CHAPTER 18

Teaching Gloria Anzaldúa as an American Philosopher

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As Gloria Anzaldúa was writing *Borderlands/La frontera* in the 1980s, I was growing up in rural South Texas as a monolingual English speaker of mixed "white" heritages (German, English, Scottish Irish, and Ukrainian Jewish). As the child of middle-class professionals who worked all day, I was raised during after-school hours by my nana, a Mexican American woman who spoke Spanish and sometimes English with her own children but only English with me and my brother. I didn't read *Borderlands/La frontera* until graduate school while finishing a dissertation on classical U.S.-American pragmatism and Latin American philosophy of liberation. Anzaldúa pierced my heart by insightfully criticizing the unspoken background assumptions of the place and culture I had grown up in, and she blew my mind by developing a liberatory philosophical consciousness that I am still working to understand, embody, and teach. In 2010, I was hired by the University of Texas-Pan American (UTPA)—recently reconstituted to form part of the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV)—to teach on the same campus where Anzaldúa earned her BA in 1969 when it was called Pan American University. Since *Borderlands/La frontera* profoundly changed the way I saw myself, others, the world, and philosophy, and since it grew out of Anzaldúa's experiences in the Rio Grande Valley where almost all my students grow up, I have had great success teaching it as a central text in Introduction to Philosophy, Critical Thinking, Introduction to Latin American Philosophy, Mexican/Mexican-American Philosophy, and American Philosophy.

The roots of this chapter, however, lie in failure. Many of my first students at Anzaldúa's alma mater read *Borderlands/La frontera* and concluded that Anzaldúa was *not* a philosopher! Hostile comments suggested that Anzaldúa's intimately personal and poetic ways of writing were not philosophical. In response, I created "American Philosophy and Self-Culture" using backwards course design and taught variations of it in 2013, 2016, and 2018. Students spend nearly a month exploring Anzaldúa's works but only after reading three centuries of U.S.-American philosophers who wrote in deeply personal and literary ways about self-transformation, community building, and world changing. In the sections that follow I (1) analyze why my first students rejected Anzaldúa as a philosopher in terms of the discipline's parochialism, (2) present Anzaldúa's broader understanding of herself as a philosopher, (3) summarize my reconstructed Anzaldúa-inspired American Philosophy course and outline some assignments, (4) discuss how my students respond to *Borderlands/La frontera* when we read it through the lens of self-culture, and (5) describe an attempt to shape the subdiscipline of American philosophy by teaching Anzaldúa to specialists at the 2017 Summer Institute in American Philosophy.[1]

The Problem: Philosophy Typically Refuses to Recognize Anzaldúa as a Philosopher

In 2011 I taught my first upper-division undergraduate course in American philosophy. Here's part of my course description:

> The question *What does **philosophy** look like in America?* is inextricably linked to the question *Which **Americans** count in philosophy?* Part I of our course will focus on canonical U.S.-American pragmatists. Part II will consider critical developments of and radical challenges to classical pragmatism from Native American, African American, feminist, and Mexican American perspectives.

This first iteration of the course began with classical pragmatist philosophers like Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey to set up our subsequent examinations of Native American philosophers like Laura Cornelius Kellogg, Viola Cordova, and Ward Churchill; African American philosophers like David Walker, W. E. B. DuBois, and Martin Luther King Jr.; and feminist philosophers like Margaret Fuller and Jane Addams. Students never questioned whether any of them were "real philosophers" until we started reading Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La frontera*. One

student said that she just couldn't understand why we were reading *literature* in a philosophy class. Another student surprised us all by singing the *Sesame Street* song: "One of these things is not like the others. One of these things just doesn't belong..." As most students continued stripping the label of *philosophy* from *Borderlands/La frontera*, a few tried defending Anzaldúa as a philosopher. I tried to steer the discussion in a productive direction by asking the two sides that were forming to articulate their criteria for calling something philosophy, but the civility of our discussion broke down. People went from talking over one another to yelling at each other, so I had to stop the class. This was the only time in roughly fifteen years of teaching that I have ever had to stop a class. To my surprise, the question "Who is American?" turned out to be far less polarizing than "Who is a philosopher?" when it came to Anzaldúa's identity.

