (Chen 2014: 4). Roger T. Ames, meanwhile, continues to emphasize a non-substantialist interpretation of the *Zhongyong* and *Mencius* that interprets their conceptions of humanity, humaneness, and human nature processually, as dynamic and gerundive (e.g., Ames 2015 and 2018). At the very least, we can say that for Confucians as for Mexistentialists, questions surrounding substance have been crucial.

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

e-ISSN: 2474-1795 • http://scholarworks.iu.edu/iupjournals/index.php/jwp•10.2979/jourworlphil.9.2.09

The Confucian debates, however, turn less on *whether* or not we should think in terms of substance and instead on *how* we should (and should not) think about substance. Rather than opting for a world of pure accident, the anti-metaphysical Confucians seek to relocate substance in ways that they believe better serve careful contingency. So the diverse ways of affirming substance that different Confucians land on—both metaphysical and not—share fundamental affirmation of the tenets of accidentality: they see us as living in a world of ineluctable change and prioritize the project of carefully navigating that change, extolling the importance of deliberatively "weighing" and adjudicating values within concrete circumstance and in light of our inherent interdependence. This suggests that the outlook of careful contingency is not inherently at odds with all substantialist outlooks, but only with certain ways of conceiving of substance.

3 Substantialism

What is the value of grounding our values in substance? There are many approaches one might take to answer this question. One is investigating what we gain and lose in affirming different particular conceptions of substance. Another is asking what we gain and lose in affirming any conception of substance at all. Both questions are valuable, but the accidentalists seem uninterested in the first.

Let us consider a parallel between Sánchez, who rejects substance outright, and the Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhu Xi, who advocates realizing our substantial (good) nature through humaneness. In his paper, Sánchez draws on Jorge Portilla to outline two concerns about what the project of accidentality may generate. The "dangers" he identifies arise from negative reaction against this way of thinking on the one hand and enthusiastic but irresponsible embrace of it on the other. In reaction against it, some may cling fanatically to historical legacy, grasping to traditional ideas of substance and committing themselves to them. In irresponsibly embracing it, others may "devalue anything and everything," denying meaningful accountability for their actions in light of the mere accidentality of all things (Sánchez 2024a). In simple terms, the dangers are overcommitting to a specific set of normative values or lacking sufficient commitment to such values. Sánchez clarifies that the project of accidentality itself calls on us to navigate these two extremes. As an ethic of *nepantla*, it warns us to remain vigilant against veering toward one or the other pitfall.

Zhu Xi, in his "Treatise on Humaneness" (*Ren shuo*), similarly cautions against dual deviations in understanding the central Confucian teaching of humaneness (*ren*), which centers on carefully caring for others. One is conflating oneself with others, and the other is mistaking one's mere internal thoughts and feelings for care. Regarding the first, while one indeed must identify compassionately with the objects of care, one also must not become too bound up in this

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

e-ISSN: 2474-1795 • http://scholarworks.iu.edu/iupjournals/index.php/jwp•10.2979/jourworlphil.9.2.09

identification and thereby fail to properly distinguish the forms and degrees of care appropriate to different relations. Regarding the second, while one indeed must exercise judgments of conscience in determining what is right, one also must not become too bound up in one's own thoughts and feelings and thereby mistake personal proclivities for principle. Like the Portilla-Sánchez pair of concerns, one danger is being overly invested and the other is lacking accountability. Humaneness, like *nepantla*, is a matter of carefully navigating the path between these two pitfalls. It is just that in embracing accidentality one is wary mainly of normative abstractions, while Confucians are careful mainly in exercising compassion and respect.

In presenting this outlook, Zhu Xi develops a tradition that sees humaneness and compassion as what makes humans human—the substance of our humanity. To realize care for others requires thoughtful evaluation and reevaluation of the concrete factors of human life—the ever-varying features of human situations and relations. This is how the ontology of substance dovetails with the ethic of careful contingency. It seems to be the case, then, that the directions by which the two models, Confucian and accidentalist, relate care for others with carefulness in the face of contingency are inverse. In Zhu Xi, the existential call to care for others drives us to focus on vigilantly navigating the ever-changing factors of actual circumstance. In accidentality, it seems it is the requirement to cautiously navigate actual circumstance that generates the need "to care for and love what I have in the here and now." The latter works from rootlessness to carefulness to care; the former works from rooting us in care to carefulness.

What I hope this helps clarify is that certain ways of conceiving of substance—and specifically the Confucian conception of humanity as consisting in humane compassion—can feasibly produce the ethic of careful contingency that accidentalists celebrate. This is why sensitivity to what we gain and lose in affirming different particular conceptions of substance is crucial. Not all philosophies of substance concentrate human value in some exclusive ethnic, cultural, or religious inheritance that excludes and subordinates other kinds of persons and ways of life. On the contrary, seeing the substance of humanity to consist in care and respect for others calls on us to value rather than devalue other people's diverse interests and inheritances.

Nevertheless, it is important to ask whether Zhu Xi does Confucian teachings a service or disservice by positing humaneness to be a metaphysical cosmic principle. Compelling cases have been made against it. The Qing philosopher Dai Zhen, for instance, railed against Zhu's metaphysical framework because he believed that seeking to follow transcendent principle leads people to ignore the concrete world of actual, dynamic human existence—and thus to overlook also the moral significance of human suffering. Dai therefore offers an alternative, non-metaphysical account of principle that redirects us to care for actual people in the here and now (Dai 1961). Li Zehou likewise turns our moral gaze from metaphysical abstractions toward concrete human life. In doing so, Li proposes a theory of "substance" that, in his own words, "is equivalent to there being no substance (*benti*)" at all. In fact, Li celebrates a great many things as "substance"—the technological and social conditions of human life, individual human psychology, and even "emotions" (in the

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

e-ISSN: 2474-1795 • http://scholarworks.iu.edu/iupjournals/index.php/jwp•10.2979/jourworlphil.9.2.09

very broad sense of the sensible experience of human life). But he explicitly clarifies that his use of the term means "not noumenon, but rather the root," referring to the grounds of meaningfulness and value (Li 2023: 126). Like Dai, Li wants to root our ethical thinking in actuality, and not in absolute and universal abstractions. To do so, both locate substance—as ultimate reality and the fundamental source of what is meaningful—in concrete life itself rather than in a metaphysical conception of human nature, viewing the highest good as the production and reproduction of actual existence.[6]

Confucians, then, give us at least two options for affirming substance within the careful contingency model: extoling the substance of one's basic humanity, which consists in our capacities for compassion and respect, and viewing the holistic dynamic world itself as ultimate substance. Both ground human value in our integral affective ties to the world and one another and instruct us to attend to the ever-shifting nuances of those relationships.

4 Roots and Routes

It may help to outline a common model of substantialist philosophy, to clarify some of its strengths. Christian doctrine tells us we are children of God. We are born in God's image and out of God's goodness, and our essence lies in that divine and transcendent essence or "substance." This is the *root* through which we are born into this crazy world—a world of growth, of change, of beauty, love, death, and evil. It is, in a sense, a world untethered. But we don't have to be at sea. We can find grounding in our root, our connection to God, our source, and our essence. In this sense, our *root* also provides a *route*: a way, a path to follow. Our essence tells us not only who we are, but who we should be, how we should live, and why. We are born from God's goodness, in God's image, and so despite our imperfections and original sin, we should strive to be good.

As we have seen, Confucian teachings tell us something similar in the *Zhongyong* and *Mencius* as well as the Neo-Confucian tradition that develops their postulate that human nature lies in people's heavenly endowed capacity for goodness. Even the anti-metaphysical Confucians affirm their own versions of something like this, insisting that we cherish the world through which we are born and appreciate our place within it, which generates the moral project of contributing to the dynamic and continuous flourishing of that world. As with the Christian framework, we ought to recognize and realize our heavenly inheritance. We ought to be good and do good because that is who we most fundamentally are and the root from which we grow. The root provides the route.

This is—despite its potential drawbacks, hazards, and abuses—a powerful and compelling way of thinking about ourselves and the world. For one thing, it grounds us in something beyond who we actually are here and now; it ties the flowers of our daily life to deeper, more meaningful

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

e-ISSN: 2474-1795 • http://scholarworks.iu.edu/iupjournals/index.php/jwp•10.2979/jourworlphil.9.2.09

conceptions of truth and ultimate reality. And it gives us both a root and a route so that we are not just leaves blown about in the wind.

It is this worldview that existentialism and the philosophy of accidentality, or Mexistentialism, objects to—and of course the unrooted (and perhaps uprooting) outlook has compelling strengths of its own. It emphasizes self-creation. If we are leaves blown about by the wind, it equips us with propellers and rutters. It empowers us to choose our own direction, our own path of self-realization, by cutting off our roots, or by picking them up and transplanting them as we please. This has virtues different from the substantialist picture just painted, emphasizing free rather than good choice. We might say that the two models celebrate autonomy in two different senses: one directs me to realize my true and noble heavenly essence; the other asks me grow into a beautiful flower of my own design. In their decolonial project, the Mexistentialists find the latter to have greater appeal. It is worth noting, however, that the two are compatible in the Confucian framework. Indeed, some modern interpreters, like Ames, emphasize the creative aspect of Confucian virtue as virtuosity in the relational achievement of personhood. In fact, either form of Confucian rootedness—Zhu Xi's abstraction about compassionate human nature or Dai and Li's celebration of holistic flourishing—can encourage us to grow each in our own authentic way and, moreover, value that authenticity.

5 Questions

The values and norms by which we live have roots, and the pertinent questions—both philosophically and practically—concern what forms those roots, or value commitments, can and should take. So among the many questions a Confucian might ask a Mexistentialist—and the rich discussion that might take place between them—is this: In navigating a world of continuous becoming, agential interdependence, existential instability, and dynamic change, is it better to empower people with a conception of themselves as interconnected subjects whose essence lies in the inherent goodness of caring about and respecting one another, or as so many accidents seeking to carefully navigate a slippery world?

Confucian tradition works from the *non-binary* dualism of the *Changes*, which is similar to what Anne Waters describes as "nondiscrete nonbinary dualism" typical of Indigenous American thought and to how James Maffie describes the dualistic "inamic" forces that constitute the world in traditional Mesoamerican thought (Waters 2004; Maffie 2014: 153). Maffie also describes these forces as constitutive of the dynamic, holistic unity of teotl.

