

INTRODUCTION

Guest Editor:
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This special issue of *Caribbean Studies* is dedicated to Caribbean philosophy. The concept of Caribbean philosophy may sound strange to some and paradoxical to others. It may sound strange because it is just beginning to be visible to experts in Caribbean Studies, and paradoxical because the concept itself indicates an apparent contradiction. The contradiction consists in the reclamation of *logos* in the land of peoples who came to represent the complete opposite of reason or measure, the Caribs. The Caribs represented for Europeans the most savage creatures in the “New World,” who were conceived as savages and cannibals. The Caribbean was also the land where black slavery in the Americas seemed to have been first introduced, or at least one of the places in which it was most prominent. Shakespeare captured well the new conception of the subject created under those conditions in the image of Caliban.

Caliban, Shakespeare’s famous character in his play *The Tempest* written in the early seventeenth century, represented a conjugation of the Carib and the African slave. He was native to the new land but it was made to speak one language, that of the colonizer, and he was, of course, a slave. Caliban could thus speak with Prospero and others, however, he could not create a conceptual universe by himself. He could curse Prospero and maybe even kill him, but he would remain forever condemned to look at himself and the world through Prospero’s eyes. Prospero in that way was eternal, and Caliban ultimately dispensable and inessential. The Caribbean, as Caliban’s land, therefore appeared as the very antipode of reason in modernity. And yet, it is precisely

in that region where we are looking now for the presence of philosophy and reason: Caliban's reason, as Paget Henry has so aptly put it (2000). This is a philosophy of/from the underworld of modernity or its underside (Dussel 1996), a philosophy that aims to respond to the problems created by what Walter Mignolo (2000; 2002) has called the modern/colonial world.

This issue of *Caribbean Studies* includes contributions of active members of the Caribbean Philosophy Association who participated in its second annual meeting. The meeting took place in the Centro de Estudios Avanzados de Puerto Rico y el Caribe in Old San Juan, Puerto Rico, from June 1-4, 2005. It was sponsored by the Centro de Estudios Avanzados, the University of Puerto Rico, Temple University, Florida Atlantic University, and the Department of Ethnic Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. The Association is formed by scholars and intellectuals interested in the exploration of questions that necessitate philosophical elucidation. It aims to contribute to the visibility and enrichment of Caribbean philosophy by creating a space of discussion and exchange of ideas about questions that emerge in the history and social, political, cultural, and economic situation of the great Caribbean area, including its Diaspora in Africa, Latin America, the United States, Canada, and other parts of the world. Its ultimate goal is to "shift the geography of reason," as its motto has it, by opening up unsuspected spaces of philosophical reflection and fomenting a serious and intense south-south dialogue.

In comparison with other areas of scholarship, philosophy is little explored in the Caribbean. Caribbean Studies tend to focus on the social sciences, particularly sociology, and on history, literature, and culture. The marginalization of philosophy responds to many factors some of which can be traced back to philosophy as a discipline, while others are connected to interdisciplinary studies about specific geographical areas. One problem with philosophy in the Caribbean, but also in other places, is that the discipline has tended to remain within the limits of reflection about the foundations of the natural sciences, mathematics, and

logic on the one hand, and the critical commentary of works from European authors on the other. Both tasks are clearly needed and important, but they become problematic when they remain separated from each other and when they are made to define the whole extent of legitimate philosophical reflection. The Caribbean Philosophical Association seeks to build on the strengths of the dominant trends in philosophy while expanding their contours, identifying and critically revising problematic assumptions, and introducing questions that help make philosophy simultaneously more rigorous and more relevant for the task of understanding and transforming the world.

In addition to open up new horizons for philosophical reflection, the Caribbean Philosophical Association seeks to make philosophy more central in Caribbean Studies. This is one of the reasons why the publication of this issue is considerably important. Exposure of Caribbean philosophy to Caribbean Studies in general can indeed be a mutually beneficial activity. The traditional absence of philosophy in Caribbean Studies can be traced back, as it has been pointed out above, to the way in which philosophy has tended to define itself in the Caribbean, but also to the epistemology of Caribbean Studies itself, related as it is to area studies. Although area studies fields are far from monolithic, they have tended to produce knowledge “about” different regions in light of European and U.S. American sciences and methodologies. Caribbean philosophy, on the other hand, focuses on the critical exploration of modern and postmodern epistemological presumptions and raises the challenge of creating new sciences and methodologies based on questions, concerns, and realities found in the Caribbean. Caribbean Studies are not necessarily deprived of such explorations, but philosophy can significantly contribute to them by offering conceptual tools that facilitate meta-theoretical reflection. Philosophy can also play an important role in establishing the ways not only to think “about” any given object, but also to think “from” particular geopolitical and social sites. A third activity that is seriously considered by philosophy, at least as it is conceived

in the Caribbean Philosophical Association, is that of thinking “with” and in light of social and cultural movements that bring up new possibilities to reflect about the social, political, cultural, and epistemic orders of the modern world. These activities are crucial to advance the comprehensive and still unfinished project of decolonization that figures from the Caribbean such as Eugenio María de Hostos, José Martí, Frantz Fanon, and Sylvia Wynter have defended in different ways.