Since roughly 90 percent of UTRGV students are Hispanic (most self-identify as Mexican American), they don't challenge Anzaldúa's Americanness because they reasonably believe themselves to be American, even if leaving the Rio Grande Valley often involves being perceived as aliens and foreigners, just as Anzaldúa suggested: "el Chicano... anda como un ladrón en su propia casa" (Anzaldúa [1987] 2012, 85). I have slowly come to understand my teaching role in terms of helping students feel *en casa* at UTRGV—for example, by encouraging rather than taming their wild tongues during class discussions and by accepting all written work in English, Spanish, or both—and designing courses that do not alienate Anzaldúa or my students from philosophy. In hindsight, it is less surprising that my first upper-division students refused to recognize Anzaldúa as a philosopher. As philosophy minors and majors, they brought more significant prejudgments about what counts as philosophy and who counts as a philosopher. In contrast, most general education students are relatively open minded since it is their first philosophy class.

Professional philosophers generally don't know Anzaldúa or recognize her as a philosopher even though she self-identified as one.[2] And in another bizarre twist, American philosophy is typically ignored in the United States, where most departments are built around what is called analytic philosophy as opposed to continental philosophy.[3] In fact, the overwhelming majority of philosophy programs in the United States do not offer any courses in American philosophy. In sum, two intertwined challenges present themselves when teaching Anzaldúa as an American philosopher: (1) American philosophy is largely unknown or ignored, even by most professional philosophers in the United States, and (2) Anzaldúa is unknown or dismissed by most philosophers since she did not earn a graduate degree in philosophy and her language and style do not fit the discipline's dominant paradigms.

Anzaldúa's Response: Challenge Disciplinary Exclusions by Philosophizing

Anzaldúa perceptively diagnosed many of the patterns of exclusion that worked (and continue to work) against her being seen as a "true American" or "true philosopher." Few academics today would dispute the Americanness of Anzaldúa, but the general tendency is still to read her as a Chicana feminist, queer theorist, poet, new age spiritualist, and so forth *rather than* as a philosopher, whereas she thought of herself as all these things *and* as a philosopher. Anzaldúa used the same both-and logic to think about her Americanness in a radically inclusive trans-American way: by recognizing the Mexican, Indigenous, *and* United Statesian strains and affinities of her identity as American. In short, Anzaldúa identified herself as an American and as a philosopher, but, as far as I know, never in the same breath as an American philosopher.[4]

Anzaldúa described herself like this near the end of her life: "ShortestbioGEA: Feministvisionaryspiritualactivist poet-*philosopher* fiction writer" (Anzaldúa 2009, 3; italics added). This is consistent with the obituary she had imagined for herself in 1994: "Here lies G.E.A. a great thinker, *philosopher*, writer and humanitarian who worked for understanding and peace between diverse peoples and groups. Era buena gente."[5] In fact, Anzaldúa's self-identification as a philosopher goes at least as far back as adolescence, when she identified philosophy and psychology as her favorite subjects (236). The fact that she often discussed philosophy in the same breath as her vocation as a writer also demonstrates its centrality: "The more knowledge I have about the world, nature, psychology, philosophy, and all the different systems and belief systems of people, the better I can know myself and other people, and the better I can write" (92). Anzaldúa's conception of philosophy resonates with a much longer history of Western philosophy, from Socrates's understanding of philosophy as a lifelong quest for self-knowledge to *la filosofía de lo mexicano*, an important attempt by Mexicans to understand themselves and their circumstances during a golden age of Mexican philosophy (1910–1960).[6] Like these better-recognized philosophical forebearers, Anzaldúa asked herself "what makes a philosopher?" in one of her notebooks and answered "scholarly self-study."[7]

At the same time Anzaldúa understood the powerful historical and cultural resistance to recognizing people like her as philosophers. In "On the Process of Writing *Borderlands/La frontera*," she explained,

> The whole time I've been in school the producers of knowledge have been middle- and upper-class white people.... They produce the unconscious values, views, and

assumptions about reality, about culture, about everything. . . . I wanted to produce artworks, to produce knowledge, but I was from a campesina-working class, a woman from a racial minority who's a lesbian. . . . And I wanted to do it my way, using my approach, my language . . . yet also use the knowledges and histories of the white cultures, of other ethnic cultures. I wanted to be able to deal with certain theories, *to be able to philosophize*. (Anzaldúa 2009, 188–89; italics added)

With this quote and my initial failure to convince my American philosophy students that Anzaldúa was a philosopher in mind, I have designed subsequent courses to provide a foundation for interpreting Anzaldúa as philosophizing in her own way using her own languages while drawing on diverse scholarly, popular, and personal sources, which is also precisely what I want my students to do.

