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THE SOCRATIC METHOD AND THE ALIENATION OF WOMEN IN PHILOSOPHY

**A thesis submitted to
Regis College
The Honors Program
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for Graduation with Honors**

by

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ABSTRACT PAGE

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THE SOCRATIC METHOD AND THE ALIENATION OF WOMEN IN PHILOSOPHY

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The Socratic Method has been the choice way to do philosophy for as long as philosophy has existed as a discipline. This method is aggressive and hierarchical, two traits that due to the semantics of engendered language alienate and exclude women. This alienation happens inevitably when the choice is presented to play the “game” that is the argumentative discipline of philosophy or not. When women chose to play the game, they are alienated from themselves. Philosophy is a highly universal and analytical discipline, that often does not allow for first-person narrative or philosophy done through the body, which is something that empowers most women. This means that women must do work they may not value, and in a Marxist sense are alienated from the product of their labor. If women do not play “the game” they are often excluded from the discipline through a lack of interaction with others and diminished opportunities due to the nature of their work. I proffer that this can be solved by changing how we define philosophy and philosophical success within the discipline.

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, I would like to thank the Regis University Philosophy Department for allowing me to explore all of my philosophical ideas no matter how unattainable they may seem at first. This paper would not have happened if I was not given the opportunity to explore all areas of philosophy and all of my interests through these four years. To my family for allowing me to pursue my dream of being a philosopher even if at times it seemed delusional when thinking about how my future will play out. To the honors program and my cohort for always pushing me to be a better writer, thinker, and person. You all pushed me toward my goals in every class and challenged me constantly. To Dr. Mukherji who pushed me to be the philosophical writer I am today, you have improved the way I write philosophy and engage myself in conversations with others, you are one of the reasons I am so prepared for the future. I am dedicating this thesis to Ted Zenzinger, one of the most inquisitive and kind philosophers I have ever met. You were the first person to ever tell me I was a philosopher and encouraged me every step of the way on this path. Zenzinger always allowed me to *know*, he is a true example of how we should live for and with others in our Jesuit traditions at Regis University and has made me a better person through the example he leads with at all times.

FIGURES

1. RATIO OF WOMEN IN PUBLICATION (PAGE 42)

2. WOMEN PHILOSOPHY PROFESSORS BY INSTITUTION (PAGE 42)

Introduction

Susan Brison says “Women face the cataclysmic destruction of their world alone, surrounded by people who find it so hard to understand what’s so distressing”¹. While she is talking about the threat of violence that all women feel, this is the same feeling women have when doing philosophy, something that can destroy and create *their* worlds through theory, while those around them have little personal stake in the matter other than their own success and desires. Philosophy is a cataclysm of a vacuum of white men and their opinions. The world seems to have made significant progress within the disparities between genders and minorities of all kinds. We see the National Football League using advertisements that promote women within the sport, we see women feeling empowered with America’s first female Vice President. Yet, within the academic discipline of philosophy, it seems as if nothing has changed, and at best these topics have been addressed by those with power inside academia with a surface level analysis.

I began my thesis research wondering about Lucretius, a Roman philosopher from the 1st century BCE who believed that women were nothing but subhuman, and no one quite understood his negative attitudes as they were somewhat crammed into the end of his book. This led me to consider the broader conception of women in Roman philosophy. I found that while it was important to developing my thesis, this conception did not, and still cannot, fully capture my experience within philosophy.

I am fundamentally interested in understanding how the history of philosophy has affected the ways in which philosophy is problematic today, and how we can solve these problems. I will thus focus on a few main questions. First, what type of discrimination do women

¹ Brison, *Aftermath*, 15

face in philosophy today? Second, in what way does the discussion of this type of discrimination mirror my own experience, and in what ways may my own experience enhance an understanding of this discrimination? Lastly, what solutions to discrimination are available? I will use the method “influx and efflux”, described by Jane Bennett in *Influx and Efflux*. These terms refer to the ability to freely have inputs and outputs of ideas that are inspired by others. She draws inspiration from Walt Whitman’s poetry in an attempt to write in a style that takes in more than just the individual, an almost “democratic” form of philosophical writing. Democratic writing is important as it takes the experiences of all and the narratives of all to be truth, to be validated and heard. There is something deeper to be said about choosing Jane Bennett and her illustrious interpretation on Whitman to write a thesis of this topic. It is the understanding that a space for all is created when we value the shared essence, the cause of our individual vibrations and the influx and efflux we all experience, whether we believe we can control it or not. In allowing this thesis to permeate your sphere of thought, you are allowing for an acceptance of an entangled world that enacts a process where my writing will pervade, enable, and disrupt you. Hopefully all for the betterment of influxes of all kinds. In this world philosophy is in a constant state of influx, yet this piece is my efflux, my wave washing up on the beach that is philosophical discourse.

It is important to note in this introduction I am attempting to dismantle the way we have done philosophy, particularly Socratic thinking. This is a bold endeavor yet is necessary for the discipline to have any substantial change to a problem at many universities, the men that bully others out of spaces that should be accessible and there for all.

Why Now?

Women seem to be the hot topic in philosophy right now, as the societies we live in are beginning to open up to the idea of feminism more (than we used to). Women have always existed within philosophy, even dating back to the ancient Greeks. There have always been women in philosophy, even the medieval period, Heloise, Hildegard of Bingen, Catherine of Sienna, and Julian of Norwich just to name a few. The climate around gender, oppression, and other is changing, and with that the way we come to identify people is also. Philosophy has consistently excluded not only in the sense of *you may not do this* but if you are doing this *you may not be called a philosopher*. The idea of calling women who have philosophical thought philosophers is a fairly recent phenom, in the past they were called mystics, spiritual women, or thought to be possessed (*because how could a woman possibly know so much*).² The majority of this research has been completed recently, discovering more women that existed within historical philosophical thought every day. This is leading to a resurgence in the discussion of women, and a new way of how women have participated in philosophy.

Sexist Presuppositions and Responses in the History of Philosophy

To have Mary Wollstonecraft publish a book entitled *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) immediately parodied by Thomas Taylor in a book entitled *A Vindication of the Rights of Beasts* (1792) should say enough about the problem that is at hand, yet that is not enough. There are plenty of examples of sexism and how women are forgotten. These authors that are presupposing these sexist ideas such as Thomas Moore in particular matter as they are

² <https://whimsyandwisdom.ghost.io/2015/10/14/twisted-knickers-and-medieval-women/>

some of the biggest figures in the canon and are taught in almost every introductory class. They happen to override all of the work done by women on the same topics at the same time due to the fact that there was more access to resources for white men.

