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Reviewed by James Pearson

Review: *Race, Gender, and the History of Early Analytic Philosophy*, by Matt LaVine

James Pearson

Academics who write about sociopolitical issues face numerous pitfalls. To Matt LaVine's credit, in the impassioned preface to his book on the history of analytic philosophy and the philosophy of race and gender, he questions his own right, as a cisgender white male, to write for and about those who have been oppressed and marginalized. His initial justification is emblazoned across the book's cover: *Silence is Complicity,* as graffitied upon a stretch of the West Bank wall separating Jerusalem from Palestine. In LaVine's view, "far too many of the people within analytic philosophy do all they can to ignore the real world at all—let alone social justice" (xiii). Beyond this, LaVine acknowledges his lack of formal training in critical theories of race and gender—and, indeed, the history of analytic philosophy—and so commits to amplifying and centering the work of women and people of color in his investigations. Such humility is admirable, but results in LaVine suppressing rather than highlighting his own critical insights. In this review, in an attempt to do justice to both him and his intentions, I'll first summarize the structure and content of his book (likewise acknowledging the work of those who he is at pains to credit), then extract and critique what I see as three of LaVine's main novel contributions, and finally offer some overall critical remarks.

LaVine opens his introduction by distinguishing analytic philosophy as a method "focusing on philosophy of language and logic" and as a movement "defined by lines of direct influence emanating out from thinkers like Moore, Russell, and Wittgenstein" (xxiii). In both senses, he thinks, analytic philosophy is fruitfully brought together with critical theories of race and gender. The book is structured to establish this central argument. LaVine begins with the method of analytic philosophy and dedicates two chapters—one on the philosophy of language, the other on logic—to exploring its sociopolitical applications. In chapter one, he adjudicates the occasionally heated debate regarding the credit Saul Kripke owed, yet never paid, Ruth Barcan Marcus in developing the causal theory of reference. Both champions of Kripke (Scott Soames and John Burgess) and Marcus (Quentin Smith), LaVine argues, wrongly centered Kripke rather than Marcus in their assessments. By using Quill Kukla's, (writing as Rebecca Kukla) concept of discursive injustice—cases in which a person is prevented from performing certain illocutionary acts as a result of their audience failing to give them the necessary uptake—LaVine instead proposes that the reason Marcus was "under-cited, under-taught, under-anthologized, and underappreciated" is that the entire discipline of philosophy has been discursively unjust towards women, whose expert judgments and arguments were only perceived as suggestions due to their sex (19).

In chapter two, LaVine traces a historical through line between A. N. Prior, Marcus, and John Corcoran to argue that logic and ethics are intertwined. Once Prior had formally disproven "Hume's Guillotine" (that only factual, and not value-laden, statements could be deduced from exclusively factual statements), Marcus's distinction between moral inconsistencies (sets of principles for which there is no possible world in which they may all be obeyed) and moral dilemmas (sets of principles that cannot all be obeyed in the actual world) sets the stage for logicians to dedicate themselves to reasoning *through* dilemmas, for such dilemmas are "no longer thought of as illustrating a logical problem with the principles themselves" (46). Inspired by Corcoran's slogan that employing logic is to "cultivate objectivity" as an ethical virtue, LaVine urges closer attention be paid to abductive and inductive logics that can, for instance, reveal the moral abhorrence of such hasty generalizations as "19

Muslims perpetrated the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, [therefore] Muslims are terrorists" (49). Against the backdrop of the taxonomy of objectivity developed by Sally Haslanger, he closes by deflating objections that logic is problematically raced or gendered, arguing that Corcoran's conception of logic as part of an "essentially incompletable" goal of cultivating objectivity correctly situates it as an aspiration compatible with fallibility and compassion (54).