In *Borderlands/La frontera*, Anzaldúa's reconceptualization of American identity and philosophy takes places on two major fronts: (1) Mexican and (2) Indigenous. In other words, two of the ways in which she is an American philosopher is by being a Mexican (American) philosopher and by being an Indigenous (Mesoamerican) philosopher. For instance, she frames the opening of "Chapter 7: *La conciencia de la mestiza*" using José Vasconcelos and weaves together "Chapter 6: *Tlilli, Tlapalli*" using an Aztec understanding of wisdom loving made manifest in art, shamanism, and writing.

Since there is no debate about whether to consider Vasconcelos a Mexican philosopher, I will briefly focus on Anzaldúa's engagement with Aztec philosophy. Her footnotes indicate that part of her interpretative framework came from Miguel León-Portilla, whose career began with a dissertation titled "La filosofía náhuatl estudiada en sus fuentes," that is, a presentation of Aztec thought and culture *as philosophy*.[8] So after my students read Anzaldúa, we read León-Portilla's twenty-one-part description of the *tlamatini*, or Aztec philosopher, as reported to Bernardino de Sahagún in the sixteenth century by elderly Native informants from Tepepulco and Tlateloco. Here is almost half of the list with Anzaldúa's name and pronouns substituted for *tlamatini* (literally, "one who knows things," but traditionally translated as "the wise man" or "the philosopher"):

4. Anzaldúa herself is writing and wisdom.
7. Anzaldúa is careful (like a physician) and preserves tradition.
8. Anzaldúa is the handed-down wisdom; she teaches it; she follows the path of truth.
10. Anzaldúa makes wise the countenances of others; to them she gives a face (a personality); she leads them to develop it.
11. She opens their ears; she enlightens them.
16. She applies her light to the world.
19. Everyone is comforted by her, corrected, taught.
20. Thanks to her people humanize their will and receive a strict education.
21. She comforts the heart, she comforts the people, she helps, gives remedies, heals everyone. (León-Portilla 1963, 10–11)

Students are consistently blown away by how well these Nahuatl descriptions of the *tlamatini* describe Anzaldúa, her works, and their profoundly transformational impact on so many of us.[9]

My Response: Teaching Anzaldúa as an American Philosopher

"American Philosophy and Self-Culture" broadens who and what counts in and as philosophy in the United States, so that Anzaldúa appears not just as a "border thinker" (Mignolo 2000), but as an American *philosopher*. The course presents Anzaldúa as the capstone to a living tradition of three centuries of U.S.-American philosophers of self-culture, community building, and world changing that includes (among others) Benjamin Franklin, Frederick Douglass, Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, and Henry Bugbee.[10] In addition to *Borderlands/La frontera*, we read from *This Bridge Called My Back*, *Making Face, Making Soul = Haciendo Caras*, and *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro*. Anzaldúa-inspired assignments include regular journal writing and existential experiments, since all of the philosophers we read linked the practices of reading, living experimentally, and journaling to their practices of self-cultivation. Students also design and undertake a final creative project while studying Anzaldúa's creative process. In this section, I discuss (1) the basic idea of self-culture in American philosophy, (2) some classical figures whose work makes it possible to read Anzaldúa in this tradition, and (3) some Anzaldúa-inspired pedagogical strategies and assignments.

The course's overarching aim is to orchestrate a transformative encounter with a living conception of self-culture,[11] especially as it manifests in the life, work, and legacy of Gloria Anzaldúa. A fundamental insight that Anzaldúa came to articulate and embody was that women of color could think for themselves, speak for themselves, care for themselves or "cultivate [their] colored skins," and create new forms and communal forums for self-expression (Anzaldúa and Moraga 1983). These are

all forms of *self-culture*, but as far as I know, Anzaldúa never used this exact term, whose popularity peaked in the nineteenth-century United States as an attempt to translate the German *Bildung* tradition, which presented philosophy and education as ongoing processes of personal and cultural growth (Eldridge 2007). But the idea and practice of self-culture goes back to the even older U.S.-American aims of "self-improvement" and "education," which took place not only in schools and universities but in public lectures, lyceums, and living rooms (Howe 2009). William Ellery Channing, who gave the most popular account of self-culture in a series of lectures addressed to working-class men in 1838, defined it as "the care which every man owes to himself, to the unfolding and perfecting of his nature" (Channing 1838, 11). Rooted in the organic metaphor of agricultural cultivation, Channing conceptualized self-culture as the intentional practice of self-growth across various fields: moral, spiritual, intellectual, social, practical, aesthetic, and communicative. Rejecting the dominant narrative concerning the working class that stripped them of agency while measuring their worth in terms of the work they do for others,[12] Channing said that we should all "fasten on [self-]culture as our Great End" (32).

