Second, Borradori uses the term "American philosophy" very loosely. In its honorific sense, "American philosophy" refers to a long and distinct tradition of thought. To consciously work within and contribute to this tradition is to do "American philosophy." Because most of the interviewees are merely reacting to the analytic tradition with little concern for the prior tradition (save Putnam, Rorty, and Cavell), they do not clearly fall under this honorific rubric.

Borradori’s study reveals much about the climate of opinion in America that will be of interest to philosophers in any area. Let us hope that her work to break down the Atlantic wall is indicative of a broader philosophical movement in this direction.

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In the seventeen essays collected in Keeping Faith, Cornel West reflects upon a crisis of vocation plaguing progressive academics in America. The problem is personal. West is trying to fashion a calling for himself as an African American public intellectual, even while he contemplates giving up on the United States and heading to Ethiopia, his wife's native country. The crisis is also structural. West argues that intellectuals on the left feel powerless and irrelevant, stuck away in an increasingly conservative academy. Cornel West struggles in these essays to sustain his faith in the intellectual vocation and the possibilities of social change in America through critical discussions of sites of hope: African American protest and intellectual life, American Pragmatism and Marxism, and the Critical Legal Studies movement.

These are vital contemporary questions, but this book is a frustrating response. Perhaps the problem lies in mass production (West turned out four volumes of essays last year) or in brevity (weighty arguments squashed into ten or fifteen pocket-size pages), but Keeping Faith also highlights larger problems in the work of one of the most articulate and provocative interdisciplinary intellectuals around.

Cornel West's arguments go neither-nor-rather. He offers 'neither an ahistorical Jacobin program . . . nor a guilt-ridden, leveling, anti-imperialist liberalism' (30). His understanding of genealogy 'derives neither from mere deconstructions of the duplicitious and deceptive character of rhetorical strategies . . . nor from simple investigations into the operations of power of such discourses' (265). He interprets architecture 'neither in a nostalgic, moralistic manner . . . nor in a sophomoric, nihilistic mode' (47). It is a busy day in the straits between Scylla and Charybdis as West drags out a tired metaphor four more times to dramatize various oppositions.
Complex political and intellectual questions metamorphose into a choice between slogans. Should black political leaders follow the 'Booker T. Temptation,' the 'Talented Tenth Seduction' (capitalization abounds), the 'Go It Alone Option,' or attempt to become 'Critical Organic Catalysts' (26-27)? A whole history of political strategy melts down into four easy options, the first three 'naive,' 'arrogant,' or 'parochial,' and the last -- West's -- obvious. Alternatives have a fantastic quality. West spends two pages indicting black literary critics for their 'defensive posturing . . . flat content analysis, vague black aesthetic efforts and political didacticism' (41) without ever naming a name. Even signs of respect twist into silencing. When Jesse Jackson and Le Corbusier both become 'gallant, yet flawed' (28,53) and most everyone and everything else is 'courageous yet limited' (17) or 'insightful, though flawed' (196), detailed analysis seems to be disappearing in favor of glib rituals of recognition and dismissal. Despite Cornel West's call for a community of dialogue among African American and progressive intellectuals, he spends most of these essays silencing, simplifying, or denigrating the black, Marxist, and postmodern writers who might have joined him in that community.

Then there is 'rather,' where Cornel West lays out alternative modes of scholarship and politics to 'neither' and 'nor.' First, he wants a 'genealogical materialist analysis' which would historicize the meanings of race and situate it in a context of psychic, cultural, political and economic forces. Second, he calls for progressive intellectuals to become 'critical organic catalysts,' participating in the high theory of universities while simultaneously 'grounded' in 'grass-roots organizations' and the 'everyday affairs of ordinary people' (102-15). Both proposals sound fruitful but Keep the Faith never realized either. Readers are promised complex analysis of particular historical moments: they get a 'schematic sketch' (36) where talismanic abstractions ('the Age of Europe' (35), 'multivarious and multi-leveled modernities' (xii) stand in for detailed historical argument. West promises intellectual work rooted in broader social movements, but he produces only lists of allies ('Marxist, feminist, antiracist and antihomophobic' perspectives (21), the social movements of 'black and brown people, organized workers, women, lesbians and gays' (103). The lists are ceremonially intoned over and over, but their inhabitants never contribute a voice or an argument to the text. 'Grounding,' the deep basis of West's intellectual vocation, turns out to be a rhetorical flourishing of the names of the 'ordinary' by a Princeton professor writing a book for an academic audience.

Cornel West can be sharp and suggestive, as his earlier monographs and the essays on George Lukacs and Frederic Jameson in this volume remind us, but in Keeping Faith West's seriousness and breadth have slid into pompous preaching. Promises of 'profound insights' (24) and 'existential dignity' (32) pile up, but all the weighty adjectives just lead to an overwhelming sense of weightlessness. West's tirades at other black academics 'in
search of recognition, status, power and often wealth (72) never provoke the self-doubt or humor which might lead to a serious and self-conscious wrestling with the issues of intellectual vocation and progressive politics which Cornel West raises so eloquently.

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How does one write nearly 10,000 letters in a lifetime? Obviously one's correspondence would be involve a sizable commitment requiring discipline, organization and time. Perhaps one would have to spend whole mornings answering the mail. Henry writes, "This is the 9th letter I have written this a.m. (though is not a.m. but 4 in the afternoon & and I have been at my table since 9.30)" (2:56). Such stints were apparently not unusual for a few months latter he apologizes to William, "this is a wretched letter [about 800 words instead of the usual length of anywhere from 4000 to an occasional 10,000 word missive], dear William, to all your brilliancies, but this is the 11th letter (of letters and notes) I have written this morning" (2:65).

Before the publication of The Correspondence of William James only about ten percent of the known 10,000 letters of William had been published—mostly in his son Henry's The Letters of William James (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1920) and Ralph Barton Perry's standard biography and source book, The Thought and Character of William James (Boston: Little Brown, 1935). The editors plan to release twelve volumes of letters. The first three volumes will contain 737 letters between the brothers. So far in the first two volumes 424 letters, (230 from William and 194 from Henry) have appeared.

The first volume (1861-1884) is of more use to scholars of Henry, not only are more of the letters (93 to 63) from Henry; his are longer and go into greater detail about his work and travels; William's are short and often only about family business—save a goodly number offering medical advice for Henry's chronic constipation. Several factors explain the Henry hegemony in Volume 1. Henry was in Europe much of the time and well into his career—he had by this time published nearly two dozen books not to mention a special fourteen volume collected edition of his works by MacMillian in 1883. William, by then, had published only articles, he was still an assistant professor of philosophy and his The Principles of Psychology was a half-dozen years off. The second volume of letters (1885-1896) reverses emphasis with