Aristotle

Lynda Lange in her article “Women is Not a Rational Animal”, which is a commentary on how Aristotle, while ethically engaging, needs to have some contention via modern philosophers on his sexist views, rather than a blunt acceptance that “it does not matter in the scheme of philosophical thought”. Lange tells us that a conversation with Aristotle about women would look like this:

Aristotle: “Every woman is (and ought to be) a non-citizen.”
Responder: “Why?”
A: “Because every woman is inferior to every male citizen.”
R: “Why?”
A: “Because every woman is devoid of the highest form of human reason.”
R: “Why?”
A: “Because every woman has inadequate vital heat for the exercise of the highest form of human reason.”
R: “Why?”
A: End of discussion: “Because having less vital heat than a male is what a woman *is*.”
OR “That is how “woman” ought to be defined” (Lange 23).

Aristotle uses biological premises to decide his opinions on women, and it is not considered by many to be *necessary* to understanding Aristotle, so his sexism often goes ignored by scholars. His key terms and what most of his philosophy is hinged upon is “form” and “matter”, “mover” and “moved”, “actuality” and “potentiality”. These are all so essential, and somehow so many ignore the fact that they are gender coded. This is not just in the anatomical sense of a male generates inside of another, while a female generates inside of themselves, but this also applies to “ability” and “faculty”. Aristotle seems to think that while men can create

their own thoughts and have their own “faculties” within themselves that women still need an external source. This is to say that a woman has less vital heat than a man or less of a life-giving source that encompasses both intellect and procreation. Ultimately, the intelligence and worth of women must rely on another. Importantly to Aristotle the biological function is also key; menses are, to him, the same as semen, but they hold less value due to them being greater in quantity, but less powerful the smaller and weaker nature of them, and that since it comes from a woman it has less vital heat within it than a man³. The key distinction that is in many ways the most offensive is that while women can participate in generating a child, only man has the vital heat needed to give that child a soul. This is due to the fact that “women are just impotent males”⁴. While this may be the introduction of rhetoric on women into philosophy, women in the medieval period, which was strongly defined by its use of Aristotle, used these biases as gasoline and started a fire.

Medieval

To talk about medieval philosophy means to speak about some women that generated mass amounts of philosophy, this is to look at Hildegard of Bingen, Marguerite Porete, and Christine de Pisan. These are women that fundamentally changed the way we do philosophy; they spoke non-universally and impacted the way we can think about the world around us. I took Medieval philosophy expecting to be disappointed, but I think I gained more insight into what it meant to be a feminist from these women, than in any class before. This is what I learned.

³ 726 b30 Aristotle, Ethics

⁴ 728 a18, Aristotle, Ethics

What we see uniquely in Marguerite Porete's *The Mirror of Simple Souls* (1310), is this contention between love and reason, as to which has more virtue and is better at attaining a life with G-d. As I have offered earlier it is quite reasonable to believe that at this time (and still now) that reason is considered to be more masculine or something done by men, while love is an emotion and therefore more "feminine". What Marguerite tells us is that love is the winner of every battle, that if you truly live your life encompassing this magnificent love that G-d has then you will be in perfect union and moral right with them. To live with all-encompassing love, that would tell us to love everyone, would teach us to treat others in a morally correct way. To Porete this looks like treating all equally and with the same love she feels from G-d. We would not treat others as less than or as someone we love less due to this nature. This means treating all peoples in a way that is kind and good. To be encompassed and to make choices by love would teach us that we ought to live, and love, in a way that treats all peoples as important. This unrelentless love can cause many morally right decisions. This love is not something we see often in philosophy, and it is truly beautiful.

When talking about Marguerite it seems important to have one other kind of mysticism in conversation with her, as the goal of all mysticism may be to become one with G-d, yet the mystics would argue there are different ways to attain this. The other being Hildegard who attempts to have a sort of mysticism that calls to be one with G-d completely via visions that tell us how to live. Hildegard would say that following these visions can give us many moral truths. Yet, we see she still uses "feminine" emotion, specifically fear, as a way to attain this union.

When looking at St. Hildegard specifically we need to contend with fear as the primary emotion she can proffer us with in how we should have a relationship with G-d. This is a unique concept as Hildegard tells us that fear of G-d is the best way to become one with G-d due to the

rigid beliefs of the medieval times that in order to be able to properly be Christian there needed to be fear of being punished. She gives us an argument that this allows women to overpower men because of their incredible capacity to live in fear (Hildegard 12). While this is a sexist notion that associates negative emotions with women, it is important to note that this fear is powerful in our battle for morality. If we live in fear of what will happen if we commit a moral wrong, logically it would follow that we are more likely to be committing morally neutral action or even possibly a morally right action. Insofar that this fear is feminine (not truly but according to the scholars of this period) having “feminine” emotions will actually teach us a lot about being in union with G-d.

For me this learning point came when, in my Medieval Philosophy course, Dr. Knorr from the English department at Regis University came to speak to us, this is when my feminist world was truly flipped upside-down in how I thought about the medieval scholars. The most important insight I gained from her presentation is mostly how many topics from this period are still applicable to today. The content that these women are working on created the groundwork for many different types of religious philosophy today such as the discussion of whether or not our relationship to G-d should be one of fear or a positive omni-benevolent one. It is also important that we note that utopias and the idea of a philosophical “perfect” society that can solve for all ethical dilemmas and lead to an escape.

This looks like Christine de Pasain and her feminism still being fully applicable to modern day society. This impacted me much more than some other issues as this was one, I attempt to do with my philosophy daily. This is the kind of philosophy I strive to create, one that talks about social issues, and impacts others. We all enjoy some kinds of philosophy more than others and as someone who loves ethics and phenomenology this allowed me to see that these

topics and ideologies that I love so much are also accessible in these older philosophies.

Christine's *City Of Ladies* gave me access to first person narrative, teaching by example, and being bold—all characteristics I had not seen from women in philosophy yet.

Modern- Descartes et al

What does it mean to be capable of freeing your mind from your body, and not having your body impact how you may think or exist on an intellectual level? Descartes asks us to do just that, to disconnect your mind from your body, and to not let any bodily implications affect you. This is an approach that inherently removes some groups of people from society as they are not capable of completing this separation successfully, as bodies impact daily lives and how one interacts fully with society. For many women (for example) it is extremely hard to separate your knowledge from the outside world from the bodily harm that is often imposed by being a part of it. This is due to the fact that women are born into a structure imposed upon them by society, for that shan't be escaped due to society being so imbedded with these structures. How do you interpret the world, when the world has never let you be free from your appearance and what it wants of you? This causes for it to impossible for some people to participate in Descartes "I think therefore I am"⁵, this logic is currently accepted as the norm, and the "correct" way to be philosophical, obviously this excludes many people from being able to participate.