> The ceaseless becoming and transforming of teotl, reality, and cosmos are the products of the ceaseless agon between being and nonbeing, creation and destruction, order and

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

e-ISSN: 2474-1795 • http://scholarworks.iu.edu/iupjournals/index.php/jwp•10.2979/jourworlphil.9.2.09

> disorder, and the constellation of their aligned inamic pairs. […] *Nepantla* unifies them by middling them and weaving them together (Maffie 2014: 172).

Considering that the *nepantla* processes weave together this interconnected fabric of existence, why not see teotl as "substance" and *nepantla* as its functioning?

This non-binary dualist understanding of a world of continual becoming is common between Aztec and traditional Chinese cosmology. In the latter, all existence is composed of two kinds of *qi* forces, yin and yang, and neither yin nor yang is complete or independent substance. The existence of one is always dependent on and entailed in its opposite, and their integrated being is always dynamically shifting. As Robin R. Wang points out, "Yinyang thought appeals to integrated processes rather than divided dualisms" (2012: 14). Following Zhang Zai, Wang argues that we should therefore resist "any dualistic formulation of yin and yang, as if the one could be abstracted from the other, regarded as superior, or be considered metaphysically separate and distinct" (Wang 2012: 81). Indeed, Confucius's philosophical explication of the *Changes* tells us, "The noble person is not fawning toward what is above and is not contemptuous of what is below" (Lynn 1999: 323; Xici 2.5). The substantialist Confucian philosophies developed within this worldview thus unsurprisingly differ fundamentally from the colonial inheritance of "neat dualisms" of European vintage that align substantiality with purity and superiority and thereby designate other kinds of humanity or modes of being as impure and inferior accident. Considering this, it is worth asking: in seeking to "commit ourselves to the reality of our concreteness, of our historicity, and our finitude," *must* we "forgo the allure of substantialization," as Sánchez suggests (Sánchez 2024a)?

In sum, the accidentalist believes that "when we embrace our accidentality we can more easily navigate a world we know to be in a constant state of transformation" (Sánchez 2024a). The Confucian suggests that we can navigate the world of change even better by embracing our substantiality—as long as we conceive of substance in terms of our affective ties to that world and care about the world on that basis. Might the substantialist Confucian ethic of humaneness offer a viable and valuable alternative philosophy of careful contingency?

6 Conclusion

I am confident that further exploration of the convergences and divergences between Confucian and accidentalist thought will prove fruitful and fortifying to both sides of the conversation, and I would like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to Carlos Sánchez and the *Journal of World Philosophies* for this opportunity to start thinking through what such collaborative discussion might yield.

[1] Sánchez further explicates this view in Uranga (2021: 32–7).

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

e-ISSN: 2474-1795 • http://scholarworks.iu.edu/iupjournals/index.php/jwp•10.2979/jourworlphil.9.2.09

[2] Nor does caring for others receive attention in his explication and translation of Emilio Uranga's *Analysis of Mexican Being* (Uranga 2021), the main source from which Sánchez develops the philosophy of accidentality.

[3] See, for instance, the three forms of Confucian concrete humanism outlined in Chapters 5–7 of Carleo (2024a).

[4] For more on Xu's concerned conscientiousness, see Ni (2002) and Rošker (2015: 86–7).

[5] On Confucianism as a philosophy of contingency, see D'Ambrosio (2023 and 2024).

[6] In these ways, Dai and Li fall within the broader tradition of Confucian concrete humanism; see Carleo (2023 and 2024a).

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

e-ISSN: 2474-1795 • http://scholarworks.iu.edu/iupjournals/index.php/jwp•10.2979/jourworlphil.9.2.09

The Concept of Responsibility in Mexican Existentialism

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Carlos Alberto Sánchez' work is pathbreaking because it brings the ideas of Emilio Uranga to the Anglophone world in ways we have never seen before. Thanks to his efforts, we can now place Emilio Uranga among existentialist thinkers from across the globe and use his ideas to enrich our discussions of twenty-first century global existentialism. This crucial intellectual is now linked to Black existentialists such as Frantz Fanon and Lewis R. Gordon, Japanese existentialists like Nishitani Keiji, Arab existentialists such as Abd al-Rahman Badawi, and Jewish existentialists such as Martin Buber and Hannah Arendt.

I would like to focus in this short reply on something connecting Uranga's theory of accidentality to his "Mexistentialism," but simultaneously to all existentialisms. In ordinary Anglophone language one might call it a "nexus," but in thinking with the Mexicas (Aztecs) we would have to call it an instance of nepantla, the Nahuatl word for "middling." I do not use Nahuatl concepts simply for them to be present in our discussion, but rather to but perform the more radical act of what it means to decolonize philosophy, according to the late Akan philosopher, Kwasi Wiredu, by *thinking* in such terms. The experience of nepantla is that of straddling two worlds without letting go of either, having one foot in one river and another foot in another. Consciousness is brought back and forth in a zigzagging motion producing a melancholia called zozobra. Uranga questions what it means to *think* in zozobra, thus later I will ask if Sánchez thinks there could be a zozobra-logic.

For the main part of my reply, I would like to investigate the theme of responsibility in Uranga's *Analysis of Mexican Being* and explore its relationship to the concept of accidentality (Uranga 2021). Thankfully, Sánchez has queued us up perfectly. Below are his words on Uranga, who considers the character of a new Mexican born in the fires of revolutionary struggle and writes that this new being must "choose accidentality," to which Sánchez replies:

> In accidentalizing yourself you set yourself free. Of course, this comes with a cost. Knowing that all is breakable and uncertain, that the past will not dictate the future, is sure to cause anguish and anxiety, what Mexican philosophers called "zozobra." But zozobra, a feeling of ungroundedness and dread that comes with knowing that the earth is slippery, that everything is constantly slipping into darkness, is attached to vigilance, to care, and caution […] the zozobra caused by the recognition of my accidentality does not give way to nihilism or defeatism, but rather to responsibility and commitment because it quickly becomes clear to me that any control or power I may claim to have over this slippery earth will have to come from me (Sánchez 2024a).

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

e-ISSN: 2474-1795 • http://scholarworks.iu.edu/iupjournals/index.php/jwp•10.2979/jourworlphil.9.2.09

We will talk about the notion of a slippery earth ahead. For now, we can see that realizing accidentality leads to a consciousness of our responsibility as human beings, or put differently the question of what we must do. There are many forms of responsibility in existential thought and not all are the same. Some must be faced, in Sánchez's words, by "me," however political responsibility must be faced by *us* (Arendt 1987; Jaspers 2000; Young 2011; Gordon 2022). Let us see how this issue arises in Uranga.

Opening the *Analysis of Mexican Being*, Uranga explains that reflection on the lived reality of Mexicanness in the post-revolutionary period, or *lo Mexicano*, had become extremely popular, particularly among young people. Seeing as no satisfactory answer had been provided as to the unique character of *lo Mexicano*, it continued to present itself as a genuine problem. One, which in Uranga's words, "imposes upon us a moral task, one of purification and responsibility" (Uranga 2021: 95). The "us" he is referring to are *philosophers*. This is also evident from his focus on "Mexican *Being*," however a better term to use would be "Mexican reality."

Uranga belonged to *El Grupo Hyperión*, a small cadre of twentieth century intellectuals who took their name from the great titan and old sun god to symbolize their project of becoming the first in post-revolutionary Mexico to articulate a distinct Mexican philosophy. Like other *hyperións*, Uranga took seriously the political responsibilities of philosophers. At the time, these included joining the national struggle to interrogate Mexicanness and describe it. The notable popularity of reflections exploring the unique character of Mexican reality was evidence that it was an issue being taken up by an entire generation of people, each struggling to better understand themselves and their new nation (Uranga 2021: 95). This should strike readers of Fanon as familiar, particularly given Fanon's formulation of the responsibilities associated with formerly colonized countries: "Each generation must out of relative obscurity discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it" (Fanon 2004: 206). Fanon's point was that fighting a revolution requires different skills than are needed for building a new national culture and political society. Uranga's was similar to this in that he was concerned that in Mexico the endogenous philosophical and cultural resources indispensable to building such an artifice were missing, which explains his preoccupation with clarifying the lived reality of the "Mexican of *our generation* […] the mode of being of the Mexican that lives every day in the existence of the new generation" (Uranga 2021: 95; my italics). Each generation has its own responsibilities, for Uranga, because each faces its own situation, one it did not choose and that could easily be otherwise. It is crucial, then, we understand Uranga as referring to a situation whose form was *accidental* and which—from nature's and history's points of view—never had to be. Living this situation were those who built the Mexican revolution *and* whom the revolution had built.

In the meso-American context, many dangers were threatening the analysis of *lo Mexicano*. For Uranga, it was imperative that philosophers not fall into two pitfalls. First, they should avoid imitation of European methods of reasoning. This is related to Uranga's broader position that the Mexican *people* should avoid seeing as their goal the forging of social and political relations styled after Euro-modern ones simply because these were seen as legitimate in the past. Uranga was

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

e-ISSN: 2474-1795 • http://scholarworks.iu.edu/iupjournals/index.php/jwp•10.2979/jourworlphil.9.2.09

critical in not taking European culture and models of political sovereignty for granted as authoritative or "right." He lamented that before the revolution Mexican society too often *did* seek to imitate Europe (Uranga 2021).

The second pitfall concerns Uranga's relationship to the human and social sciences. For Uranga, psychology, anthropology, and sociology—all the empirical sciences—substantialize Mexican reality and turn it into an object. Instead, *historicism* was the path to ontological insight, and not just any historicism. Uranga was not talking about empirical history. Instead, he envisioned a special, philosophical kind of history that could bring one back to the "origins of Mexican being" (Uranga 2021: 93-8). Here I must note the influence of Heidegger. I wish to ask Sánchez if it is possible to theorize from, and build upon, Uranga's ideas without Heideggerianism. But more on this ahead.