A century and a half later, against the dominant narratives that saw Mexican Americans as workers for white people and Mexican American women as subservient to men, Anzaldúa wrote a letter to her fellow third world women writers. "Speaking in Tongues" articulated her reasons for writing, which she understood as "the quest for the self" and the practice of "making soul." It is one of the many places that Anzaldúa describes and prescribes self-culture as the opposite of submitting to the dominant culture's demands that oppressed persons should remain in the lesser place they have been unjustly assigned. If philosophy courses are increasingly assumed to be an unnecessary cultural-luxury good even at elite private colleges and universities where white middle- and upper-class students still predominate, they are often presumed by Texas politicians and educational bureaucrats to be even less crucial for UTRGV students. Through a deficit lens, Mexican American language and culture are not assets that can be leveraged against the real challenges of coming from low-income families and being first-generation college students. The resulting emphasis tends to be on graduating students as quickly as possible and training them to enter the workforce *without* fostering their critical capacities to transform it. Anzaldúa herself did not develop her radical conceptions of self- and world transformation *because* of her education at Pan American University but rather *in spite* of it: "I, for one, became adept at, and majored in, English to spite, to show up, the arrogant racist teachers" (Anzaldúa and Moraga 1983, 165). She called for and practiced the development of more bodily forms of living, writing, and philosophizing grounded

in the personal experiences of *los atrevesados*, the people the academy was designed to keep out: "Throw away abstraction and the academic learning, the rules, the map and compass. Feel your way without blinders. To touch more people, the personal realities and the social must be evoked—not through rhetoric but through blood and pus and sweat" (173). My course therefore challenges students to evoke their personal realities "through blood and pus and sweat" while developing a transgressive sense of being part of a philosophical tradition that was originally designed to keep them out.

The course begins with Benjamin Franklin as a "founding father" archetype for self-making in America and "America's first philosopher."[13] As we read Franklin's autobiography, I encourage students to begin philosophizing for themselves about what it means when they are told to "make something of themselves" today. We discuss the historical transition from a society where identities and roles were assigned at birth versus the American dream (generally more honored in the breach than in the observance) of creating our own identities and choosing our own vocations. Students begin identifying and communicating how they are pressured to "make something of themselves" in constricting ways that they then begin to challenge. They are usually surprised to learn that Franklin's ideas about self-making focused on moral and intellectual growth in the service of the community or the commonwealth even though his complex version of the American dream was later reduced to a narrow conception of individualistic economic achievement (Lemay 1986). With this preliminary understanding of self-culture in mind, students engage in a weeklong existential experiment by attempting to practice the "Art of Virtue," that is, the method of self-improvement that Franklin designed to become "a better and happier man" (Franklin 1996, 70).

As students practice Franklin's method of *self-making*—something they will continue throughout the course using other philosophers' methods—they also begin what Anzaldúa calls *self-writing* by keeping a philosophical journal, which the syllabus describes as follows:

> Many American philosophers kept extensive personal journals as part of their practices of self-culture. We will follow in their footsteps to develop our own personal and living understandings of the course material. Think of your journal as a technological device that you may use to: 1) record the most important things you've read/heard/thought; 2) further develop your reflections upon these things; 3) explore who you were, who you are, and what you'd like to become; 4) cultivate your actions and character in light of these reflections; 5) write and think about where you live and your experiences of the world; and 6) practice self-culture and keep track of your own

progress. At the end, you will turn in your journal (or a curated sample of entries if you wish to maintain more privacy).

The course is built around the practice of keeping a philosophical journal because I believe that Anzaldúa's practices of "organic writing" or "self-writing" are innovative and important in a decolonial context, just as Franklin's transformative practices of journaling were innovative and important in colonial and early postcolonial America.