This has led to most of what we consider to be feminist theory within philosophy. Analytic philosophy being so exclusionary caused the beginning of a movement, categorized at its beginning with many papers all entitled "Feminist Critique of Descartes"⁶. When Descartes

⁵ Descartes, *Meditations* (1641)

⁶ A key example of this is Penn State's *Feminist Critiques of...* series

chose to be boldly against what we would typically call phenomenology and the concepts of precarity and being one with our bodies. Phenomenology requires for us to understand our place not just within our intellect, but also to be intentionally directed to the world. This intentionality is placed in the fact that our consciousness always has a direction it is going via solicitation from the world. This solicitation is what can give each individual meaning. This also is the key concept that allows those who exist in precarious situations to persist and push forward with their lives

Translations and Language

In light of the fact that philosophy has been done and written in many languages, it is often difficult to evaluate an author's attitude towards women because of unclear or mistaken translations. At one point in my philosophical past, I pointed out sexism in a piece of text, the response I got was that "oh you just got(?) a bad translation". At that point I was quite upset, how could this man (one of higher qualification) tell me that I, a woman, am wrong about sexism. The more I thought about it the more it did make sense, how could I truly know what Lucretius meant, since I do not know Latin? Translation could lead us to believe something that was not the intent of the author, and this is particularly the case when our language does not have enough or different words.

Our language is also so key to my discussion on the Socratic Method as adversarial. The way we have gendered our language leads to some insights that are key not only to explaining why this method is problematic, but also how we have gendered language to often be assumed to describe one gender, which harms all. Semantics are key in the way we discuss and yet, they seem to be taken for granted in the academic world. An example of this is if Socrates was to call

himself a good man of virtue (*Agathos*) even if he does not participate in welfare or family structure. This is a statement often accepted without further questioning. We as readers are accepting an underlying current here according to Merrill Hintikka and Jaakko Hintikka in their book *Can Language be Sexist*; what they tell us is that we are under the assumption that since the word “good” is next to the word “man” that he is being good in relation to other males, rather than in relation to the interests of society as a whole. What we must ask now is “can a woman be a good man?”, the answer is no. Insofar a woman is a good man she fails to do what society would tell us is the duty of a woman; the concept of “goodness” here, but not in general, is semantically sexist. We see that “goodness” here seems to be related to whether a person or thing performs its function well, rather than an idea of something being “good” in any ethical way. It seems that often semantically we use these terms to denote worth based upon function rather than the true, moral, meaning behind it.

When looking deeper into language, we must also look into the gendered connotations of certain words. We see this within the words “aggressive” or “emotional”. In our society these words refer to polarized attitudes, emotions, and actions. that can only be represented by one gender group. Men throughout history have been allowed to be aggressive while women are shamed for it, and vice versa for emotionality. This has caused the way our society views these words to be entrenched in gender, as they are acceptable under different circumstances. Women that are aggressive are still condemned in our society. Just think to the most recent presidential cycle, in which many women candidates were forced to discuss gender issues and families rather than the policy they desired to, such as war and international relations. On the other hand, for men, aggression is a positive emotion that is used to give them power and space within disciplines and work. So, when I say within this thesis that women cannot participate in acts of

aggression due to societal constraints, it is not that women do not want to be aggressive, it is that they cannot be aggressive without losing so much due to how engendered the words have become.

Ultimately, philosophy has a stark history of exclusion of people and shaming many that may not traditionally participate within society. This history is compounded by the way we use language and how this leads to a specific view of women.

The Alienation of Women

Alienation From Others

Alienation from others looks like insofar as we decide not to play the game, we then become alienated from the discipline as a whole, we have less access to the discipline and those inside as well as less access to publishing, school, mentorship, the keys to become successful. My personal example of this is within a class once I gave what I thought to be a pretty strong argument within a class, yet due to the fact that it involved first person narrative it was rejected with the premise, well it can't be backed up by any of the philosophers we are learning about (men). Many can understand this as a feminist approach to Marx's theory of alienation from society. When we decide to not work within the current unnecessary constraints of philosophy, including all of the unnecessary exclusion that happens, we are drowned by rejection and silence. This unnecessary exclusion often looks like not valuing all voices within the classroom and forcing all philosophical conversations to be a "debate".

Alienation From Self

The alienation from self is one where we cannot be one with our work as philosophers. When we decide to engage in the “game” that philosophical thought is we must produce work that may not be authentic to us. This means that we have no authority over what we create, we must speak in a universal is often what this looks like, and not only that, but our work has a value to it that is assigned to it from others. While this may not seem to be an inherent harm, as all disciplines assign value such as this, it seems to be particularly harmful when the value is unbalanced such as in philosophy with a skew towards analytics.

The other form of alienation we feel here is from the mode of how we produce our work. My entire, quite short, career as a philosopher I have done my work for others, to please those who want me to write in universals and do a specific type of philosophy. This causes alienation from the self as this is not what I want to be doing. Writing first person philosophy laced with mostly radical feminist theory makes me so happy.

Boundary Struggles

Nancy Fraser in her book “Capitalism and the Contradiction of Care” gives us an insightful analysis to how women experience boundary struggles in disciplines that do not value them equally. These boundary struggles are the failure of a society to let our reproductive work and our “productive” (paid) work to intersect. This is quite common in any job for women, yet it is even more prevalent in philosophy. An analytic profession will always force a bigger removal of social reproduction from productive labor as the themes common to social reproduction are removed from the discipline. In an analytic setting, as philosophy commonly is, we remove ourselves from our work, we must only use our minds and not our bodies. Women’s bodies are traditionally heavily tied to their reproductive work, due to the nature of childrearing and the way housework is done.. It is impossible to remove yourself from your body, especially when it

changes so much about you and how you exist within the world. Insofar as philosophy is asking us to analyze and ask about the world, it would only be fair that we are allowed to have our body involved, yet that is not trusted in traditional philosophy; deduction and reasoning “should” always come before the bodily senses. This alienates women from one of their biggest identity factors not only in the way others perceive them, but through how they perceive themselves within social reproduction.

The Socratic Method as Adversarial

Hierarchical Dialogue

Hierarchical dialogue exists in all ways of life, but the way it exists within philosophy causes a unique bias against one individual within philosophical conversations. In [insert text name], Marilyn Friedman gives us a unique analysis of how the conversational part of philosophy is done, and I will build upon this analysis to explain how hierarchical dialogue explicitly causes the most harm.

What Friedman states is that philosophical conversation is in many ways a “contest of wills, a verbal smackdown” rather than a respectful interchange⁷. This is how philosophy has developed, it is a conversation between the “philosopher” and between the “novice” who the philosopher is highly capable of outsmarting with superior logic. This seems to be a crucial element to how philosophy is done; it has adapted this conversational method of attacking rather than respect due to the precedent set forward by the “greats”.