To read Uranga charitably, one would have to say that the value of emphasizing a historicist analytic is that it evaluates human reality on the basis of *action*, which is a standard that has no substitute when struggling to understand what a human being is and desires. Uranga's historicism, in part, comprises the existential character of his thought. To look at *lo Mexicano* through "non-ontological" frames that de-accidentalize it was the second pitfall he warned against (Uranga 2021: 159). To de-accidentalize means to view something as if it were *not* a product of human action and therefore metaphysically contingent. Accidentality is not identical to contingency, but it appears within the domain of contingency. It refers to the features of reality we take as essential or substantial despite their being, in phenomenological terms, non-intentional. Frequently, human action brings about such consequences which, because they are non-intentional, are also unforeseeable. It is precisely the accidents of human action Uranga thinks we are responsible for and, I am asserting, define his Mexican existentialism.

The reason Sánchez' discussion of decolonization is so effective involves his reliance on classical Mexica wisdom in the *huehuetlatolli*, or, in Nahuatl, the "ancient talks" (Sánchez 2024: 8). The two pitfalls mentioned above are like two abysses present on either side of the road one traverses while walking atop the mountain peak. An existential moment arises when Sánchez emphasizes that "even taking the middle ground (nepantla) does not guarantee […] you won't fall. Even the middle path is dangerous; falling, or slipping, is always a possibility" (Sánchez 2024a). A consciousness of the slippery earth must animate a methodology of accidentality, then, otherwise the analysis of Mexican reality might not be sufficiently accidental. And Uranga was clear that philosophers were most successful when using methods they themselves had developed. It ensured their ideas were relevant to Mexican people and not simply "elegant flower[s] in an academic greenhouse" (Uranga 2021: 134).

A methodology of accidentality is necessary because the empirical sciences risk objectifying Mexican reality and turning it into a substance. For Uranga, the "non-ontological" sciences provide an important but "extremely provisional" and superficial kind of self-knowledge to the Mexican

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

e-ISSN: 2474-1795 • http://scholarworks.iu.edu/iupjournals/index.php/jwp•10.2979/jourworlphil.9.2.09

philosopher. Relying exclusively on knowledge from sciences that can only see substances enables the Mexican philosopher to "absolve himself, through this act, of all responsibility" for clarifying the lived experience of Mexicanness (Uranga 2021: 152).

This is connected to what the *huehuetlatolli* or "ancient discourses of the elders" say a philosopher is. The *tlamatini* in Aztec society were "those who read, those who count, those who loudly turn the pages of the codices" (Purcell 2023). People who have the "power of the black and red ink," and [who] write and communicate skillfully." *Tlamantini* have a special relationship to the people. They "accompany us, guide us, make us speak [truth] upon the path" (Purcell). In another dialogue found in the *Florentine Codex*, the *tlamatini* is described as a bright torch, a mirror to show the people to themselves; someone is forged in a tradition of books. The philosopher's words show the people the middle path of nepantla. He—and it most likely *was* a he—is a leader of the people and a high achiever. He is credible; someone that can be trusted. He encourages sound judgement in others and teaches them to intimately know themselves. Thus it is clear that *tlamatini* had a political responsibility that linked them to those who were not philosophers. This is the tradition in which I place Uranga and the history from which he is thinking about the crises facing his own people: the new Mexicans.

But why his skepticism of the modern sciences? Another question for Sánchez is whether Uranga considered the possibility that there could be ontological psychologies, ontological anthropologies and sociologies, just like there was an ontological (as opposed to empirical) history. It is clear Uranga closely read the fifth of Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*, but elsewhere Husserl develops in greater detail why Euro-modern instantiations of these central human sciences do not exhaust all that they are. To reiterate, I sense the pernicious influence of Heidegger here, however Uranga was correct to argue that the radical nepantla-ness or cross-natured reality of Mexican life raised unique methodological challenges for studying it (Uranga 2021:158).

On the subject of nepantla, Maffie's treatise *Aztec Philosophy: Understanding a World in Motion* is excellent (Maffie 2014). For Maffie, it is crucial we see nepantla as a gerund—meaning it translates not to being-in-the-middle or being-in-between but instead as "middling." Even better would be to translate it as an adverb, where it would mean "middlingly" (Maffie 2014: 169-70; 362). Nepantla is not a state but an activity, and for this reason it is easily reified or turned into a substance. Anglophone students of Uranga should not think of it as a noun either. Nor is nepantla a synonym for liminality.[1] Interpreting it in these ways obscures important metaphysical differences between classical Aztec and Euro-modern ontology. Where the liminal is between being and nothing, nepantla is an activity manifest in the production of the middle. Nothing creates itself *ex nihilo* in Aztec metaphysics, but always out of something that came before, which also must be "accidentalized." Uranga's focus on historicism is meant to locate how *lo Mexicano* was part of this process of change and conversion in reality; how in, in Aztec terms, it was a nepantla-process of becoming.

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

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Thus far we have been reflecting on the methodological stakes of accidentality. Sánchez articulates the political ones when writing that "those who recognize the primary of human accidentality don't have to accept the worldview that puts them at the bottom of a hierarchy" (Sánchez 2024a: 11). The Spaniard said that Mexicanness only came about through the meeting of the indigenous person and himself. His implication was that Mexicanness was not only a historical accident but God's mistake (Sánchez 2024a: 4-5). But accidentalizing the Spaniard's outlook shows that all human beings are accidental, or what Jane Anna Gordon calls *creolized*, by which she means produced by the meeting of people and circumstances that never had to coalesce and that are, consequently, politically open as to what they will become (Gordon 2014). For Uranga, this also meant that *lo Mexicano* did not have to exist at the bottom of a colonial system but could weave a different future for itself. This explains his preoccupation with the Mexican revolution. For Uranga, a new kind of Mexican reality struggled to assert itself during the revolution, which embodied the assumption of political responsibility in Mexico in a new way. So, we must ask, who or what was forged in the fires of this struggle?

The revolution emerged out of a crisis facing the Mexican nation. Although the word "crisis" comes from the ancient Hellenistic *krinein* meaning "to choose" or "decide," the appropriate nomenclature here would be the Nahuatl for *crossroads* (Maffie 2014: 387).[2] Prior to 1910, President Porfiro Díaz had become an authoritarian ruler in Mexico, eliminating political opposition and refusing to give up power after seven elections. Under the auspices of economic reform, Díaz opened much of the territory in the north to foreign investment by wealthy European and American capitalists, dispossessing indigenous people of their land. Soon up to forty percent of Mexican land became expropriated and owned by non-Mexicans. In the south, local Mexican bosses or *caciques* dominated their own people. Compounding these issues was an over one hundred percent increase in the price of corn, a sacred crop in Mesoamerica that had been domesticated and farmed since Olmec civilization.

After President Diaz was deposed and exiled to Paris, Francisco Madero of the anti-re-electionist movement became president. However, the problems just mentioned did not go away. Three revolutionaries emerged: Pascual Orozco and Pancho Villa, who fought Mexican state forces in the north, and Emiliano Zapata, who waged an intense class war in the south and stood up for exploited people. But this was only the beginning of the revolution. Much bloodshed would unfold over the ensuing decade, which ultimately culminated in a constitutional republic. Along the way, important figures such as Enrique Flores Magón would rise and tap into Mexico's rich history of progressive activism on the political left.

One could say that the Mexican revolution instantiated what Julius C. Scott called *The Common Wind*, where news of Haitian slaves rebelling on the island of San Domingo reached continental Mesoamerica and inspired a movement that came to a head contemporaneously with the Russian Revolution (Scott 2018). Too often Mexico is omitted from accounts of struggle for human emancipation on a global scale. When the first free Black republic in the New World, Haiti, offered

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

e-ISSN: 2474-1795 • http://scholarworks.iu.edu/iupjournals/index.php/jwp•10.2979/jourworlphil.9.2.09

aid to any nation hoping to make a revolution in the name of freedom, on condition that after the dust settles slavery be outlawed, Mexico answered Haiti's call (Heatherton 2022).

So, again, who was forged in this struggle? What did the Mexican people decide at their political crossroads? For Uranga, the new nation that emerged was not some romantic symbol of freedom, but a deeply uncertain home-world saturated by zozobra. Interestingly, his argument in the mid-twentieth century has been confirmed by more recent academic literature produced by Mesoamerican, Latin American, and Latinx scholars working across many fields. Today, there is a rich tradition of Chicano/a discourse on the subject of home-worlds, home-tactics, and multiple rootedness that remains autonomous from Africana diasporic discourses on the same (Anzaldúa 2012; Ortega 2016; López 2020). I have not seen Uranga's contributions cited in this literature, which is something Sánchez' work will likely help to change.

This new Mexican reality or zozobra was more than simply political, which is also to say "impersonal." It was also deeply *intimate* and sentimental (Uranga 2021: 162). This affect is part of what Uranga means by the term "home-world," which refers to a mood the way jazz musicians might speak of the blues. The responsibility of Mexican philosophers was to *translate* this mood affecting ordinary people into terms they could understand. In this sense, Uranga's argument is a clear extension of the classical Aztec wisdom or "discourses of the elders" which state the role of the philosopher or *tlamatini* is to reveal the people to themselves, to guide them by describing their reality and offer them a mirror in which to gaze.

Despite living Mexicanness, many turned away from it. *Lo Mexicano* could not be raised to the level of a self-conscious reality. Uranga wanted to change this because he saw in Mexicanness possibility, albeit one that would be challenging to realize and demanded confronting rather than fleeing zozobra, the post-revolutionary mood of Mexican national life. Since zozobra implicated everyone, it highlighted the responsibility of everyone, too. As stated above, this responsibility was both a political and an intimate reality. Below are Uranga's words.

> We see [what the revolution] made for the life of each one of us,' that is, individualized. It is given to us as a matter of obligation and responsibility. *Tua res agitur*. It is about something that concerns each one of us, not an anonymous and social mass. The revolution revives or destroys its possibilities with each Mexican person on an individual basis [...] We are asked to maintain the revolution, to hold it in perpetuity, but what is overlooked is that the uselessness of that demand resides in the vagueness of whom it is demanded; the demand is not demanded of a group without personality, but of isolated and particularized subjectivities" (Uranga 2021: 163).

lo Mexicano was somehow present, yet not ready-at-hand. Although the new home-world existed between ordinary people, linking them together, it was not clear what it was (Uranga 2021: 164).[3] Being both intelligible and unintelligible—or perhaps something ambiguously "middled" and

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

e-ISSN: 2474-1795 • http://scholarworks.iu.edu/iupjournals/index.php/jwp•10.2979/jourworlphil.9.2.09

between these—it exemplified nepantla, which is not easily translated but is rather associated with a very specific set of images such as weaving, crossroads, etc. Uranga thus turned to painting and poetry, the only things he thought presented *lo Mexicano* concretely, by which he meant "ontologically." I will not examine Uranga's analysis of Mexican art here, though some recourse to it will be necessary.