Presenting Franklin as a distant philosophical ancestor sets up the later suggestion that Anzaldúa might be our closest philosophical relative, but I also try to avoid suggesting a false equivalency across subject positions. The *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* amplifies but also challenges Franklin as America's archetypal self-made man (Zafar 1990). Like Franklin, Douglass emphasizes themes of personal freedom, of moving from impotence to importance by means of hard work, but he leaped over Franklin by emerging as a *self-made man* after being born into a system of slavery that legally defined him as *chattel*. Again, the pedagogical aim in traversing the space and time from Franklin/Douglass to Anzaldúa is to introduce students to the idea that the task of their lives may be to make themselves who they want to be after sustained personal reflection and experimental practice rather than whatever society has told them they must be. In the words of the historian David Walker Howe, "To be self-made was to have made, not money, but a self" (Howe 2009, 137). Douglass effectively reframes self-culture as the lifelong process of "becoming one's own master,"[14] thus highlighting self-culture's rebellious, countercultural, or even revolutionary potential, especially for people who do not enter the U.S.-American system on equal terms. Much like Anzaldúa describes in "Chapter 2: *Movimientos de rebeldía y las culturas que traicionan*," Douglass entered a national culture that had already betrayed him, so that one of the chief virtues he had to develop was a rebellious spirit. In his own tongue and from his own racialized and gendered position, Douglass could have written, "*Y como mi raza que cada en cuando deja caer esa esclavitud de obedecer, de callarse y aceptar, en mi está la rebeldía encimita de mi carne . . . No fui buena ni obediente* . . . for this Chicana *la guerra de independencia* is a constant" (Anzaldúa [1987] 2012, 37). With Douglass's famous speech "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" in the background, our class discussion often ends up centering on the parallel case of UTRGV's undocumented and DACAmented students and their families.[15] Many students also conclude that the war of independence is not over, and we begin to think more imaginatively and critically about how it continues to play out in classrooms, minds, hearts, souls, and bodies.

From start to finish, students encounter exemplars from the "resistance tradition of American philosophy," which "placed the issue of boundaries at the center of questions of identity and community" while engaging in pluralistic experiments of personal and political freedom (McKenna and Pratt 2015, 375). Given length considerations, I will skip over the unit on transcendentalism, which centers around Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* and Margaret Fuller's *Women in the Nineteenth Century*, but the basic structure is the same: introduce a classic theorist and practitioner of self-culture (Thoreau) but then problematize the presumption of universality, this time with respect to gender (Fuller), so that the living ideal of self-culture develops alongside a critical consciousness of the historical, material, and cultural conditions that limit both its availability and its theorization. The last selection we read before spending the final four weeks on Anzaldúa is Henry Bugbee's *The Inward Morning: A Philosophical Exploration in Journal Form*, which provides a bridge between philosophy as many of my upper-division students already understand it—an enterprise centered on arguments from canonical figures like Plato or Kant—with philosophy as self-culture practiced and recorded in a personal journal. Because Bugbee believed that "the life we lead and the philosophy we believe in our hearts cannot be independent of one another," he was "concerned with the works of philosophers not in themselves, but as helps to the understanding of experience" (Bugbee 1999, 107, 139). In sum, students learn philosophy to better understand and articulate their own experiences, find their own callings, and not just seek the truth but try to live it.

Student Responses to *Borderlands/La frontera* and Self-Culture

After ten weeks of preparation, we read *Borderlands/La frontera* as an exemplar of the enterprise of self-culture in American philosophy, now rendered in the native tongue of many students: the wild, forked tongue of the borderlands, "neither *español ni inglés*, but both" (Anzaldúa [1987] 2012, 77). Anzaldúa's description of her homeland shifts the geography of reason to make the borderlands center rather than periphery, much like Emerson tried to convince American scholars to embrace their own lands, traditions, and experiences instead of believing that Europe was the only source of real culture. As Anzaldúa explains,

> Culture forms our beliefs. We perceive the version of reality that it communicates. Dominant paradigms, predefined concepts that exist as unquestionable, unchal-

lengeable, are transmitted to us through the culture. Culture is made by those in power—men. (38)

In contrast to this long-standing cultural tradition whereby "women are subservient to males," Anzaldúa's attempts at self-culture, at "entering the world by way of education and career and becoming [a] self-autonomous person," extends the lineage of self-culture in a way that resonates with many students, especially those who are Mexican and/or Mexican American women. At the same time, the framework of self-culture sheds new light on Anzaldúa's claim that "indoctrinated as straight, I made the choice to be queer" (41). Like Thoreau constructing his own cabin on Walden Pond, Anzaldúa constructs her own culture "with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar, and my own feminist architecture":