LaVine next turns to the movement of analytic philosophy. He breaks it into five periods (1898-1914, 1914-1926, 1926-1940, 1940-1960, 1960-1970) and, working chronologically, dedicates one chapter to each. In chapter three, he uses Charles Mills's work to critique G. E. Moore's common sense philosophy as unduly conservative. Making appeals to that which a privileged individual finds intuitive risks perpetuating unjust social hierarchies and distorting the urgency of different philosophical problems. LaVine finds a preferable revisionary alternative in Susan Stebbing's call to adopt a critical attitude towards common sense, and endorses contemporary work in this vein by Haslanger, Liam Kofi Bright, and Catarina Dutilh Novaes. Chapter four presents Bright's interpretation of the logical positivists as voluntary racial eliminativists (holding racial taxonomies to be empirically meaningful, but warranting rejection given the deleterious effects of their use) and offers a reading of both the positivists and Wittgenstein as subscribing to "metaphysics as disguised ethics" (96). In chapter five, the sociopolitical ambitions of the Vienna Circle are assessed. LaVine urges that Sarah Richardson's feminist critique of Thomas Uebel's attribution of a political philosophy to the Left Wing of the Vienna Circle (comprising Rudolf Carnap, Otto Neurath, Hans Hahn, and Philipp Frank) be understood as offering historiographical constraints, including that historians "must not appropriate, marginalize, mainstream, or moderate feminist epistemology and philosophy of science (118). Nonetheless, he finds in the Vienna Circle seeds of a useful "political theory of analyticity" that he believes can be gainfully employed by contemporary philosophers of race and gender seeking "public methods of dispute resolution" (134). Chapter six turns to the Black Lives Matter movement, and details how Paul Grice's work can be used to explain why the retort "All Lives Matter" is both objectionable and inappropriate. Chapter seven argues that Mills and Haslanger are "more Quinean than Quine" in their socialization of naturalized epistemology (174). In his concluding chapter, LaVine attempts to bring various strands of his work together to argue for a social constructionist view of race, and lays out future avenues of research.

The most obvious of LaVine's novel contributions in this book are the range of voices he engages to tell his history. Beyond those already mentioned, and keen to avoid Eurocentrism, figures such as John Mohawk, Peter K. J. Park, Ibn al-Haytham, and Izydora Dąmbska are referenced or discussed. In addition, and perhaps to avoid the cultural isolation he detects among analytic philosophers, LaVine also uses examples from contemporary musicians and comedians such as The Sorority, Samantha Bee, Michael Che, and Trevor Noah. More striking still, however, is LaVine's approach to historiography. He shares with Scott Soames the view that "the best way to tell a history of analytic philosophy, which allows you to get the most combined historical accuracy and theoretical insight, is with the culminating philosopher as protagonist" (xxxiv, n1). For Soames this protagonist is Kripke, who in Soames's hands dissolved various problems that had occupied his predecessors by showing how to extricate the analytic, the a priori, and the necessary. For LaVine, who adds "political expediency" to his guiding values, the protagonists are instead "Bright, Dutilh Novaes, Haslanger, and Mills" (xxiv, n1). It is these trailblazing contemporary thinkers, LaVine believes, who show how analytic philosophy may be made relevant to the urgent sociopolitical concerns of our current moment. "The proper inheritors of the tradition of Russell, Moore, Carnap, Neurath, Stebbing, Austin, and Marcus," he writes, "are folks like Liam

Kofi Bright, Catarina Dutilh Novaes, Sally Haslanger, [Quill] Kukla, Charles Mills, Audrey Yap, Naomi Zack, and the like" (195).

It is not wholly clear to me how LaVine wishes such historical claims to be understood. It is odd to jump from the 1970s to the 2010s to find the protagonists of one's history. What of late analytic philosophers, the conceptual turn, or the rise of metaphysics? In addition, even if some—indeed, many—thinkers in the early analytic tradition would have been open to the sociopolitically engaged philosophy of LaVine's protagonists, it is difficult to see their principal concerns as fundamentally recast by that philosophy, in contrast to Soames's deployment of Kripke's work on modality. I would instead register LaVine's heroes as participating in a recent *turn* in the history of philosophy, part of the 21st century rise in applied philosophy.