Let us look again at nepantla which is, after all, the central category of Mexican ontology. It is autochthonous and stands independent from Euro-modern ontological categories (Uranga 2021: 167). Uranga writes: "The Mexican character does not install itself *over* [...] two agencies, but *between* (*entre*) them. The Nahuatl term 'nepantla' captures this phenomenon perfectly" (Uranga 2021: 167). For the Franciscan friar Diego Duran, these two agencies that the Mexican character alternated between were the law of the Christian and that of the indigenous. For Alfonso Reyes, it was the attitudes of hypocrisy and cynicism. For the poet Lopez Velarde, it was a drawn-ness to the impulses of religiosity and love (Uranga 2021: 167). The content of these agencies is accidental, however. It is the *form* of oscillation, pendulosity, and zigzagging between them that characterizes zozobra. It is a melancholia born of ambivalence and alternation, unable to let go. This is crucial, for in some existentialisms, particularly that of Simone Weil, as is evident from her essays on the de-creation of the ego, *letting-go* is indispensable to responsibility-taking (in some domains) as well as personal and political growth. Given this, Uranga's discussion of zozobra would be highlighting something important, namely the challenge of taking responsibility while butting up against some of the most adverse yet human attitudes such as nihilism, meaninglessness, despair, ambivalence, and many others that militate against one's taking an *interest* in realities beyond oneself. One becomes existentially "stuck" in the middle state of caring and not caring, commitment and non-commitment to the possibility of a better future.

One question that could be posed here is whether there could be such a thing as a zozobra-logic and, if so, what it might look like. This question is one for Sánchez to work out. Uranga is clear that if there is a zozobra-logic, it would have to be "distinct from the linearity of formal logic and the spiraling of dialectics" (Uranga 2021: 167). However, I can already see many possibilities beyond and betwixt these. One thing that is clear is zozobra-logic does not require absolute consistency, as formal logic does. Thus it is not rigid. However, its syntheses are perhaps not as radical as dialectical logic. The syllogism does not transform into something completely new.

I imagine zozobra-logic as one where arguments are *woven* like the fabric that constituted such a ubiquitous presence in the Aztec lifeworld. Woven mats symbolized nepantla-processes of life such as weaving, sexual coitus, and mixing. They also symbolized war.[4] Judges and rulers conducted important business on woven mats. Mats were present in dwellings as tapestries and decorations. People slept on woven mats, lovers had intercourse and women gave birth on them. Woven fabric was present at marriage ceremonies and in other ritual contexts. For Uranga, warp and weft intersect to hide "a peculiar sorrow, a private suffering" that "never heals" (Uranga 2021:168). Zozobra philosophers interpret a cosmic weave and logic becomes a "sad and gentle activity that

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

e-ISSN: 2474-1795 • http://scholarworks.iu.edu/iupjournals/index.php/jwp•10.2979/jourworlphil.9.2.09

weaves our life… [with] a passivity"—and I would add a gentleness—"whose definition is hard to articulate" (Uranga 2021: 168). I imagine zozobra-logic as weaving arguments that are akin to hammocks where the fabric is flexible but can tolerate heavy tension and support great weight.

In Aztec society, not all mats, ropes, cloths, etc., were woven using identical materials. Also, many shapes and colors appeared. Accidentality, then, was present *in* the fabric itself. Uranga acknowledges this when writing: "Linen's right to neatness does not take priority over the coarseness of agave fibers (*henequen*)" (Uranga 2021: 171). What is interesting is how, for Uranga, the responsibilities of the people and of the *tlamatini* were both accounted for, woven into his image of Mexican society as a whole.

Like warp and weft, *lo Mexicano* was crossed, stretched between worlds and entwined in ways that could sustain great tension (Maffie 2014: 357). The problem is not everyone desired to know this new reality produced by the revolution. Some would have been discomforted by what they would discover about themselves if were to break with hegemonic models of life and begin to *think* for themselves. As Uranga put it: "The pleasure of acceptance has its correspondence in the terror of knowing ourselves" (Uranga 2021: 182).

Those who were intellectuals and who sought to cover over Mexicanness were no longer interested in their political responsibilities. They were no longer invested in the business of acquiring self-knowledge as Mexicans. Instead, they called for blind transformation, or change without self-knowledge. Uranga called this absurd. He argued these intellectuals desired *not* to know themselves because, in the end, they were ashamed of Mexicanness. The revolution continues to generate responsibilities for the philosopher by "demand[ing] that we recognize ourselves in our misery and identify ourselves with it so as to build upon it" (Uranga 2021: 183). Thus zozobra was also a calling, a possibility to build something beyond it. In closing, then, we should note that thinking in this way, beyond Euro-modern logics, and based on the acquisition of self-knowledge, was not only a responsibility. It was something Uranga thought could form the basis for a new, Mexican humanism (Uranga 2021: 185).

To reiterate, for readers' convenience, my questions for Sanchez are below:

1. What does it mean to *think* in zozobra? Is there a zozobra-logic?
2. Is it possible to extricate Uranga's thought from the death throes of Martin Heidegger? Does Heidegger's ontologism produce a dogmatic streak in Uranga's attitude toward the sciences?
3. Does Uranga enact nepantla by writing ambiguously about the responsibilities of Mexican philosophers and that of the new Mexican people generally?
4. Do you see Uranga's Mexistentialism as an extension of the tradition of the *tlamatini* or a departure from it?

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

e-ISSN: 2474-1795 • http://scholarworks.iu.edu/iupjournals/index.php/jwp•10.2979/jourworlphil.9.2.09

[1] Ortega (2016), building on Anzaldúa, does this. On the distinction between nepantla and liminality see: Maffie (2014: 362).

[2] "Sahagún tell us that at certain times the five Cihuapipiltin ("Noble Women"), who "hate," "mock," and cast spells upon people, descended upon and resided at the crossroads (omaxac chaneque). During this time parents kept their children at home and people made offerings to the Cihuapipiltin at the crossroads (omaxac). The Cihuapipiltin were also known as Cihuateteo ("Goddesses"): angry, malevolent spirits of women who had died in their first childbirth with child in utero. They were the female counterparts of warriors fallen in battle or on the sacrificial stone; yet, apparently unlike their male counterparts, the Cihuateteo were furious and ill-willed because unfulfilled. The Cihuateteo accompanied the Sun from its zenith at midday to its setting in the west (Cihuatlampa, "The Place of Women"), which was their residence. The Primeros memoriales states the Cihuapipiltin "hover over the crossroads (otlamaxac)." They descended to Earth on the days 1 Deer, 1 Rain, 1 Monkey, 1 House, and 1 Eagle, inflicting disease and deformities upon children as well as leading adults astray by instigating unbalanced (i.e., immoral, unwise) behavior such as adultery. Those who came in contact with them became diseased, disoriented, disordered, and unbalanced – in short, stuff out of place" (Maffie 2014: 387).

[3] Uranga writes: "It is not clear what our link is" (Uranga 2021: 164).

[4] To explain how war is an instance of nepantla life processes would take us outside the scope of the present discussion.

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

e-ISSN: 2474-1795 • http://scholarworks.iu.edu/iupjournals/index.php/jwp•10.2979/jourworlphil.9.2.09

The Accidental Trans Woman: Mexistential "Accidentality" and Daoist "Wandering Beyond"

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"I was lost in the dreams
others had for me;
struggling to create a life
I was never meant
to live."
—L. E. Bowman

Carlos Alberto Sánchez's presentation of Mexistential "accidentality" alongside zozobra and commitment is a rich contribution to the growing body of existential philosophy from marginalized and subordinated subject positions, and I am grateful for his invitation to engage his work from my own positionality and chosen philosophical framework. I am a white, queer, trans woman of European descent, and the existential philosophy I have relied most heavily on to unpack queerness and transness is that of the classical Daoist, Zhuangzi. In this response, I will think alongside Mexican existentialists, especially with regard to the notion of "accidentalizing oneself," by presenting for critical comparison a trans reading of some key concepts from the *Zhuangzi*, specifically the existential project of "wandering beyond." Sections 1 and 2 present brief empirical and philosophical accounts of contemporary trans lived experience in the United States. Section 3 then offers a presentation of how "wandering beyond" can serve as an effective practice for trans becoming in the face of overwhelming material and hermeneutical hostility. I conclude in Section 4 with a critical comparison of Mexistential accidentality and Daoist wandering beyond in terms of contemporary trans existence. My hope is that such a comparison is a productive contribution to cross-cultural liberatory philosophy.

1 Trans Lived Experience of the WTF

As I write this essay, there have been 658 anti-trans legislative bills proposed in the United States thus far in 2024 alone.[1] These bills seek to deny trans people such things as the safe use of public restrooms, health care in accordance with established best practices, access to organized sports and recreation, and even basic privacy. Medical professionals, teachers, parents of trans youth, and trans people themselves can face harsh repercussions for violating any of these regulations that manage

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

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to become law, with sanctions ranging from termination of employment to incarceration for child abuse. When taken as a whole, this ever-growing flood of anti-trans legislation—there were "merely" 21 anti-trans bills proposed in 2015—seems to have a singular purpose: the removal of trans people from public life, at the very least, and in its more virulent manifestation, the erasure of trans existence altogether.