The clearest example of this is Socrates in any of his dialogues written by Plato. We often see him speaking to a “novice” who he is able to outsmart and will always be better than. These

⁷ Friedman, 8

people, while they may be dedicated and well respected in their fields, are novices in philosophy, and therefore are often unaware of some of the concepts philosophers find to be most basic, like constructing a valid argument to convey reason properly. This sets up the idea for those within philosophy that this trickery and way of discussing is the ultimate way to succeed. So, what happens now when all the canon that is read commonly is of this structure and discourse? It adapts to become the way that philosophy is done, philosophy becomes a game of winning and losing. The prime example of this is in Plato's *Euthphyro* where Socrates speaks to a priest. After many attempts to explain what piety is from *Euthphyro* he becomes extremely embarrassed and runs away rather than staying and being able to even learn from his errors due to the immense shame he feels.⁸

But what does this have to do with women? There is a hierarchy that also exists in society built upon a long history of inequity, one where women are less than men, and that's the way society continues to function. It has been talked about in previous sections just how hard it is to see women within philosophy as a force with authority and how uncommon it is for that to ever happen. This causes for women to have to be the "novice" or the lower-level thinker within hierarchical dialogue since it seems to be accepted as their place within society and now within the discipline. This leads to the bias that women within philosophy are incapable of attaining or understanding "wisdom" or "reasoning", which leads to a large amount of discrimination within the discipline. Often it is just seen as a solution that can be solved via winning the argument, yet women are in a particular double bind that if they do win, they are seen as being "bitchy" or more assertive than structural norms want women to be. It is understandable that many find this engagement positive, more education for that one person and, it seems that they become

⁸ Plato, *Euthphyro* (380).

enlightened. Yet, often when students and others are told their ideas are wrong, they stop contributing and fear that they will never be good enough for those that they are surrounded by (even though they are).

The ancient Greek word for Socrates' method of philosophy is *elenchus*. This is the concept of turning someone's *soul* through such shame that they are persuaded. The majority of the dialogues do not end in an amicable manner rather with the opposition running away. To me this concept is so astonishing, the concept of such shame and aggression that you can change the entire way someone thinks. While I would contend you cannot shame someone into their soul turning you can shame someone into not actually expressing their opinion in a conversation and feeling shut down. I have experienced these many times in my classes. An example of this was when I was asked to student teach about philosophy. I chose something I care about deeply. I decided to talk about identity, a key part of phenomenology, and for minorities, one of the keys to understanding our place in the world. We discussed Gloria Anzaldua's *Geography of Selves*, which discusses phenomenology and how we interact with the world. Our class discussed how we face the world and how our identities cause us to interact differently in social structures. This includes race, gender, sexuality, and anything else that can make us an "other". We talked about how we can be fragmented in our identities and pulled into two different directions at once. I poured so much of my time and my mental energy into preparing this, and it went well, at first. Students related and shared some of their experiences and how race, gender, sexuality, and economic factors have impacted them in society. After the class was taught, with five minutes remaining the two senior white male professors publicly, while me and my partner were standing in front of the class, shamed us for our presentation. We were told that race should not be important, and minimized the experiences of everyone in the class, telling us that by sharing our

experiences we were the ones oppressing ourselves by choosing to label our identity. It was shocking and hurtful, and I felt so alienated due to the massive power imbalance that exists within the discipline. The professors had an open discussion with us, and many students tried to explain how they felt and why their identities mattered, but due to the power dynamic it was ultimately deemed that our group was being selfish and did not have authority over the subject.

Aggression in Dialogue

In *The Myth of the Neutral "Man"* Janice Moulten explains that aggression typically has well deserved negative connotations, especially when it is physical. In historical contexts, aggression is rage, anger, belligerence. Yet aggression has a unique positive connotation in specific disciplines, like law, politics, philosophy. These are spheres where one does not have to eat or attack their coworkers to be considered aggressive, yet they have these traits: ambition, authority, power, competence, and effectiveness. The expression of the concepts is often, well, *aggressive*.⁹

The Socratic method is aggressive due to the violent nature of being talked down to. The Socratic Method always gives one party power over another. The rhetoric that Socrates uses often tend to belittle the other, even if they are an expert, and remove their validity within their sphere. This is always an aggressive fight-like dialogue where there is a winner and a loser. This translates heavily to the classroom insofar that we chose to idolize this sort of trickery, which I know most of us do. I have engaged in many conversations where I was attacked as Socrates would attack someone and would become what I would call a "victim" of this conversation. Women feel aggressive tendencies, yet it is not socially acceptable to express this aggression,

⁹ Moulten, 149

and when it is, women are shamed and excluded due to not conforming to norms, something that causes alienation. This causes women to never be the aggressor, if they were they would surely be susceptible to some level of backlash that many more aggressive women, including myself, have seen within the discipline. This backlash often looks like a lack of engagement with any philosophical ideas proffered or a lack of true seriousness about the ideas brought forward. This is exactly what happened to many women that have been the first in their fields, such as Christine de Pisan or Susan Brison.

It is assumed that the best way to do philosophy is to create a point that has an adversary, the best adversary being one that has the most extreme opposition. This should not be the way we go about philosophy. To be the most aggressive against an opponent's argument and the most in distinct opposition just to have discussion is why philosophy is so slow to advance. Let us think about ethics, specifically how we have yet to advance in a *significant* way for human rights. This discourse is slowed due to this aggressive response and approach. For example, consider the sheer amount of polarization in the debate about abortion. While this seems like a truly complex issue there is a solid standstill in the debate, which comes from the fact that when we discuss human rights, we cannot even come to a consensus on who we should consider to be human. Insofar as we cannot even have this agreement, that progress cannot exist. It seems that ethics would progress more if there was a basic level of agreement and a higher level of critique on the mechanism or how rights are weighed, rather than the painful stark contrast of rights or no rights. A more basic level of agreement would look such as philosophers agreeing that the problem needs to be solved and that the mechanism for solving it is often one of broader social change. Basic agreement can also simply look like allowing the statement that "humans should have rights" flow with no opposition. While having the deeper debates about who we even can

consider human is important it seems that often these extremely nuanced conversations hold up the ability to further the broad social change.

Within all of these different facets of the Socratic Method, there have been many problems caused for women and other minorities within the space of philosophy. These come out within stereotype threat, implicit bias, and atypical groups. The harms that these three specifically have on women explain a large amount of why women may feel more pressure.

Stereotype Threat, Implicit Bias, and Atypical Groups

The concepts of stereotype threat, implicit bias, and atypical groups are important to understanding how women became the “other” within philosophy. They are, in many ways, the three keys to understanding how women cannot succeed in philosophy in its current state. no matter how publicly inclusive the discipline may claim to be. Exclusion is a causal factor to how these relationships work, and let it be clear all different groups of people can experience these detriments.

It is important to note that others within the community, those who are queer or not white, are also impacted greatly within philosophy as they are a traditionally marginalized group. Yet, I am choosing to write my thesis on something that I have experienced, being a woman. This is not to say that these groups deserve less discussion, but it is my fundamental belief (as it should be of all philosophers) that doing a deep dive about this issue does not take space away from others. Both discussions can be had and both discussions should be had.