More generally, against both Soames and LaVine, I think that finding *protagonists* to tell the history of a philosophical movement—culminating figures who correctly understood matters in contrast to the failures of earlier thinkers—tips the scales of historiography too far against the value of historical accuracy. This does not seem to trouble LaVine, however, who, for instance, acknowledges in his chapter on Wittgenstein that he "will not be concerned with putting things the way Wittgenstein would have liked (107, n1). Or to take another example, the sort of beliefs that Moore thought common sense, such as the belief that he had a body or that he had had many beliefs in his life, are value-neutral (if anything is), and hence not clearly subject to the implicit biases LaVine identifies. Yet LaVine writes that his "primary concern is with how Moore has actually been read and how people actually think of intuitions in the field," so that the fact that "Moore would disagree with the way in which his own work has been taken" is of secondary importance (83, n9). So maybe LaVine should be understood as offering a history of the *reception* of analytic philosophy, one that he intends to function as a call for more of the sociopolitically-informed work he favors. This interpretation certainly comports with some of his more passionate rhetoric, as well as his "final plea" that his readers "simply. . . make your work more focused on bettering the world" (205).

A second of LaVine's contributions is his sketch of "metaphysics as disguised ethics." According to LaVine, both traditional and resolute readings of Wittgenstein's use of "nonsense" in the *Tractatus* complicate the picture of that work being opposed to ethics. If, with the traditional reading, Wittgenstein believed that some nonsense is illuminating, LaVine points out that it is possible to hold that ethical statements are illuminating nonsense. If, with the resolute reading, Wittgenstein believed that nonsense was simply nonsense, there remains his remark at 6.54 that "[m]y propositions serve as elucidations in this way: anyone who understands *me* finally recognizes *them* as nonsensical" (quoted at 96), which LaVine thinks leaves open that Wittgenstein's goal was to convey the importance of ethical imagination. On either interpretation, LaVine thinks we need an explanation for why Wittgenstein did not write more about ethics. LaVine's answer is that, in fact, Wittgenstein *did:* his metaphysics is disguised ethics, in the sense that he believed "we can express, convey, or encourage ethical outlooks without actually uttering sentences containing any terms traditionally taken to be necessary for an ethical claim" (97). Referencing recent work by Severin Schroeder, LaVine argues that Wittgenstein was a "moral solipsist" who believed ethics was a matter of "being answerable only to one's true self" (98). The *Tractatus* elliptically supports this position by undercutting the possibility of impersonal ethical facts, diverting the reader's "ethical attention from an external world to their internal selves" (98).

LaVine notes that his interpretation coheres with various tantalizing fragments, such as Wittgenstein's remark to Ludwig von Ficker that the point of the *Tractatus* was ethical, and that his family referred to the book as "Uncle Ludwig's little book on ethics." For all that, the interpretation is undeveloped as it

stands. Not only does subscribing to moral solipsism represent just one among many reasons why one might refrain from writing about ethics, the scant mention made of ethics in the *Tractatus* means it could be claimed to support any number of positions. In addition, merely because the traditional and resolute readings both leave open the possibility of an ethical view is not to say that the *Tractatus* develops or presents one. LaVine also attributes "metaphysics as disguised ethics" to the logical positivists on the grounds that Carnap's *Syntax* project allowed for the pragmatic rejection of linguistic frameworks judged pernicious, such as those involving racial classification. Yet LaVine misses the significance of noncognitivism in, for instance, describing such a pragmatic rejection as a "justification" (102).