The specter of "gender cleansing" is not hyperbole when major political parties (in the USA and UK, for example) make the exclusion of trans people from public life a plank of their national platforms, subjecting trans people to increased rates of violence and homicide, and when the denial of medical care and family protection compounds this mortality rate with astronomically high rates of suicidality. Trans individuals already face some of the most extreme forms of marginalization and hostility in the United States today, with markedly disproportionate rates of food and housing insecurity, family estrangement, unemployment, and harassment, just to select a few statistical markers of existential precarity.[2] Rates of violent victimization are also disproportionately high and often distressingly extreme (Williams Institute 2021). Earlier this year, to take just one example of anti-trans violence, a fourteen-year-old trans girl, Pauly Likens, went for a walk in her local Pennsylvania park only to be found several days later dismembered in a lake (Soto 2024). But the greatest lethal threat to the trans community is actually contained within those proposed bills listed above. According to the American Psychiatric Association's DSM-5-TR, those diagnosed with gender dysphoria experience rates of suicidality and suicide attempts between 30% and 80%, depending on the study. Suicidality rates drop precipitously as gender-affirming care decreases the incongruence between deeply felt identity and physically gendered body. Suicide attempt rates also decrease by 40% when LGBTQ youth have at least one affirming adult in their lives (The Trevor Project 2019). Many of the bills above seek to block access to such care and to remove trans youth from supportive family environments (if they are lucky enough to have them). Viewing all of the above together, one finds three factors manifesting in the United States: (i) the exponential increase in anti-trans bills proposed in the United States each year, (ii) the overall effect of isolating trans individuals through exclusion from public spaces and organizations, and (iii) the prohibition of the two most effective means of suicide prevention. How can one read this as anything other than an effort aspiring to the genocide of trans and nonbinary persons?

In her work on trans philosophy, Talia Mae Bettcher describes living in this anti-trans social world as living in the WTF. In the WTF, the dominant common sense is not constructed for understanding trans experience and so our experience of the everyday is disorienting, perplexing, and often dangerous. Faced with such a starting point for existential self-understanding, trans philosophy is a practice of illumination and aims at least for survival but ideally for liberation (Bettcher 2017). For trans individuals, life in the WTF prompts questions like: Do I really have to choose between my own well-being and having a relationship with my family? Does half of the country really wish we just stopped existing? Will someone try to kill me for using the bathroom at this rest stop? Am I really just crazy, confused, or broken? WTF?

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

e-ISSN: 2474-1795 • http://scholarworks.iu.edu/iupjournals/index.php/jwp•10.2979/jourworlphil.9.2.09

While the first three questions focus more on material and social hostility to trans existence, the fourth focuses on what I am calling *hermeneutical hostility*. Hermeneutical hostility is a species of hermeneutical excess, which is itself a species of hermeneutical injustice. With general hermeneutical injustice, individuals from marginalized groups are unable to make sense of their own experiences to themselves or to others due to a gap in the collective hermeneutical resources of society (see Fricker 2007). Nicole Dular argues that hermeneutical injustice can also be the product of *too many* hermeneutical resources. She defines hermeneutical excess as "a proliferation of concepts that fail to pick out real phenomena, which function to perpetuate dominant ideologies and systems of oppression by means of obscuring understanding of marginalized groups' experiences (especially among the dominant), for which apt concepts already exist" (Dular 2023: 429). Using the examples of "nonconsensual sex" as a recoding of "rape" and "reverse racism" as a recoding of "racial justice," Dular describes hermeneutical excesses as "defensive strategies" that effectively function to inoculate the dominant ideology from resistant ways of knowing and thus keep the hegemonic perfectly naturalized (Dular 2023: 431).

But there is something deliberately *offensive*, *preemptive*, and *antagonistic* about anti-trans ideology today. The goal is not to inoculate the dominant ideology against challenges, but rather to mark (i.e., *stigma*-tize) the marginalized themselves for an attack. Examples of anti-trans hermeneutical hostility include deadnaming and misgendering trans individuals to out them as trans, but also the more insidious conceptual work of recasting "trans women" as "male rapists," "gender-affirming top surgery" as "irreversible damage," "trans-supportive parents" as "child abusers," and illegal "conversion therapy" as "gender-exploratory therapeutic care." The distorted logic pervading virtually all of these manifestations of hermeneutical hostility and anti-trans ideology is what I refer to more broadly as *the cisheterosexual matrix*. I will now turn to a close analysis of this distorted logic and its origins in European colonial domination, an analysis that should align this sort of trans liberatory philosophy with the liberatory project of Mexican existentialists.

2 The Cisheterosexual Matrix and the Colonial/Modern Cisgender System[3]

The cisheterosexual matrix is a modification of Judith Butler's heterosexual matrix (1990: 208n6) in two important ways. First, the identity domain for gender is further specified as gender identity and gender expression, to better include trans identities and ways of life (to be explained in more detail shortly). Second, I understand this matrix to be the contemporary manifestation of the colonial/modern cisgender system, i.e., the matrix is no longer understood as an ahistorical framework. Some work must be done to clarify the common origin of racial and ethnic domination and of sexual and gender domination. The decolonial work of "accidentality" in Mexistentialism is two-fold. First, accidentality reclaims Mexican identity as one of value and power, as opposed to being a less substantial or more diminished derivative of European identity. Second, its roots in

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

e-ISSN: 2474-1795 • http://scholarworks.iu.edu/iupjournals/index.php/jwp•10.2979/jourworlphil.9.2.09

Nahuatl wisdom inoculates Mexistentialism from the colonial response that it is simply European existentialism with Mexican authors. This decolonial work, then, is operating at the social and material level as well as at the epistemic level; it is challenging both social injustice and hermeneutical injustice. One can reposition this doubly decolonial move in terms of the colonial/modern cisgender system of María Lugones and Brooklyn Leo's Trans of Color critique.

Building critically on Anibal Quijano's notion of the coloniality of power (Quijano 2000a, 2000b, 2001-2002, as cited in Lugones 2007), María Lugones argues that heterosexism is

> a key part of how gender fuses with race in the operations of colonial power. Colonialism did not impose precolonial, European gender arrangements on the colonized. It imposed a new gender system that created very different arrangements for colonized males and females than for white bourgeois colonizers. Thus, it introduced many genders and gender itself as a colonial concept and mode of organization of relations of production, property relations, of cosmologies and ways of knowing (Lugones 2007: 186).

Lugones's identifies "the heterosexualist patriarchy" as an "ahistorical framework of analysis" that obscures the various mechanisms by which heteronormativity, capitalist exploitation, and racialization are inextricably intertwined (Lugones 2007: 187). To truly challenge heterosexism, we need to recognize its intersections with other modes of oppression as well as their shared colonial roots in the colonial/modern gender system.

According to Lugones, there is a light side and a dark side to this gender system, just as there is to Quijano's coloniality of power. For example, while second-wave (white) feminism in the United States challenged the portrayal of women as "fragile and sexually passive," this is a specifically European (i.e., colonizer) brand of femininity and was created to distinguish these women from "nonwhite, colonized women, including female slaves, who were characterized along a gamut of sexual aggression and perversion, and as strong enough to do any sort of labor" (Lugones 2007: 203). White bourgeois womanhood was as much constructed in contrast with white bourgeois manhood as it was in contrast with nonwhite and working-class women and nonwhite femaleness.[4] I read this genealogy of colonial/modern gender as a deepening of the intersectional imperative in feminist theorizing to include a decolonial imperative. It is not just that various modes of oppression are interlocking and mutually reinforcing today, as intersectionality theory establishes, but they were created as such during European colonialism and still operate for the purpose of subduing or eradicating extensive portions of humanity.

For all the work that Lugones does to implicate a colonial/modern (cis)gender system at the heart of the coloniality of power—thus prompting feminists to engage coloniality and decolonial theorists to engage gender—her initial work on the colonial/modern (cis)gender system does not systematically or substantively challenge the legacy of violent cisnormativity that connects the

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

e-ISSN: 2474-1795 • http://scholarworks.iu.edu/iupjournals/index.php/jwp•10.2979/jourworlphil.9.2.09

European colonial project to the present. Brooklyn Leo, in developing their trans of color framework for the colonial/modern cisgender system, writes that

> Rather than viewing gender variance and liberatory gender relations as precolonial conceptions lost in the destructive aftermath of colonialism [as Lugones seems to do,] gender-diverse identities are neither extinct nor romantically antiquated […] the colonial/modern gender system could not maintain its supremacy without the abjections of Trans, Two-spirit, and Gender-Nonconforming peoples of color (Leo 2020: 455).

For Leo, it is not just racism, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy that are interwoven in the colonial project, so too is cisnormativity—the naturalizing of cisgender identities and ways of being over and against trans and gender-nonconforming identities and ways of being. Leo's critique of Lugones central framework is consistent with the core aspiration of her decolonial feminism, but it is a much-needed corrective. One finds similar analyses in Black trans scholarship on the co-constituting historical evolutions of anti-Black racism and anti-trans cissexism, and of the constructions of Blackness and transness themselves (see, e.g., Bey 2022 and Snorton 2017).

Why mention any of this? Because the same colonial project that brought distinctions like white/nonwhite, Spanish/Mexican, colonizer/colonized, and civilized/savage also brought with it (in contemporary parlance) man/woman, gendered/ungendered, heterosexual/queer, and cisgender/transgender in multiple intersectional iterations. The colonial legacies, and more importantly the colonial *logic*, of all of these remain with us in various forms today. With regard to my own positionality as a queer, white trans woman of European descent, the contemporary cisheterosexual matrix bears heavily, if not lethally, on my person and my community. To illustrate how, I conclude this section with a detailed articulation of the cisheterosexual matrix.

From a naturalized, uncritical, cisnormative perspective, there are simply The Two Sexes: men and women, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers. One can, however, break this neat and clean "natural" binary into multiple domains of identity. First, there is assigned sex, which in the dominant framework is usually reduced to male and female according to visible genitalia or chromosomal pairings. Second, there is gender identity—how one understands one's own gender internally, e.g., as a boy or man, as a girl or woman. Third, gender expression is the way in which one expresses one's gender socially in terms of behavior, dress, aesthetic body modification (e.g., tattoos, piercings), voice, and so on. Lastly, there is the orientation of one's romantic and sexual desire. All four of these domains are binary and interlocking, according to the cisheterosexual matrix. One is either a masculine cisgender man who desires women, or one is a feminine cisgender woman who desires men. Anything in between or deviating from these two "natural" tracks, such as an intersex body, an androgynous expression, a transgender identity, or a queer desire are impossible and therefore unnatural, abnormal, unhealthy, and perverse. In the language of the colonial/modern cisgender system: The Two Sexes are the light side, and the further one deviates from these norms, the more violent corrective or eliminatory measures one is subject to.

