

Ricardo Friaz

Personal Statement

My desire for a PhD in philosophy stems from my desire to critique thought that delimits and constrains lives, from the joyful spirit of creating new concepts that work to recognize multiplicities and difference, and the connection between these practices and teaching. In order to practice philosophy, reading cannot be conducted as a neutral subject that surveys the history of texts impartially, but as lived-in practice by which the body becomes host to a plurality of voices and thought. It is necessary as a thinker to both acknowledge the particular history of where one thinks from as well as move across traditions and disciplines to think from new vantage points.

It took me time to realize the non-universal character of thought: as a second-generation Mexican-American, I resisted my family's calls to embrace my culture and "be" Mexican, preferring to simply "remain" American (I am since grateful for my dad's insistence that I speak Spanish at home). I was obsessed with literature as the way to think universal concerns as a neutral, "pure" subject. It was a chance encounter with Nietzsche and Foucault in my undergrad that led me to think with an evil eye and recognize that there is no outside to social-political orders, that one always thinks from somewhere, and must strive to move around. My experiences have resulted in my desire to critically investigate the political forces and structures that produce the subject with attention to the particular subjectivity I inhabit. The positive side of this critique is developing a concept of community, or how we are to live together. This informs my desire to study contemporary French thought, Decoloniality, and Latin American philosophy, especially Santiago Castro-Gómez.

In thinking these concerns, I draw on Gilles Deleuze's thought and his collaborations with Félix Guattari. Deleuze's criticisms of identity, unity, and its history are potent for understanding the constitution of the human subject and its political conditions, and his attention to the conditions for the creation of concepts are an insightful approach to thought. Deleuze and Guattari's privileging of experimentation over interpretation as a practice of "reading" an artistic object speak to my interests in literature as a field of philosophical thought that renders disciplinary boundaries secondary: no longer "philosophy and literature," but tracing the possibilities that literature offers.

Literature remains an inseparable component of my conception of philosophy. I developed my background by pursuing an MA in English, and I developed my comprehensive exam list on California Literature. I think California's place as the Western frontier is significant, for as Joan Didion says, "here [...] is where we run out of continent." My graduate studies in English emphasized decolonial thought and its connection to literature, both of which I find to be necessary in thinking about contemporary political and social life in terms of subjectivities and peoples. Most importantly, decolonial thought works to decenter the world to allow other ways of thought to unfold. Castro-Gómez' work in understanding the effects of modernity and its conclusion on our lives is important to me as a logical development of decolonial thought.

My interests coalesce around the question of community, or how we can live together in context of a violent past and an oppressive present determined by seemingly inescapable forces of capitalism, the state, and the production of oppressive knowledge that outlines and regulates forms of life. Foucault's genealogical thought is valuable for my project in tracing the development of discipline and control. Decolonial thought functions as a starting point from which to approach the contemporary world, and I privilege Latin American philosophy as a point of access for my focus on the history of colonialism and capitalism. I am interested in Deleuze and Guattari as thinkers of creation and difference, which is necessary for not only developing critiques of oppressive thought but theorizing a better future.

In order to trace my thought, I want to develop my background in philosophical treatments of subjectivities. In addition to race and colonialism, I am attentive to class, gender, and sexuality. While I do not think these aspects of subjectivity are mutually exclusive, I do not think it makes sense to theorize an essential point of access to subjectivity. To this end, I am especially interested in feminism, especially its French tradition.

I think the University of Oregon's philosophy department is a great place to develop my particular interests and work with faculty who are engaged with the questions that drive me. I am particularly interested in Dr. Alejandro Vallega's work on Continental and Latin American philosophy. Dr. Colin Koopman's recent work on subjectivity at the convergence of various schools of philosophy would be a valuable resource for my own lines of thought. I am interested in Dr. Nicolae Morar's work, especially on the relationship between Foucault and Deleuze's thought. Dr. Rocío Zambrana's work on Hegel, Marx, and Decolonial thought is unique, and I'm especially interested in her work on "neoliberal coloniality." I very much appreciate the broad faculty backgrounds that University of Oregon's philosophy department has, as I value interdisciplinary work highly and hope to develop my background beyond my interests proper.

Teaching, in the discursive sense, is the labor of philosophy. My experience teaching philosophy and writing has helped me learn my limits as a teacher and what I need to go beyond them. Researching for and building my classes has been important in developing my interests. I have been lucky to teach at the two-year and research university levels, and working with ESL, returning, and Honors students has pushed me to develop how I navigate ideas in a variety of contexts. I want to continue my studies in order to develop as a teacher and reader of texts, which is what the philosopher is, and would be honored to do so at the University of Oregon.