Stereotype Threat

Stereotype threat is a different and quite new phenom. Within the philosophical sphere large amounts of research on the matter has been done by Jennifer Saul. She explains that “Rather than affecting the way that members of a stigmatized group are perceived, stereotype threat affects the way a group actually performs”¹⁰. Saul cited studies that showed that when women know that there will be any number of people around them, even one, that do not believe they can do the task at hand, that they are more likely to fail. The study used tests with basic disciplinary questions on it, when women were in a space alone or with others that did not hold negative stereotypes outwardly against them, they performed significantly better, than when there were those who were prejudiced around them. Those who fall victim often underperform as they are subconsciously fearful of confirming the stereotypes that align with their identity. The quantitative and empirical data on this will be discussed in detail within my data section in case you have doubts.

When a situation holds a threat, the group that the threat comes from is constantly underperforming; when a group is in a situation removed of threat, groups perform equally. Stereotype threat has no empirical studies done within philosophy, yet it seems to be a fair assumption to predicate that philosophy is seen as stereotypically male. I would justify this by the fact that those who are not philosophers when asked to name philosophers will only give you male names, as common philosophical knowledge has become plagued with Plato, Kant, Descartes, and dry existentialists such as Camus¹¹. It seems as though this may not be enough to count philosophy as a specific discipline as stereotypically male, yet when we look at broader society the association with reason and objectivity within thought has long been dominated by

¹⁰ Jennifer Saul, 3

¹¹ I would suggest Hazel E. Barnes for a more feminine and luscious existentialism

males, while women are left with emotion and subjectivity as their predominant stereotypes of thought.

To solidify this argument Helen Beebee, a talented feminist theorist, will be consulted. She writes about stereotype threat eloquently stating “Once we grant that combative and aggressive behaviors are deemed to be culturally masculine behaviors, the alienating affects of such behaviors can be seen as a trigger for stereotype threat”¹². Beebee argues similarly to me in many ways that if we can disgender philosophy and de-masculinize it that those who have a feminine comportment will be able to participate in philosophy fully and without fear of others prejudice. Those masculine traits she speaks of are the very ones that have defined the sphere of philosophy in an academic sense for its entire existence. Philosophy is purposefully adversarial, to create results, and often this is the exact opposite of how society encourages women to interact. We often see the women who act adversarially become shamed. The key example is how Susan Brison once creating a work of phenomenology relating to women’s experience was excluded from many philosophy spaces after as she could not be taken as a “serious philosopher” if she was to write upon these issues and “ignore analytics”.¹³

The research done on stereotype threat tells us that the minority group, in this paper, women, shall underperform and conform to their stereotype when threatened, which happens almost constantly within philosophy, Beebee would give an example of a seminar, where philosophical papers are questioned and attacked routinely, with no exception. When in this threatening situation women become “woefully ignorant” and “professionally incompetent”. This tends to be due to the engendered norm that those of feminine comportment are more emotional and less logical. As I have stated previously about our language, even if we believe that we are

¹² Beebee, 4

¹³ Brison, “Why I spoke out” (2014 speech)

more engaged and understanding in how gender affects our biases in perceptions that this is not true, so many of these stereotypes are so embedded into our society at so many levels that they still exist even if we think they do not. A prime example is the rhetoric we get every single time a woman attempts to gain power within the political system.¹⁴ Attempting to gain political power is inherently adversarial, as candidates must run against one another in order to gain this power. We still see that the rhetoric of women being incapable of even being rational is so pervasive and used as a weapon.

Insofar as women are also so underrepresented in philosophy and it has become the new normal for most men within philosophy to not even notice that women are not there. Women, however, do notice, and this creates new pressures upon women in philosophical spaces. This is the second way that stereotype threat finds itself pervasive in philosophy. This is why women feel a threat to underperform, they can see that there are no women around them, that the ones that are present are silenced, and that it is common to be dismissed. Gloria Anzaldua tells us “Others fear the men for other similar reasons: being thought less of, ignored, disliked, displaced, not allowed space... women are still the old standby for projections, still demonized”¹⁵. This can incite a fear that I have felt often, when the normal is silence and there is no one to show you how to be a loud and impactful woman, how do you do it? I have been subject to stereotype threat time and time again. The times I have had any positions of power in class with male teachers I have been shut down so hard. I remember once when I challenged a philosophy professor he shut me down immediately, I was “wrong” and was not an authority, even though it was a situation in which I was talking about women’s issues. When women speak out and chose

¹⁴ In 2021 Rep. Paul Gosar tweeted an animated video of him killing one of his female counterparts, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

¹⁵ Anzaldua 76

to be courageous and share, they are breaking the stereotype of silence, and are shamed and bullied into submission.

Implicit Bias

Implicit bias has been studied significantly by science in recent years and has ties to everyone, even those who see themselves as the most egalitarian within social settings. As Saul explains this bias is exceptionally pervasive as it encompasses even those who part of the said group¹⁶. This is to say that not only men have implicit bias against women; both men *and* women have implicit bias against women. This may seem far out of the philosophical realm as philosophers do pride themselves on being egalitarian, yet we should look at anonymous review done by A. Budden et al in 2008. What this review showed is that when the names upon philosophy papers for publication were truly anonymous that the publication and selection of women's papers went up by 33%. The papers being of all the same quality show quite well that the reason for this increase was the diminished capability to have an implicit bias¹⁷.

This should be enough data to allow for this argument to be made, yet if it is still doubted whether implicit bias exists let us look at studies done by V. Valian and J. Madera et al, in studies done by both groups the same results were yielded within the classroom. Men were more likely to be called upon, the same paper had a higher grade when submitted under a male name, graduate men are encouraged more often to get their work published, and men are more likely to receive letters of recommendation than women. In this study although, it seemed that not only men had a bias towards men, but women yielded the same results also having a bias towards

¹⁶ Saul, 2

men. This point is hard for me to make as most institutions in academia seem to have a gender bias when it comes to publishing. Although, as someone who cares deeply about my discipline and as someone who understands philosophy deeply, I would hope to be able to prove that this discipline within itself should still do the work even if others are not.

Let it be clear the problem of implicit bias nor the aforementioned stereotype threat have any solutions once women successfully become an employed philosopher. Louise Antony shared how when she entered a classroom, she advised the previous and more senior professor on late work, he shared that he did not allow and penalized late work, so Antony adopted the same policy. What happened was she discovered she had over 40 missing and late papers and that most of the students would fail due to the tardiness. She contacted the senior professor again, and she asked what he had done in this situation. It had never happened when he was teaching the class. Often it may seem as if women leave these double-bind situations once they are in a job, ones that show that the authority of women is not respected to begin with. It turns out that when she chose to hold firm on her policy and authority many students bullied her in teacher evaluations and seemed to have never valued her authority to begin with.

So often in academia you must change to exist in the space with those with power. You must confine yourself to tradition and the philosophy that is accepted by those with excessive power, often classical analytic philosophy. Time and time again I have felt the need to change my attitude and the way I act to conform to what is expected of me as a woman.