The third contribution I shall highlight is LaVine's "political theory of analyticity." LaVine opposes philosophical appeals to intuition on the grounds that what one finds intuitive may only reflect one's implicit biases. He also argues that such appeals are objectionably ableist, since part of the treatment for those of us with obsessive-compulsive disorder is learning *not* to give weight to our intuitions: "encouraging people to think that they must rely on such automatic cognitions to be a good philosopher. . . would mean that someone with a mental health issue like obsessive-compulsive disorder. . . would likely need to remove themselves from philosophy if they were to promote their mental health" (73). In addition, LaVine believes that allowing the "intuition of essences" to play an explanatory role in our grasp of metaphysical facts lends itself to an objectionable "*epistemic hierarchy*—a belief that some are inherently better knowers than others" (130). In this light, he reads the logical positivists' opposition to the synthetic a priori as being partly motivated by similar concerns, for they understood that allowing "intuition or pure reason as a source of knowledge or justified belief. . . would disrupt public methods of dispute resolution, an important component of public reason" (134). Yet the analytic theory of necessity they developed to eliminate the role of intuition in philosophy cannot account for the necessary a posteriori and contingent a priori later identified by Kripke. What is needed, LaVine concludes, is a new "political theory of analyticity" that grounds both a priori knowledge and knowledge of necessity in something other than intuition.

Once we follow Paul Boghossian in distinguishing sentences that are metaphysically analytic (true in virtue of their meaning) from those that are epistemically analytic (justifiably held true once their meaning is grasped), LaVine argues, there is room for us to hold that all necessary truths are expressed by sentences that are epistemically analytic. Indeed, he continues, we may follow Gillian Russell's suggestion that we move to the "weaker claim. . . that all necessary truths have their modal status as a result of our linguistic conventions" (quoted on 137). The resulting view is "political" because it can "serve critical race theoretic alternative epistemologies and the feminist fight against assumed objectivity" (138), grounding an epistemically egalitarian and intuition-free public platform upon which to build one's arguments. Later, LaVine adds that his theory would entail that "essence[s] are the result of conventions," and so "when somebody tries to discuss essences of genders, races, or classes as built into the fabric of the universe and which need to be abided, we have every reason to deny them out of hand" (184). These are ambitious claims, but, sadly, LaVine only has space to sketch them here; readers must await future work to see them worked out in detail.

Beyond these main contributions readers will find several thought-provoking claims in LaVine's book, such as that Stebbing may be read as anticipating John Rawls's difference principle (128). But perhaps my largest concern about the book as a whole is that its target audience is unclear. Readers of this journal might be thought squarely in its sights, and yet the interpretation of historical figures that LaVine presents as "standard readings" have not been accepted by specialists for some time. (What historian of analytic philosophy needs to be taught that

the logical positivists were not apolitical? Or that the nature of Wittgenstein's philosophical achievement in the *Tractatus* is not straightforward?) Another natural audience for this book might be thought scholars of race and gender. And yet here again, it seems to me that LaVine argues at length for positions that have already been fought over and won. Social constructivism is the predominant view in the philosophy of race, for instance, so that LaVine's concluding chapter defending it from various alternatives seems otiose. Or again, that the discipline of philosophy (like most social institutions) has been unjust towards women and people of color is the *starting* point for much contemporary work on race and gender, rather than something that needs to be revealed as the explanation for inequitable citation data.

Perhaps, then, the text might best serve as an introduction for students dipping their toes into both the history of analytic philosophy and the philosophy of race and gender for the first time. It is certainly a clearly structured and very accessibly written book. In addition, readers of this journal who wish to find ways of bringing sociopolitical issues into their own history of analytic philosophy classrooms may be inspired by some of LaVine's connections. In my recent philosophy of language classes, for instance, I have tasked students with applying the Gricean framework to Black Lives Matter/All Lives Matter rhetoric, and LaVine's chapter serves as a useful example for how this can be done.

LaVine's declared purpose is to demonstrate that

1. there is much to be gained by bringing together inquiry into critical theories of race and gender, on the one hand, and analytic philosophy, on the other

2. there is more precedent for this type of work in the history of early analytic philosophy than is traditionally recognized (193).

I certainly agree that the contemporary analytic philosophers LaVine names as the protagonists of his history are contributing much to the philosophy of race and gender, and generally applaud the increased sociopolitical engagement of 21st century philosophy. Yet I am less certain that attention to the philosophy of race and gender will teach us about the history of 20th century analytic philosophy, even though I would agree with LaVine that anyone who thinks that sociopolitical concerns were wholly absent from the philosophers who worked in that period is mistaken.

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