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

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This cisheterosexual matrix is at the heart of virtually all contemporary anti-trans rhetoric in the WTF. It is only with such starting assumptions that gender-affirming top surgery for a trans-masc person could be seen as "irreversible damage." And only from the perspective of this cisheteronormative position can it make any sense to claim that a trans woman using a public restroom to pee is "really a man" seeking to gain access to a women's space for "perverse sexual purposes." Without the meaning-making conceptual connections naturalized behind this cisheteronormative image of The Two Sexes, virtually every anti-trans talking point is literal nonsense, as rationally ordered as a fever dream or nightmare.[5] And as I have illustrated above, the historical origins of this matrix are in the European colonial project and its ongoing social constructions of race, capital, and cisheteropatriarchy. In what follows, I would like to illuminate a path through this hermeneutical hostility for liberatory trans becoming, and to do so I will step outside of the European philosophical traditions altogether and turn toward a figure who challenged categorial logic and patriarchal familism in his own historical context of Warring States China (575-221 BCE). I turn now to the classical Daoist philosopher, Zhuangzi.

3 A Trans Reading of the *Zhuangzi*

The existential thread of the *Zhuangzi* is a direct challenge to the two dominant moral and political frameworks of its time: Mohism, with its emphasis on categorial logic, and Confucianism, with its emphasis on patriarchal familism. Zhuangzi's philosophical analysis here begins from the subjective experiences of alienation, disenchantment, and dissociation that many of us feel in response to social demands to organize oneself and the world at large into a strict categorial schema and to submit oneself to a patriarchal order of relations and obligations.[6] Add to this dominant sociality an awareness of one's own mortality and it is easy to imagine oneself feeling suffocated, panicked, or despairing. The practice of wandering beyond begins from this crisis-like sense of existential imprisonment. Zhuangzi recognized well the complex and self-replicating systems of epistemic and ethical norms designed to organize and control individuals in the name of harmony. To wander beyond is to step over and outside the boundaries imposed by such social constructions, and the benefit of this practice is the tranquility of being grounded in the fluidity of the present moment. As Steve Coutinho puts it, successfully wandering beyond is to become "a master of transformation, to be at home with the complexity and unwieldiness of things, to have the capacity to thrive without firm foundations" (Coutinho 2004: 72).

Central to wandering beyond is the epistemic cultivation of vastness (*da*). For Zhuangzi, vastness is an "ever-expanding frame of reference beyond the limitations of the human toward to the all-encompassing range of the cosmos" (Coutinho 2004: 93). It is to move beyond the common sensical or everyday perceptions of oneself and the world around one, either by adopting fully the

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

e-ISSN: 2474-1795 • http://scholarworks.iu.edu/iupjournals/index.php/jwp•10.2979/jourworlphil.9.2.09

perspective of another or by reflecting what is spontaneously revealed to one in the moment. In contrast to vastness, there is pettiness (*xiao*). The petty frame of reference is "the parochial attitude of those who seem incapable of judging anything except from their familiar perspectives, and whose conception of the value of life is limited to success as defined by their community" (Coutinho 2004: 94). Given that such petty parochialism is more often than not an unreflective acceptance of the status quo and those with whom such norms invest power, this cultivation of vastness as a sincere and empathic collection of situated perspectives illustrates how deeply invested Zhuangzi is in the plight of ordinary individuals, "especially those who are Othered and marginalized, those pushed beyond the boundaries of social respectability" (Coutinho 2004: 75).

The method by which one cultivates epistemic vastness rests largely on the process of challenging the imposed boundaries of categorial logic, i.e., dichotomous distinctions. The classical Chinese binomial *shifei* refers to "approval and rejection" or "affirmation and denial." The human situation—that of *renqing*, meaning the ecologically interdependent and emotionally colored experience of being human—reflexively gives rise to *shifei* judgments, and these *shifei* judgments must be overcome because, in Zhuangzi's terminology, they are artificial rather than genuine, or in more contemporary philosophical language, they are naturalized social constructs. As Coutinho puts it,

> *shifei* judgment that sharply separates opposites for human convenience is not genuine but artificial. It is a product of human emotions and linguistic constructs: we classify things, like or dislike them, and then make judgments. The natural world, however, does not conform to these crude structures: natural processes slip through the frameworks in which we attempt to contain and control them (Coutinho 2014: 123).

If one is to escape the trap of social conformity and its constitutive social constructs, then one must see past these mystifying concepts, terms, and entailed emotional valences to return to the spontaneous, the genuine, or in a Daoist sense of the term, the natural. Phenomenologically, this means that "when we refrain from imposing fixed perceptions, we become able to engage with them in a manner responsive to shades of difference that escape the crude boundaries of our ordinary linguistic concepts," and existentially, it means that "when we recognize the extent to which our lives are molded by social constructs, we become able to free ourselves from a type of emotional entanglement that disturbs our tranquility" (Coutinho 2014: 101).

I find these aspects of wandering beyond—the cultivation of epistemic vastness and non-dichotomous thinking—to be particularly helpful in navigating trans identity and existence in the face of hermeneutical hostility. The cisheterosexual matrix, with its dichotomous distinction between The Two Sexes as well as its misogynistic, cisheteronormative, and colonial devaluing of all things feminine, trans, queer, and non-European, deploys precisely the sort of value-laden categorial logic that Zhuangzi seeks to challenge. Particularly helpful in the historical context of queer and trans theory is that Zhuangzi's approach does not simply reverse the valuation or swap out one binary for another but rather deconstructs the categories themselves in a move towards a

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

e-ISSN: 2474-1795 • http://scholarworks.iu.edu/iupjournals/index.php/jwp•10.2979/jourworlphil.9.2.09

more liberatory way of thinking. From an existential perspective, Zhuangzi is not suggesting that deep dissatisfaction in the confines of one identity category should lead to adopting the confines of another; the problem was never the particular category ideal one tried to fit, it was the effort to fit idealized external standards in the first place.

What might this mean concretely? I will offer the experience of gender transition as an example here. In trans support groups today, a shockingly consistent topic of conversation is the new member's sense of overwhelm in realizing that they are indeed trans but they do not know how to be a woman, or a man, or nonbinary. The feeling many of us have when we first walk in is that our assigned gender does not fit, but in pursuing scripted or stereotyped ideals of other genders we find that they also do not fit! Those who are further along in their transition offer the sage advice that the newly out trans person focus simply on those little things each day that feel fitting and natural in the moment; basically, the gender category one lands in, if one lands in one, will sort itself out later. Paraphrasing the advice of a close friend when I first came out: Coming out is not so much the adoption of a new identity as it is the letting go of all the "shoulds" that came with the old one. In Zhuangzi's terms, one wanders beyond the confines of one's assigned gender as one deconstructs all of the individual *shifei* boundaries that keep one locked in a petty and parochial frame of reference.

This sense of finding what feels fitting and natural for oneself in a given moment reflects another key conceptual thread in the *Zhuangzi*: genuineness (*zhen*). As mentioned above, Zhuangzi is critical of social constructs because they impose an artificial framework on the natural spontaneity of the cosmos. As Coutinho notes, the classical Chinese conception of genuineness "has a cluster of associations: what is innermost, what is sincere, the stuff of which one is made. The most genuine core of something is its natural makeup; the natural behavior that follows from it is spontaneous, exhibiting the minimum of artifice. Genuineness is authenticity, being 'true to' oneself" (Coutinho 2014: 111).[7] Personal connection to this natural source of spontaneous vitality within each of us is the goal of wandering beyond. When our experience and our actions spring forth from this genuineness, "we reconnect with the natural world, become more distanced from the everyday hopes, fears, and anxieties that plague us, and are more tranquil and accepting of all our circumstances" (Coutinho 2014: 112). The person who has cultivated vastness, practices nondichotomous thinking, lives by wandering beyond, and remains deeply connected to an inner source of genuine and spontaneous vitality will find that they are tranquilly grounded in the here-and-now regardless of precariously shifting and fluid circumstances (Coutinho 2014: 113).

All of that being said, Zhuangzi is not so naïve as to think that the precarity that many of us face is not sometimes dangerous and potentially lethal. His sense of genuineness is therefore neither narcissistic nor is it suicidal. If acting genuinely in a given situation could result in "cutting short one's natural life span," find a way to skirt the danger. Sonya Özbey argues that these scenarios where one's embrace of one's genuine vitality risks cutting short one's life involve a two-fold concern for Zhuangzi. First there is "the reduction of the person to limited roles and functions." Zhuangzi

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

e-ISSN: 2474-1795 • http://scholarworks.iu.edu/iupjournals/index.php/jwp•10.2979/jourworlphil.9.2.09

does not believe violent coercion can or should easily return one to the existential prison one has worked so hard to escape. Second, there is the sort of zealous ideological commitment called for in the dominant discourse of his time, one which required sacrifice and even death for a principle (Özbey 2018: 124). The central logic of wandering beyond and cultivating genuineness is to be ever-becoming, fluidly transforming as circumstances require. It would be inconsistent to impose one's will on a situation that would not be safely receptive. For the Zhuangzian Daoist, when placed in a situation where external circumstances and one's genuine spontaneity are at odds and where the stakes are high, a recurring theme is neither full conformity nor risky rebellion, but rather an ambiguous embrace of unserious fulfillment of obligations.

This ambiguity, according to Özbey, is indicative of an awareness of power structures without the intention of overturning such structures in the here-and-now (Özbey 2024: 270).[8] While taking up resistant space and living tranquilly and genuinely instead of anxiously and artificially is certainly to be preferred, there are times in a trans life where one may opt to occupy a gendered positionality inauthentic to one's true self in order make it through a situation. The "folk ethics" of passing and coming out in trans communities often advocates a similar sort of ambiguity as does Zhuangzi: Being out and proud to change the system is not always possible and is sometimes lethally dangerous. It is up to the individual to determine how they navigate this precarity in a given situation.