This special issue of Caribbean philosophy provides a good example of the diversity of foci, problems, and questions that are central to the Caribbean Philosophical Association. It is divided in two sections: the first contains articles, while the second has short reviews of two books with the authors’ responses. The first section begins with a proposal about the prospects and possibilities of Caribbean philosophy by the young philosopher Jennifer Lisa Vest. Her conception of a “new dialogic” sets the tone for the approach to philosophy in this issue. This “new dialogic” brings together a unique configuration of voices and philosophical sources from the global south. This article is followed by a contribution from the renowned liberation philosopher Enrique Dussel, who traces the origin of modern political philosophy to Latin America and the Caribbean. Dussel, the most prolific Latin American philosopher of the twentieth-century, argues that modern philosophy first emerges in the Hispanic world around questions of conquest and the definition of the rights of people whose definition surpasses the limits of the feudal and medieval world. Insofar as the Caribbean served as the scenario for the first stage of the violent encounter between Spaniards and indigenous peoples in the “New World” and as it also became the setting that inspired the first radical critique of the modern European project by Bartolomé de Las Casas it can be said that modern philosophy, and more particularly, modern ethical and political philosophy emerged in the Caribbean.

Dussel’s reflection on the origins of modern political philosophy is followed by a concise and elegant account of philosophy in

Puerto Rico written by Carlos Rojas Osorio. Rojas Osorio is well known for original philosophical works as well as by his extensive and careful studies of the history of philosophy in Latin American, the Caribbean, and Puerto Rico. His contribution to this special issue offers a historic interpretation of Puerto Rican philosophical thought, which also reviews and summarizes the work of Puerto Rican philosophers in the twentieth-century. From the history of philosophy in the Hispanic Caribbean we move with Brinda Mehta's contribution to the literature of Ramabai Espinet, a Trinidadian writer of East Indian descent. This essay is a contribution to the analysis of philosophy in poetic form, which, as Paget Henry asserts in his *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy* (2000), is one of the dominant mediums where philosophical reflection appears in printed form in the region. Mehta combines cultural studies and feminist theory to understand the particular conception of history proposed by Espinet in her novel *The Swinging Bridge* (2003).

Mehta's elaboration of 'kala pani' poetics in the Caribbean is followed by a contribution from Nelson Maldonado-Torres that focuses on a comparison between the Martiniquean-Algerian psychiatrist, theorist, and revolutionary Frantz Fanon, and the Trinidadian Marxist C.L.R. James on the question of the limits of modern conceptions of reason and the task of the intellectual. The contribution also pursues the articulation of a conception of reason adequate to the task of decolonization as project, to which the author refers to as *decolonial reason*. The five essays that comprise the first part of this issue demonstrate the presence of philosophy in the Caribbean from the very beginnings of modernity to our days. They make the point that modern philosophy may have not only emerged in the Caribbean and have a strong presence there from early on in modernity, but also appears today as a place from where a "new dialogic" can be born. Such "dialogic" brings into view a variety of philosophical sources in the linguistically and culturally diverse region and beyond. In this sense the Caribbean appears as a significant geo-political area not only for the under-

standing of modernity, but also for future projects that can lead to what Dussel refers to elsewhere as a transmodern future.

The book review section continues the emphasis on dialogue that appears in the first part. The books that are discussed in this section won the CPA's 2005 Frantz Fanon Prize for best contributions to Caribbean philosophy. The first book is Sybille Fischer's *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Haitian Revolution* (2004). This book has also more recently been awarded the 2005 Modern Language Association's Katherine Singer Kovacs Prize, and the 2006 Latin American Studies Association's Bryce Wood Prize. The second book is Alejandro de Oto's *Frantz Fanon: política y poética del sujeto poscolonial* (2003). Clevis Headley, Neil Roberts, Marina Banchetti, and Nelson Maldonado-Torres serve as commentators.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to everyone who contributed in one way or another to the completion of this issue. The first acknowledgement goes to the contributors, among whom we find Lewis Gordon, the President of the Caribbean Philosophical Association. He offers insights into the Association, the meeting in Puerto Rico, and the significance of this special issue. I also thank the translators of some essays and reviews. They are Marina Banchetti, George Ciccariello Maher, Alejandro de Oto, Arturo Dávila, Lina Meruane, and myself. Thanks also to Cecilio Colón Guzmán for providing the art work for the cover. Special thanks are due to Oscar Mendoza-Riollano, editor of *Caribbean Studies*, who provided enormous help in the coordination of the different tasks involved in the edition of the issue. I also thank the anonymous reviewers who offered the insights and recommendations that were needed to guarantee the quality of this issue. This special issue of Caribbean Philosophy is dedicated to the Caribbean Philosophical Association in its fourth year of existence.

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