Atypical Groups

The concept of atypical groups whether we label it philosophical or sociological inspired the majority of this paper. Atypical groups to me are the easiest way to explain the process of

change and the blindness to inequity that is purported by so many in academia. Atypical groups start with the typical in actuality and then understand what is not. The easiest way to understand this concept is through a study done by Miller, Taylor, and Buck. Their study was not specifically on philosophy yet was on US voters. In their studies they first asked participants to identify a typical US voter, the majority (82%) answered male. This means that to many the *atypical* voter is a woman, and when asked who the typical voter was not and 72% answered women. When asked why women are less likely to vote they were told that perhaps the system does not allow change for women. Then the most important question was asked: To allow for women to vote should the system change to have men vote more like women *or* should women become more like males. The answer was 85% the latter, that women are the ones who need to make the effort to change. This means that the burden to not be the atypical group and to gain equity is put only on the group that is atypical in the first place¹⁸.

This may seem uninfluential within philosophy, yet we must look at the way that philosophy is done. Beebee so eloquently states that philosophy is “combative” and “aggressive”¹⁹. This combativeness and aggressiveness are predominately a male characteristic as explained in the stereotype threat section previously. Yet, this can be extremely alienating to many women. Women are the atypical within philosophy, this has already been determined by the strong lack of the public knowing much about women identifying philosophers, and the fact that within the field they are so underrepresented. This means that women within the field are expected to now become aggressive or combative and the problem now erupts twofold. The first option is plainer in the sense that women will be thrown into these aggressive situations that are often philosophical discussions and leave. After all, we know that the reason so many women

¹⁸ Beebee, 2

¹⁹ Beebee, 3

leave philosophy is that the academia feels as if it is an attack on their existence and worth²⁰. The second path that emerges is that a woman stays and then becomes these traits that are so masculine, the effects of this are often implicit bias and stereotype threat, yet we also see women losing who they are as individual philosophers to take on these more “masculine attributes”. Not only is this a detriment to what could be an addition to ways of thought, but often when women display these traits they are seen as manipulative and some other not kind words as even though they present the male characteristics of philosophy, they are still women. It seems that women can never win.

There are, however, many women that can be considered outliers to this dilemma, ones whose paths did not fit on either of these. I contend that this is quite amazing to have happened, but I also wonder how much resistance were on these paths. It seems that to not take either of these is to push against all that is accepted and to become on the “outside”. This outside exists for me as a push back on the system and writing about a paper on the system while allowing myself to be mentally outside of the system. While this may be the path to success for some, we should not accept that it needs to be hard or alienating for women to succeed.

Why Care?

That is the age-old question of truly any paper, why should anyone else care about this? Peter Godfrey-Smith a well-known philosopher of science, explains the purpose of philosophy the best to me “Doing philosophy is a matter of trying to put things *together*, trying to get the pieces of very large puzzles to make some sense”²¹. It may seem to have no relevance to this

²⁰ Beebee, 9

²¹ Godfrey- Smith 12

thesis, yet it explains in a broad way why philosophy should care about a problem it has never cared about before. The most basic reason I can give for anyone to care, especially those within the philosophical community, is that the whole purpose of philosophy is to ask broad questions about society and all of its facets. In order to do so, philosophy must be inclusive to a variety of perspectives and methods.

Philosophy deserves to have all experiences and opinions known, otherwise the discipline is of less value than it could potentially hold. If philosophers cannot hold themselves to searching for questions that encompass the whole public, then they are not good philosophers, and if they are so biased that they cannot ask questions that encompass all groups of people and an understanding of all groups of people then they are also bad philosophers. Philosophy has no purpose if it cannot be inclusive to all who exist.

Even further we must analyze how philosophy is done in the sense of argumentation. It is often a battle between opinions and a game of defending opinions. While the true purpose of philosophy is to ground our opinions in reasoning, this thought process of “battling” is so pervasive that this true purpose is often forgotten or ignored. Often those who are minorities in philosophy attempt to create philosophies and ideologies that support all marginalized peoples and allow for all to be included, yet there will always be naysayers and those against these ideas. It gets tiring having to defend your existence daily. It seems unfair to have to continuously defend your rights as a human, and this can often get extremely exhausting, causing women to leave the field.

Data

If you do not buy any of these arguments pragmatically there are large amounts of data to back up my statements. Qualitative data has told us that women feel repressed and underrepresented but let us also look at the quantitative aspects. They show us the broader picture of how few women numerically exist within philosophy as a whole, and also different types of philosophical publications. There are many analyses to how this data can teach us to be better.

The article *Why Do Women Leave Philosophy* by Thompson, Adleberg, Sims, and Nahmias gives very interesting numerical statistics on why women are underrepresented. The most important statistic that I will be using from this piece as a quantitative set of data. They looked at many syllabi across the country and discovered the range of female philosophers read within each class is between 5%-20%. What is most important is that no matter the percentage men often would poll that they felt women were represented fairly and all other minority groups would argue they were so underrepresented that they did not feel validated within the classroom²². 5-20% should not be an acceptable amount of diversity, but it is interesting to consider why men thought this was fair. The answer I believe to be true is that is the way they think the discipline is. Insofar as women only make up a small percentage of the content read it makes sense to males that are in the discipline that women actually are not a large part of philosophy, as this is what is being taught to them. Not only does this teach men that a lack of women is ok in the discipline, but it also teaches women that they do not belong. In a study, Erin York Cornwell and Valerie Hans of Cornell University found that when making decisions about how to participate in society, those who are minorities are more likely to have an increased participation when an increase in representation exists. Therefore, a decrease in representation

²² Thompson, Adleberg, Sims, Nahmias (p. 15)

often leads to a decrease in a desire to participate, especially when those people are now alienated due to the lack of representation. This entrenches a lack of women and leaves no space for solvency.

My next data article: *New Data on the Representation of Women in Philosophy Journals* written by Wilhelm, Conklin, and Hassoun builds on many of the aforementioned statistics by providing a strong analysis of these statistics and what they mean. This article explains in a lot of ways how this data is harmful and how the numbers must be taken for what they actually are and not misconstrued as many of my naysayers do. It is key to note that while yes, the overall representation of women in philosophy has increased, this increase is concentrated in certain areas of the discipline. Overall, as of 2022, 33% of philosophers are women, a massive jump from the 16% in 2016. In the table (see pg. 40) you can see that the number of women has increased to 24% in journals that are related to the mind and language, yet women in other philosophical journals are still at a measly 12.4%.²³ This is due to the fact that women are pushed into certain streams of thought within philosophy, even within the publication process. As a woman it is much easier to feel wanted and to actually be wanted within a journal on feminist theory rather than an analytical philosophy journal. This is due to the fact that women's contributions are often only valued either by other women, or in fields that men dare not touch, hence feminist theory.