> What I want is an accounting with all three cultures—white, Mexican, Indian. I want the freedom to carve and chisel my own face, to staunch the bleeding with ashes, to fashion my own gods out of my entrails. And if going home is denied me then I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new culture—*una cultura mestiza.* (44)

Whether recovering the sexuality and Indian features of Guadalupe in chapter 3 or describing the often-painful process by which "the soul uses everything to further its own making" in chapter 4, *Borderlands/La frontera* develops the theory and practice of self-culture. Anzaldúa's description of the Coatlicue state is an especially important contribution, since she has more insight into the unconscious and bodily aspects of soul making. I encourage students to journal in response to this passage: "Our greatest disappointments and painful experiences—if we can make meaning out of them—can lead us to becoming more of who we are" (Anzaldúa [1987] 2012, 68). In chapter 5, the white, Mexican, and Indian aspects of Anzaldúa's new culture come to voice as she takes pride in all of her languages: "I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice: Indian, Spanish, white. I will have my serpent's tongue—my woman's voice, my sexual voice, my poet's voice" (81). Chapter 6 describes Anzaldúa's shamanism as "the ability of story (prose and poetry) to transform the storyteller and the listener into something or someone else" (88). By transforming herself before our eyes, Anzaldúa transforms us and gives us a path to make our own faces and hearts, whether we look more like Benjamin Franklin or the Aztec *tlamatini*. As she famously puts it, "I change myself, I change the world" (92).

In sum, Anzaldúa teaches us new ways to theorize and practice self-culture: "I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet" (Anzaldúa [1987] 2012, 103). She also teaches us new ways to theorize and practice philosophy: "By creating a new mythos—that is, a change in the way we see the world, the way we see reality, and the ways we behave—*la mestiza* creates a new consciousness" (80). Since this quote provides an excellent definition of philosophy—a back and forth attempt to change how we see the world, how we see each other, and how we live—I end our two weeks of class discussion on *Borderlands/La frontera* by having students come to class having already written about and ready to discuss the question, What new way(s) of perceiving yourself, others, or the world have you gained by reading Anzaldúa's philosophy?

Professional Responsibilities: Teaching the Teachers of American Philosophy

One of the biggest lessons that I have learned by teaching philosophy at Anzaldúa's alma mater is how much more Anzaldúa and my students have to teach me as a philosophy professor. This is what I chose to discuss when I got the opportunity to colead a two-session plenary workshop on Anzaldúa's work with Mariana Alessandri as part of the 2017 Summer Institute in American Philosophy (SIAP), which draws together roughly fifty faculty, postdocs, and advanced graduate students who work in American philosophy.[16] Many of the participants were not familiar with Anzaldúa, so I encouraged them to study and teach Anzaldúa in order to better understand and teach their students, especially those whom philosophy has historically excluded.

Like the radical women of color Anzaldúa addresses in "Speaking in Tongues," many of our students are writers who must defy the myth that their race, class, language, gender, religion, sexuality, or immigration status prevents them from writing and philosophizing for themselves. Anzaldúa's works are published in defiance of these myths as works of insurrection, but they are simultaneously works of love: "We wield a pen as a tool, a weapon, a means of survival, a magic wand that will attract power, that will draw self-love into our bodies" (Anzaldúa [1987] 2012, 163). In the context of American philosophy, we can recognize Anzaldúa's works as part of a much longer tradition of self-culture that can help us overcome the fact that the discipline of philosophy is one of the least diverse disciplines in the humanities and social sciences when it comes to the representation of women and other traditionally underrepresented groups.[17] In countless subtle ways, the dominant ways of practicing

philosophy require students to "stop speaking in tongues" or to "scrape the dark off [their] face," but Anzaldúa offers us resources for thinking about how to rebel against this injustice and redefine the discipline. I especially like drawing my students' (or my fellow American philosophy teachers') attention to Anzaldúa's answer to the question of why she writes:

> Because I must keep the spirit of my revolt and myself alive . . . I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you. To become more intimate with myself and you. To discover myself, to make myself, to achieve self-autonomy. (169)

For Anzaldúa, writing is also "the act of making soul, alchemy. It is the quest for the self" (Anzaldúa [1987] 2012, 169). She teaches us that the practice of philosophy demands "fusing our personal experience and world view with the social reality we live in" (170). Like Anzaldúa, I want our students—especially those from underrepresented groups—to treasure the wildness of their tongues and pens, so I encourage them to write in whatever language feels comfortable and to "use what is important to [them] to get to the writing. No topic is too trivial. The danger is in being too universal and humanitarian and invoking the eternal to the sacrifice of the particular and the feminine and the specific historical moment" (170). Here's a prompt that I give students to write about in their journals, which I then modified as a homework assignment for SIAP participants:

> What's something "trivial" or "current" or "particular" or "feminine" that you've wanted to write about but haven't because it might not be considered philosophy? What might you discover about yourself (and philosophy!) if you had the courage to write about it?