4 Accidental Transness and Wandering Beyond Cisheterosexuality

Several places of conceptual resonance exist between Zhuangzi's practice of wandering beyond and Mexistentialism's practice of accidentalizing oneself, and I think that most of those who have at least begun a process of social or medical transition will recognize both in our own lived experiences. I would like to focus on just two. First, the existential movements of accidentalizing and of wandering beyond *feel* different. Zozobra and tranquility hold very different valences, but I see this as a difference of emphasis rather than a qualitative distinction between the two. Initially coming to terms with one's transness can be frightening. One is embarking on a psychosocial journey in which one is leaving the substantial ground on which one was raised, i.e., cisness. The cisworld, including our closest friends and family, will often try to push us back onto this essential ground as we drift away, either out of a misguided attempt to help or an unchecked displaced rage. And as we take each incremental step towards a fuller consciousness of our own accidentality, there is often a lurking fear that the next step will be the one that sends us sliding: away from our families and friends, away from our old selves, away from all that is familiar. To walk this path, then, is to "stay in the middle," to stay in nepantla, "a place of caution, vigilance, and self-awareness" between the two extremes of substantialization and annihilation. To lean into commitment, to take ownership of one's process and the care of one's self is a wonderfully empowering response to this

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

e-ISSN: 2474-1795 • http://scholarworks.iu.edu/iupjournals/index.php/jwp•10.2979/jourworlphil.9.2.09

zozobra of being nepantla. I may not know where I am going or who will be there when I arrive, but I will be here with myself every step of the way. So while Zhuangzi captures the relief of letting go of internalized coloniality, white supremacy, transphobia, and so on, Mexistentialism underscores the other edge of the sword, that stepping into authenticity with an oppressed and stigmatized identity means to be fearfully stepping away from all that is ironically familiar and comfortable.

Second, whereas Zhuangzi advocates for liberated individual genuineness with his suggestion that one wander beyond a categorial schema and a patriarchal order, accidentalizing oneself from a Mexistentialist perspective leads to commitment, to the grounds for solidarity across difference, and ultimately toward liberatory social movements. Zhuangzi does not want to go there, and his historical and political context do not really allow him to go there. In Warring States China, a grassroots movement for popular liberation had better be an armed rebellion aiming at regicide or it will culminate in a senseless massacre of the already disenfranchised. The Mexistentialist framework speaks much more readily to political action. As Sánchez notes, we are *all* accidental. To accidentalize oneself is to see through and live beyond the self-deception that one is substantial or essential in some way. In being accidental, and seeing all others as ultimately accidental, one is well positioned to relate to, to advocate for, to celebrate, and to love others in their unique accidentality. The distinction is not between essential and accidental, but rather between self-deceptive bad faith and honest accidentality.

Commitment, as a natural response to accidentality and zozobra, is of obvious benefit to trans life as well. For trans individuals, being a statistical minority is virtually always the case in our lives, including within our families of origin where others are almost always cisgender. We are not just statistical minorities in any given country, but we do not have shared geographic roots as a community either. Transylvania is, alas, not my homeland. This makes trans individuals more anomalous, generally speaking, in virtually every community we will ever be a part of. As such, part of our survival and flourishing is to seek community across differences, socially and politically. As has become painfully obvious since 2015, trans becoming requires chosen family and coalitional solidarity.

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I would like to close this response by again thanking Sánchez for the invitation to engage his work on accidentality from my own positionality and theoretical background. I have found my own thoughts on identity and becoming in the face of hermeneutical hostility to be greatly enriched through this process. Though brief, I hope the points of creative tension that I have highlighted in the final section will lead to fruitful further discussion, here or elsewhere.

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[1] (URL: https://translegislation.com; last accessed September 23, 2024).

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

e-ISSN: 2474-1795 • http://scholarworks.iu.edu/iupjournals/index.php/jwp•10.2979/jourworlphil.9.2.09

[2] For statistics on trans marginalization, see American Psychiatric Association (2017); Baams et al (2019); Human Rights Campaign (2017); The Trevor Project (2020) and Wittlin et al. (2023).

[3] I follow Brooklyn Leo here in highlighting the cisnormativity of Lugones's colonial/modern gender system, and I realize some feminist philosophers, cis and trans alike, will disagree with my decision to do so. A full critical interpretation of Lugones's later work is beyond the scope of the present essay, but a short note is necessary. In *describing* the colonial/modern gender system, Lugones notes that there is a light side and a dark side. White bourgeois European gender norms are the light side, and pretty much everything else is the dark side. However, when operationalizing this concept, the "system" itself seems to be the light side, while everything on the dark side is that which does not satisfy the standards of the "system." The dark side, then, is that which *lacks* and therefore falls out of the system's standards for intelligibility, falls out of "the human." The relationship between the light side and the dark side is, on my reading, something like the self and the shadow self; the latter is that which has been cast out of the self but yet remains constitutive of the self. A *theory of* the self may include and account for what is cast out into the shadow self, but the self does not *include* these cast-offs. Similarly with the colonial/modern gender system, a *theory of* the colonial/modern gender system may include and account for that which has been deemed a lack and cast out (e.g., trans genders) but yet remains constitutive of the light side of the system, but the system itself does not *include* these genders. In other words, I read the system itself as cisnormative, even though we can discuss trans identities and other (non-)gendered constellations in terms of the system.

[4] As Lugones points out, the status of "woman" or "feminine" frequently did not cross racialized and class boundaries, and moreover that ostensibly white working-class women could be ambiguously racialized in relation to bourgeois white women (Lugones 2007: 208n19). This unaccounted-for complexity in Lugones's colonial/modern cisgender system is part of the ambiguity that gives rise to the differing interpretations of her framework noted above. For example, one might point out that sexual dimorphism is repeatedly identified as part of the light side of the system (e.g., Lugones 2007: 193, 195). And yet, Lugones also refers to "females" excluded from womanhood and femininity, "females without gender" who were "sexually marked," presumably on the dark side of the system (Lugones 2007: 203). Though Lugones references Aristotle in the note here, I read this as similar to Hortense Spillers' discussion of "ungendered Black females" in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" (1987).

[5] Judith Butler provides a timely and compelling analysis of the "phantasm of 'gender'" in anti-trans movements in her most recent work, *Who's Afraid of Gender?* (2024).

[6] While not the cisheterosexual matrix itself, the confluence of these two dominant traditions produces an eerily similar challenge to life outside of the mainstream. Due to the limited space available here in this symposium response essay, I am not able to justify fully the anachronistic claim that Zhuangzi's philosophy is effectively anti-cisheteropatriarchal in nature, suffice it to say that the two main targets for contemporary trans liberatory critique are (1) normatively reproductive and patriarchal familism and (2) categorial logic built on binary distinctions—i.e., the foundations of Confucianism and Mohism, respectively.

[7] I am not interested in adjudicating whether or not "sincerity," "authenticity," or "genuineness" is the more appropriate translation of *zhen*. For my purposes here, no further precision is needed.

[8] For a contrasting interpretation of these episodes in the *Zhuangzi*, see the work of Hans-Georg Moeller and Paul D'Ambrosio, especially *Genuine Pretending: On the Philosophy of the Zhuangzi* (Moeller and D'Ambrosio 2017).

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

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The Universalities of Accidentality: A Response to Readers

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I would like to begin by thanking the symposium participants. Thank you for thinking about Mexican philosophy and the notion of "accidentality" *with* me. I am also grateful to the *Journal of World Philosophies* for the invitation to initiate this conversation.

Before I turn to the interventions, I'd like to highlight their tone: collegial, sympathetic, and when critical, constructive. This is quite an extraordinary thing. The usually abrasive approach of contemporary philosophy is put aside for a project of inclusive thinking, one that seeks participation rather than exclusion. Each of the respondents brings with them their own appreciation of the notion of accidentality and each one enriches it with their own approach and their own lived experience. In what follows, I will focus on what I perceive to be significant moments in the interventions or directly answer questions posed by the participants.

The first intervention is by Robert A. Carleo III (Carleo 2024b). Carleo considers accidentality through a Confucian/ethical and not an ontological lens. For Carleo, the Mexistentialist rejection of substance makes better sense as an ethical rejection because, Carleo writes, "its major premises and motivations center on the practical implications and applications of substantialist thinking" (Carleo 2024b). Generally speaking, I am sympathetic to this approach, and I think Emilio Uranga (the main protagonist in this talk of "accidentality") would also be. There's a thin line in Uranga's "ontology" between being and doing, one which he often crosses, to the extent that he ends his *Analysis of Mexican Being* talking about moral and political "lessons." Of course, there is no explicit demarcation between the two; this demarcation, Carleo reminds us, is clearer in Confucianism, where "Confucian philosophers have long worked with a similar ontology of dynamic instability and advocated a comparable ethic of careful contingency" (Carleo 2024b).

Carleo also prefers the term "contingency" over "accidentality." But this is not arbitrary. Carleo does this in order to highlight the fact that, for Confucian thinkers, the notion of "substance" is central. While for Mexican philosophers, especially Uranga, substance is attached to a Eurocentric, western, and colonial philosophy of domination, the case is not the same for Confucian thinkers. For this reason, Carleo chooses instead to talk about "careful contingency," which mirrors the project of accidentalization that we speak about in our paper. In other words, Carleo is not rejecting the idea of accidentality, but merely reframing it in Confucian terms, adding that Confucians "share fundamental affirmation of the tenets of accidentality: they see us as living in a world of ineluctable change and prioritize the project of carefully navigating that change, extolling the importance of deliberatively 'weighing' and adjudicating values within concrete circumstance and in light of our inherent interdependence" (Carleo 2024b).

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

e-ISSN: 2474-1795 • http://scholarworks.iu.edu/iupjournals/index.php/jwp•10.2979/jourworlphil.9.2.09

While I agree with Carleo's proposal for a "careful contingency" and the dangers (perhaps) of adhering to a philosophy of accidentality, his overall conclusion is problematic. He writes, "[for Mexistentialists] in embracing accidentality one is wary mainly of normative abstractions, while Confucians are careful mainly in exercising compassion and respect" (Carleo 2024b). And here, the fault is my own. Perhaps I missed an opportunity in the lead essay to say that accidentality is a *fact*. Or put another way, the project of accidentalization that Mexistentialists propose is not a project of dealing with "normative abstractions"—that is, in fact, the project of substantialization. The project of accidentalization is a project of dealing with life on its own terms; it is a project of accepting our trauma, our catastrophes, but also our possibilities and our potentialities. In this last sense, it involves caring for one another, participating in community building, and being agents of social and political change. Carleo asks: "it is worth asking: in seeking to 'commit ourselves to the reality of our concreteness, of our historicity, and our finitude,' must we 'forgo the allure of substantialization'"? Given what has been said, the answer is definitely *yes*.

The second intervention, by Gregory E. Doukas, titled "The Concept of Responsibility in Mexican Existentialism" interrogates Uranga's concept of accidentality as I've outlined it in the lead essay with the aim of exposing a notion of responsibility that sprouts from it (Doukas 2024).