The first analysis is that women's contributions are often read more often by women due to the relationship we feel towards those who are similar to us. Feminist theory as a whole is definitely more popular among women and when looking at classes that are comprised of mostly

²³ it is important to note the majority of these papers by women in here are in the mind section and deal with how we interact with the world),

women authors, the class is on average 95% women²⁴. The other analysis comes from the fact that men tend to shun types of philosophy that are done by women, yet at the same time pigeonhole women into a few strands of philosophical thought. If a woman ever dares to touch topics that pertain to mostly women, such as Susan Brison did in *Aftermath*, they could have an experience similar to her. She was told she would never be valued for any of her work that was not on women, she was from then on always defined as just a feminist theorizer, not inherently a problem, but not what she wanted. She also found that she was rejected by many philosophical conferences, because the men there did not believe that she could ever be an authority on “real” philosophy post her writing her book on sexual assault. This rhetoric on who can do what in philosophy is extremely toxic and contributes to the alienation of not only women, but anyone who strays from what is considered to be “normal”.

The article *Fair Numbers* gives us two important graphs that explains truly how few women there are in the realm of philosophy, when the paper was written two years ago the percentage was 16%. The overall average percent of women in the discipline is still at a meager 33% as of 2021²⁵, this is not enough. Even in the sciences, which are the discipline that traditionally is known for the most gender discrimination there is more gender diversity. The first graph looks at overall representation of women in tenure-track positions at highly ranked philosophy departments in US universities, and the second looks specifically at the articles written by women. Overall representation at every level is bad, there is no other way to put it. It has been 50 years and still the percentage of women studying philosophy is the same, the lack of progress is explained through everything in this paper, yet this statistic is so shocking and has

²⁴ At Regis University (Feminist Theory class makeup)

²⁵ APA diversity study 2021

caused many to actually rethink their contributions to gender inequity within the discipline. It is a harsh realization, yet it is necessary to get those who are within the discipline to wake up and see what is truly happening around them.

(First Person) Narrative

First person narrative is a way to do philosophy that goes outside of what we are told to do, speak in a universal voice. This is because talking about ourselves is seen as not being definitive proof of a truth claim. How can we take our personal experiences as truths when often logic can get us to an answer that seems to be more safe? Being able to speak in first person allows a unique experience for others, to be able to exist in an imaginative body and do imaginative politics. This looks like being able to exist within an experience of a marginalized group and see what the impact of racism, sexism, etc. has on that person. This is how women have done philosophy for ages, think Christine De Pasain and her *City of Ladies*. This is an example of “over-proofing” where the story is done through many individualized and unique first-person examples. Over proofing is highly effective for women within philosophy, hence the rise of women engaging in first person narrative. If you can give enough real-world examples for one argument, at some point it must be true. This allows for those who engage in this form of narrative (currently marginalized philosophers) to be real and seen. First person is important, as much as traditional philosophy wants to diminish it or ignore it within the publishing sphere. This may be due to philosophy not liking this narrative, or it can be that it is a tool typically done by minorities and these groups are underrepresented anyways. It is the reason I am able to tell my story in this discipline.

My journey to asking this question is one that I have spent hours tormenting myself with the correct way to share. I started doing philosophical thought in high school, I was a senior and

pushed hard for a philosophy class to be offered. The course in itself was underqualified, the teacher was a physics teacher who had taken one philosophy class in college. We spent the entire semester discussing the concept of determinism and Pascal's Wager—that was it. I have no hard feelings against this teacher seeing as I pushed so hard for this class, but it is understandable how I entered college not wanting to participate in philosophical discourse.

I was enrolled at random my first semester at Regis in the honors philosophy seminar. I discovered philosophical discourse in a new way, one where my opinions mattered, and questions and topics were infinite. I always say the best philosophers I have ever met are overthinkers, and this class allowed me to expand my mind and overthink constantly—in a productive capacity. I honestly fell in love, in a way I have never fell in love with any other subject. It took me a while to leave my prior major (Early Childhood Education) because most parents aren't supportive of their children majoring in philosophy and alas, I had already discovered how much of canon in philosophy disparages women. Luckily when I made the switch my parents were beyond supportive, and I had built a network of amazing professors who would always support my success and nothing less.

Coming from a philosophy major to this specific question was a journey within itself. I had never planned on ethics or feminist theory being my topic. Junior year was hard, and with a whirlwind of political and personal events I came to my topic. I was taking many philosophy classes and was in a couple where I was the only woman, it may seem like not a large deal, but it pulled me into the behaviors I normally saw me being ignored, talked over, and disregarded, in a greater capacity than usual. That became muddled with the presidential election, which allowed me on a large stage to see the same things that happened to me happen to a much more powerful woman, Kamala Harris. These were months spent feeling so defeated, here at Regis and in the

eyes of politicians. I was at the point of giving up on my two favorite things: my major, philosophy, and my minor, politics.

I spent many late nights talking to my cohort and concluded I had to do *something* to ease what I was feeling, and I wanted it to be something people actually cared about, hence the perfect topic for an honors thesis. I knew I wanted to share a piece of me that I had fought so hard to be successful in and this was the right way. I had to use my voice for something, even if it only impacted my space here at Regis. Writing about my experiences and being able to hypothesize why they happened and how they can be solved was a form of therapy for me and confirmed my passions. To be able to recommend women to be in conversation with the typical canonical men, or to explain how to make discussion more inclusive gave me significant hope for the discipline I loved so much. It made me proud to call myself a philosopher again.

In more recent times, I have felt radical. Everything has seemed to come back to being alienated from myself and from my discipline. This seems to be an alienation that I only started to realize that deep depths of while writing this thesis. I have known many philosophy majors in my time at Regis that have picked their classes in an extremely particular way. They picked classes that they knew the professors and students well in, and they picked these classes for the knowledge of support, that their teachers and peers would offer support of their beliefs rather than support their marginalization within philosophy. Those teachers understood that while the canon is important, yet it also is something that can be contested by marginalized philosophers and have a true discussion about the canon that is challenging. I would have told you I never did this; in truth this is a lie. I didn't realize that I was actually doing this myself, I was allowing myself to be alienated from the topics I was interested in, due to the preservation of myself and

mostly my mental health. I realized I was alienating myself from the discipline and wanted a change, I became bold and branched out, only to experience even more alienation.

This new me was one that took classes I wanted to even if I knew the content was going to be sexist inherently due to the authors or that my peers would challenge me. I was not ready for the new kind of alienation I experienced. I now was in a dichotomy. This was one where I was no longer alienated from the discipline as a whole, but I was alienated from myself. I was often taken not seriously and shunned for having opinions. Not only was I alienated from the classroom, as these classes were often filled with men that had a strong disdain for my personality and boldness, yet I also felt alienated from the topics. Thomas Moore's *Utopia* which tells us that women are not actual people is alienating (whether it is satire or not), Aristotle's opinion that women are just impotent men is alienating, Descartes disdain for the body as a tool is alienating. I felt as if everything I read did not value me and that was painful and made me even more driven towards change.