It's become second nature for philosophy professors to spend a great deal of time teaching students to internalize disciplinary norms and manifest them in their writing, but Anzaldúa has convinced me that it is also worth doing the opposite, to encourage rebellious writing. Here I find the poetry of Anzaldúa especially helpful, and I have gotten good responses by showing a video of Anzaldúa reading "To Live in the Borderlands Means You" to my students (and the SIAP participants).[18] There is something particularly important about me—a tall, bearded embodiment of what the stereotypical philosophy professor looks like—shutting up and sitting down to watch and listen with my students (or fellow philosophy teachers) as Anzaldúa's

digitally reproduced voice, spirit, and body take up space in the classroom. Very few philosophy students (or teachers) think of poetry as a vehicle for writing philosophy, but writing poetry in a philosophy class can help us "throw away abstraction and the academic learning, the rules, the map and the compass" (Anzaldúa and Moraga 1983, 173) precisely to truly learn, create new rules, redraw the map, and reorient ourselves and our readers.

As Anzaldúa explained in her preface to *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro*, writing functions as a fundamental "process of discovery and perception that produces knowledge and conocimiento (insight)" (Anzaldúa 2015, 1). This description of writing has been shared for millennia by many philosophers, who are "often driven by the impulse to write something down, by the desire and urgency to communicate, to make meaning, to make sense of things, to create [ourselves] through this knowledge-producing act" (1). One of Anzaldúa's most innovative philosophical gifts is that she offers a vision and practice of self-culture not just for an economic or philosophical elite but also for the wounded or broken or excluded: "I call this impulse the 'Coyolxauhqui imperative': a struggle to reconstruct oneself and heal the sustos resulting from woundings, traumas, racism, and other acts of violation que hechan pedazos nuestras almas, split us, scatter our energies, and haunt us" (1). At the end of our courses, I believe that our students should be able to say with us and with Anzaldúa,

> My work is about questioning, affecting, and changing the paradigms that govern prevailing notions of reality, identity, creativity, activism, spirituality, race, gender, class, and sexuality. . . . Soy la que escribe y se escribe / I am the one who writes and who is being written. Últimamente es el escribir que me escribe / It is the writing that "writes" me. I "read" and "speak" myself into being. (2–3)

Summary and Conclusion

It is not enough to present Anzaldúa to my students as an American philosopher, especially since she thought of herself as ultimately transcending labels. For the same reason, the most important question is not whether my students are becoming philosophers, American or otherwise. The truest measure of the course's worth is the extent to which we—here, I deliberately include myself with my students, since I undertake all the course assignments with them—have been tempted into doing more thinking for ourselves in genuine conversation with others as we develop methods, practices, and tools for becoming ourselves, building community, and

transforming the world. So, for their final projects, I tell students to take advantage of their freedom to do just about anything that expresses or advances "American Philosophy and Self-Culture."[19]

Notes

1. There are substantial and probably insurmountable problems with the ethnocentrism of the term *American philosophy*, but North American scholars customarily use it to refer to the philosophical traditions of the United States of America (sometimes, but not typically, including Indigenous philosophies). Although the term *American philosophy* did not crystallize until the late nineteenth century with the creation of American pragmatism, it is retroactively applied at least as far back as the colonial era. For one of the best contemporary visions of what *American philosophy* could and should mean, see McKenna and Pratt (2015).

2. Recent publications about Anzaldúa by professional philosophers housed in philosophy departments that constitute important exceptions to this rule include Alessandri and Stehn (2020), Alessandri (2019), Ortega (2016), Paccacerqua (2015), Pitts (2016), and Pitts, Ortega, and Medina (2019).

3. American philosophy occupies a kind of third space but is ignored by the dominant philosophical narrative, a polarized situation that is well summarized by Gutting (2012).