Worth mentioning before I respond to the queries posed at the end of the essay is Doukas' impressive familiarity with Uranga's *Analysis of Mexican Being*. I am personally touched by this, especially considering that merely a decade ago Uranga was practically unknown to philosophers north of Guanajuato, Mexico. Encountering Doukas' impressive handling of Uranga vindicates my own decades-long efforts and those of the small circle of academics who have tirelessly written about, translated, and promoted Mexican philosophy *outside of Mexico*.

Moving on to the intervention: Doukas rightly proposes that building a sense of responsibility in his readers was certainly Uranga's purpose in writing that work. The problem is that it is not very clear what this *sense* is—especially when we think of responsibility in light of zozobra, in the presence of Martin Heidegger, in terms of nepantla, and in the context of indigenous thought. Doukas conveniently summarizes his disquiet at the end of the essay. Allow me to answer his questions one by one (there are four):

1 What does it mean to think in zozobra? Is there a zozobra-logic?

Doukas points out that Uranga proposes that zozobra logic is not linear or dialectical. Zozobra, Uranga argues, has its own logic. So what is it? Doukas writes, "I imagine zozobra-logic as weaving arguments that are akin to hammocks where the fabric is flexible but can tolerate heavy tension and support great weight" (Doukas 2024). On Doukas' description, zozobra logic is a *type of logic* as we understand it, made up of structured arguments, with premises and conclusions, and so on, but "weaved" together in a non-linear, non-dialectical way so as *to make sense*. My own position on this is that Uranga does not mean "logic" when he says "logic."

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

e-ISSN: 2474-1795 • http://scholarworks.iu.edu/iupjournals/index.php/jwp•10.2979/jourworlphil.9.2.09

Uranga calls the logic of zozobra, "the logic of oscillation" (Uranga 2021: 167). But I don't think he means that oscillation has a particular logic, but rather, that oscillation has a certain kind of *movement*. A few pages later, he says, "The thread [of life] is not spun by a providential hand, or a logical one, but an adventurous and random hand" (Uranga 2021: 170). Here he separates logic from adventure and randomness. The first belongs to Providence, to God, to Fate, to Destiny; the second, to the mystery of adventure and accident. So there is *no logic* of zozobra in any common sense. What does it mean, then, to "think" in zozobra? It simply means to think what must be thought in the moment, to think according to the necessity of the present, and to formulate those thoughts not in the calculating machines, which are our brains, but in our hearts. We think with *corazonadas*—with "heart logic."

2 Is it possible to extricate Uranga's thought from Martin Heidegger? Does Heidegger's ontologism produce a dogmatic streak in Uranga's attitude toward the sciences?

Can we separate Uranga from Heidegger? Uranga certainly wanted us to do just that. After thinking *with* Heidegger about being and accident, he writes:

> Very well then, we think, no longer with Heidegger but within our own specific ontological perspective, that Being can receive an interpretation that is precisely contrary to that of ancient ontology, that is, to see it and to understand it not as substance but as "accident" precisely because we have placed it in its proper horizon, which is temporality and which we must also interpret, consequently, also as accident (Uranga 2021: 154).

However, such extrication is more difficult than just throwing off the Heidegger-ladder and continuing on your way. In my opinion, Uranga utilizes Heidegger's *Being and Time* for a very specific purpose. It wasn't to gain tenure, to publish a book, to be welcomed into the Heidegger Circle; it was to try to offer a story of Mexican existence that was rooted in its own history, its own routines, and its own projects. Heidegger allows him to do this, and once he gets what he needs from the Heideggerian analytic, he moves on—or claims to move on.

But it wasn't Heidegger that produced a dogmatic streak toward the sciences. Uranga's anti-scientism is a historical artifact, something that Mexican philosophers had been proudly promoting for about fifty years when the anti-positivists of the *Ateneo de la Juventud* first made their move against the scientific positivism of Auguste Comte and the Mexican dictatorship of the late nineteenth century (for more on this, see Zea 1974).

3 Does Uranga enact nepantla by writing ambiguously about the responsibilities of Mexican philosophers and that of the new Mexican people generally?

No, I don't think that Uranga's failure to be clear about responsibility is a performative action. Rather, as far as his texts are concerned, he was very clear. Responsibility entails knowing ourselves and accepting our history and our accidentality (and our nepantla) as constitutive elements of our

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

e-ISSN: 2474-1795 • http://scholarworks.iu.edu/iupjournals/index.php/jwp•10.2979/jourworlphil.9.2.09

being. Autognosis is the goal, and each member of the Mexican community is responsible for achieving it.

4 Do you see Uranga's Mexistentialism as an extension of the tradition of the *tlamatini* or a departure from it?

No and yes. Let me explain. Mexistentialism, as I understand it, was a product of a time of great social and political change in Mexico. Uranga, Jorge Portilla, Luis Villoro, and others worked on what they believed was a transformative project, one that reflected the times. For this reason, they wrote histories, philosophical discourses and analysis. But the principal goal of Mexistentialism was to paint a picture of the Mexican person that reflected both an immediate crisis and a *professional* handle of the history of philosophy; so in this sense, the answer is no. At the same time, the picture painted by Mexistentialism was meant to be both Mexican and tend always toward other spaces, other times, and other peoples; and in this sense, the answer is yes. Importantly, however, while they articulated wise and illuminating things, they themselves were not "wise" in the sense that we consider the *tlamatini* "wise." The personal histories of most of those involved in the Mexistentialist project would support my claim—so again, no. Of course, perhaps I am just holding a very high standard for what it means to be *tlamatini*, one that I don't think most contemporary philosophers can achieve. However, I do think that we can make an argument that portrays Uranga's Mexistentialism as an extension of the *tlamatini* simply because the wisdom inherent in it is profound, informed by the circumstance, and potentially transformative—which, in the final analysis, means that, yes, Uranga's Mexistentialism can be seen an extension of the *tradition* of the *tlamatini*.

The third, and final intervention, is "The Accidental Trans Woman" by Imogen M. Sullivan (Sullivan 2024). This is a beautifully crafted phenomenological exploration into accidentality, trans existence, and Daoism.

Mexican existentialists understood existentialism as justifying their own assumptions about what life was truly about. Being alive was a matter of luck, life itself was a gamble, living was precarious, our shared existence was mired in catastrophe, violence, and death. Nothing was guaranteed. Sullivan tells us that this is similar to trans existence, where trans people must live with the constant threat of their own erasure at the hands of the world. Both experiences make way for a thinking of accidentality as a category of existence.

While Sullivan articulates their position via Zhuangzi's Daoism, they do find value in the Mexistentialist approach. I'll let the reader enter Sullivan's text on their own, as in it one finds the hardest ground, a foundation on which to appreciate the trans experience, if one has never. In my response, I will focus on what Sullivan says about the intersection of "Zhuangzi's practice of wandering beyond and Mexistentialism's practice of accidentalizing oneself" (Sullivan 2024). "Wandering beyond" involves stepping outside the boundaries imposed by social constructs and categorial logic. It is a practice of moving beyond the limitations of human perspectives to adopt a

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

e-ISSN: 2474-1795 • http://scholarworks.iu.edu/iupjournals/index.php/jwp•10.2979/jourworlphil.9.2.09

more expansive, cosmic frame of reference. This approach challenges dichotomous distinctions and patriarchal orders, aiming to cultivate a sense of tranquility and genuineness by being grounded in the fluidity of the present moment. It encourages individuals to engage with the world in a manner that is responsive to its complexity and unwieldiness, rather than being confined by rigid social norms and expectations. In this sense, wondering beyond resembles the project of accidentalization Uranga describes. This, too, involves rejecting or refusing idealism and the demands of colonial expectations. It, too, encourages individuals to engage with the world as it gives itself in its own givenness, with its own urgencies and its own asks.

Like Sullivan, I also see both projects converging in interesting ways. This is how Sullivan puts it:

> embarking on a psychosocial journey in which one is leaving the substantial ground on which one was raised, i.e., cisness. The cisworld, including our closest friends and family, will often try to push us back onto this essential ground as we drift away, either out of a misguided attempt to help or an unchecked displaced rage. And as we take each incremental step towards a fuller consciousness of our own accidentality, there is often a lurking fear that the next step will be the one that sends us sliding: away from our families and friends, away from our old selves, away from all that is familiar. To walk this path, then, is to 'stay in the middle,' to stay in nepantla […] to lean into commitment, to take ownership of one's process and the care of one's self is a wonderfully empowering response to this zozobra of being nepantla. I may not know where I am going or who will be there when I arrive, but I will be here with myself every step of the way. So while Zhuangzi captures the relief of letting go of internalized coloniality, white supremacy, transphobia, and so on, Mexistentialism underscores the other edge of the sword, that stepping into authenticity with an oppressed and stigmatized identity means to be fearfully stepping away from all that is ironically familiar and comfortable (Sullivan 2024).

The Daoist approach to the challenges of existence exacerbated by social pressures, prejudices, and so on, thus mirrors what Mexistentialism recommends. And the trans experience can be articulated through both frameworks, although such articulation is reserved only for someone who has gone—or is going—through that experience.

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

e-ISSN: 2474-1795 • http://scholarworks.iu.edu/iupjournals/index.php/jwp•10.2979/jourworlphil.9.2.09

Conclusion

In conclusion, the project of accidentalization is meant to replace a project of substantialization. In the latter, the goal is to get as close to the ideal of (European) humanity as is *humanly* possible. The goal of the project of accidentalization is to recognize, accept, and struggle with who one is, with one's world, and with those possibilities that are original to our circumstance and ourselves as persons embedded in that circumstance. This means understanding that things may not work out, that we may lose ourselves in the struggle, that we may not end up where we thought we would when we set out on our human journeys. It means knowing, once and for all, that expectations are not duties, but wishes, predictions that may have no standing with *our* reality. The project of accidentalization, that is, is not a project of salvation, but of suffering, of struggle, of becoming and overcoming. And that's not as bad as it sounds.

Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

e-ISSN: 2474-1795 • http://scholarworks.iu.edu/iupjournals/index.php/jwp•10.2979/jourworlphil.9.2.09

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Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

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Journal of World Philosophies 9 (Winter 2024): 125-174.

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