4. If anyone were to have knowledge of Anzaldúa self-identifying as an American philosopher, it would be AnaLouise Keating, coexecutor of Anzaldúa's estate and cotrustee of Anzaldúa's literary trust. Keating's introduction to *Light in the Dark* identifies Anzaldúa as a philosopher (but not as an American philosopher) and explores connections with "recent work in continental philosophy and feminist thought" (Anzaldúa 2015, xxx). Like Keating, I believe that "Anzaldúa is a provocative *philosopher* of the highest caliber, weaving together mexicana, Chicana, indigenous, feminist queer, tejana, and esoteric theories and perspectives in ground-breaking ways" (xxxvii; italics added). From within the discipline of philosophy, McKenna and Pratt (2015) present Anzaldúa as an American philosopher by briefly referencing her understanding of borders and boundaries in their final chapter, "The Spirit of American Philosophy in the New Century." Nevertheless, the difficulty of reading Anzaldúa as an American philosopher *sin más* is illustrated by the fact that their more substantial discussions of Anzaldúa are split across three chapters, primarily "Latin American American Philosophy" but also "Red Power, Indigenous Philosophy" and "Feminist Philosophy and Practice."

5. Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, University of Texas at Austin, Box 105, Folder 3 (italics added).

6. The best introduction to *la filosofía de lo mexicano* available in English is Sánchez and Sanchez Jr. (2017). For a study of Anzaldúa's critical engagement with and transformation of this tradition as found in the work of Samuel Ramos and Octavio Paz, see Alessandri and Stehn (2020).

7. Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers, Box 102, Folder 5.

8. See León-Portilla (1963). The fact that *la filosofía náhuatl* from the original title was translated as *Aztec Thought and Culture* is a perfect illustration of Anzaldúa's claim that philosophy is falsely but almost universally presumed to be white, so that "ethnic" (read: nonwhite) cultures can at best aspire to thought.

9. For a series of *testimonios* in a single volume, see Keating and González-López (2011).

10. I also try to help philosophy minors and majors who have a preexisting conception of philosophy draw connections with ancient philosophers like Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, and the Hellenistic Schools as interpreted by contemporary philosophers like Michel Foucault and Martha Nussbaum, who have shown that ancient philosophy was a way life, a way of caring for oneself, and a way of living in community (Nussbaum 1994; Foucault 2005).

11. This "living conception of self-culture" is well developed (without any reference to Anzaldúa) by Lysaker (2008).

12. Channing (1838) wrote, "I do not look on a human being as a machine . . . but as a being of free spiritual powers; and I place little value on any culture, but that which aims to bring out these and to give them perpetual impulse and expansion. . . . The common notion has been, that the mass of the people need no other culture than is necessary than to fit them for their various trades" (29).

13. The claim that Franklin was "America's first philosopher" was made both by Franklin's compatriot Thomas Jefferson and the extremely influential Scottish philosopher David Hume (Campbell 1995; Cawelti 1965).

14. This phrasing is borrowed from a passage in which Douglass writes, "I will give Mr. Freeland the credit of being the best master I ever had, *till I became my own master*" (Douglass 1995, 49; italics added). Douglass later describes that moment: "I was now my own master. It was a happy moment, the rapture of which can be understood only by those who have been slaves. It was the first work, the reward of which was to be entirely my own. There was no Master Hugh standing ready, the moment I earned the money, to rob me of it. I worked that day with a pleasure I had never before experienced. I was at work for myself and newly-married wife. It was to me *the starting-point of a new existence*" (68; italics added).

15. For obvious reasons, there are no officially available statistics regarding the number of undocumented or DACAmented students who attend UTRGV, but recently published estimates from 1,000 to 1,200 or at least one out of every twenty-five students seem reasonable (Groetzinger 2018; Perez-Hernandez 2016).

16. For the sake of complete accuracy, I should report that SIAP's organizers invited my colleague and wife, Mariana Alessandri, whose work on Anzaldúa as a philosopher includes Alessandri (2019). She in turn invited me to colead the workshop, since we study and teach Anzaldúa from different philosophical angles.

17. In terms of diversity, philosophy is even worse than most STEM fields. See the statistics and analysis presented by Paccacerqua (2015).

18. Gloria Anzaldúa's reading of this poem can be seen at about 6:40 in this video recording from March 24, 1993, as part of the 24th Annual University of North Dakota Writing Conference, "La Literatura: Contemporary Latino/Latina Writing," https://commons.und.edu/writers-conference/1993/day2/3/.

19. To avoid misunderstandings and grade disputes, I provide basic guidelines, narrate a wide variety of past examples, and have students submit brief descriptive proposals, which we then modify if necessary until we are mutually satisfied.

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