The good that came from these trials came from a Greek concept, that of *Parrhesia*, or to speak fearlessly. I at some level discovered how to do this within my discipline and how to speak for myself and for others. I think if I had not discovered this concept and had been able to utilize it to make myself more accepted and heard that I would not have been able to write this thesis or be able to advocate for other women within the field.

Naysayers

Many believe that women actually are compensated for too much in philosophy and that they are the majority within philosophical representation. Wesley Buckwalter and Stephen Stich both propogate this idea in their controversial article "Gender and Philosophical Intuition".

These authors believe that even if women within philosophy are underrepresented numerically this has no result on their substantive representation in academia. What I offer here will be two lines of response, the first being that just because the number of women have increased cannot directly correlate to the quality of their experience increasing, and secondly that women still face (typically) womanly issues such as an emphasis on appearance.

I find this argument in many ways to use strawman logic, that is to distract from the real problem at hand by saying another problem has been solved. Yes I will accept that the number of women in philosophy overall has increased, yet this does not mean they have access to all disciplines or that the quality of their experience has increased in a valuable way. When looking at figure 1, as well as into the work of Benetreau-Dupin and Guillaume, we see that while the number of women in the profession is increasing in quantity, they still only have access to particular fields of philosophical thought, and even when they try to break free they are pigeonholed. The book *Aftermath*, written by Susan Brison is a perfect example of this conundrum. She broke into the world of philosophical publication having written an extremely powerful book, particularly about gender related issues. From that point on she was often told she would be stuck in that genre forever as a woman who decided to write about feminist theory. She became known for her unique style of philosophy and gender theory, yet not always in a positive way. Brison dealt with many viewing her as a philosopher that could only do feminist theory and not by the broad theorist she truly was, she was rejected from many circles.

The second piece to this argument is the factor of appearance. Women specifically must conform to a specific appearance to be viewed as valid. Women are taken significantly more seriously depending on their dress. We see that women who dress nicer and look more appealing to men often have better chances of advancement within philosophy. This seems like an archaic

notion, yet it still is true. Women who are more physically appealing to men tend to do better within the discipline as they are given more opportunities at conferences, graduate school, and in the faculty dynamic. It is extremely regrettable for a discipline that prides itself on being derived from thought, not just what a body is capable of. Kristin Dellinger did a study on workplace environments and how dress affected how men and women were perceived. Dellinger found that within workplaces that had mainly men that the women in that sphere were expected to dress significantly closer to their gender norms to be seen as acceptable and professional. Yet when looking at workplaces with mostly women, these norms were diminished. In academia as a whole where there has always been more men than women, these pressures are often faced to dress feminine and “nicely” as it has been deemed unprofessional to not be correlative to engendered binary norms.

Many naysayers throughout the discipline as a whole suggest that the gender disparity in philosophy has been solved for, as that was then and this is now, I have heard this many more times than I should have. What I offer is that in actuality while it may seem comforting to place sexism within history books as an issue of the past, we see it thriving within modernity. One of the recent extremely publicized cases was within the CU Boulder philosophy department. In 2014 a report released by the American Philosophy Association stated that CU Boulder “maintains an environment with unacceptable sexual harassment, inappropriate sexualized unprofessional behavior, and divisive uncivil behavior.”, this report was only created after more than fifteen women came forward to share stories of sexual harassment by the male professors.

Solutions

It seems that philosophy is something that can be done by all, yet it is not. There are three clear solutions that I propose to allow for philosophy to become a more inclusive discipline. I would offer you the definition of philosophy has to change from “just thinking” to asking questions about the world around us. While on face value these may seem to be the same, when discussing with people outside the major they often believe that philosophers truly do nothing besides think about problems. Yet, when we can frame it as asking questions about the world, this often turns the idea of what is happening as it allows for people to be pointed in a direction that actually makes change. I think that most philosophers would agree with this definition as we can only think about what we know, a key to why we need more diversity. As I explained earlier not only does more diversity lead to better questions, but also to the ability to do philosophy in an imaginative body, to be able to understand at some level what is experienced by those who we inherently cannot access naturally, and to use this access to better the discipline.

The Canon

It seems to be forgotten by men, or possibly purposefully ignored that the canon comes out of a place of total white male domination. The first major change that must happen to see a higher level of inclusivity into the discipline is for the canon to be changed. When in an introductory level philosophy class, it is often quite rare to ever read anyone but the “greats”. The “greats” within philosophy are usually Kant, Sartre, Descartes, and a whole cast of other white men. When the largest complaint by women is that they feel underrepresented it seems as if the most obvious first step in the process to inclusion is to add other voices, particularly those of women. While this may seem to be enough to allow for women to feel included, it is important to spend time when reading the canon to note that not all opinions of a philosopher

need to be taken into account with considered valuable or correct. For example, we can teach Thomas More's *Utopia* and allow for there to be room for discussion on how, while it is the most read justice utopia in the canon, that it is not necessarily equitable in its treatment of all groups—particularly women. Allowing for this discussion and understanding that philosophy is not an all or nothing discipline allows for the minorities to feel more included.

What Are Ideas?

The second facet to being able to adequately include more individuals into philosophy is to change the commonly accepted notion that there is only one way to properly think about philosophy. Often, pupils are punished for not having the correct chain of thoughts, even if the answer is still a valuable one. This causes for those who think differently to be outcast, and for their process of doing philosophy to be humiliated. It is true that there are valuable and non-valuable opinions within the philosophical sphere and that argumentation, and a strong backing is necessary, but to judge the way one concludes simply because it is not the most accepted way causes many impactful thinkers to be lost. Those who exist within a female compartment inherently experience the world in a different way than those who do not exist within that compartment. The body can cause many experiences that others cannot experience. Experiences such as: higher rates of abuse, femicide, racism, and even those who experience childbirth will have a new bodily experience that cannot be separated into just “reason”. Our bodies interact with the forces that drive against us in the world daily, those experiences we garner from the world can allow us to make different, if not even better, ethical choices. While it may seem easy to square away this critique as only a critique on rationalists it is important to

note that the majority of canon philosophers are rationalists and this permeates into teaching and ideologies.²⁶

When individuals who have had to take their bodily existence into account so often when making choices for themselves, those who were brought into this life with pre-existing structures dictating how they ought to live before they even could begin to rationalize, we are immediately excluding those groups. These groups are anyone that happens to live in precarity, in situations where they do not fit into the “inside” or the normative, and existence is on the “outside”. Bodies exist within structures that have forces opposing against them, it is often how we make choices about how we exist in the world, through the phenomenological idea that we exist within the world. We react to what the world gives us, especially when our bodies are policed and forced to look a certain way to belong. To think that it is flawed within our human nature to consider this policing and how it has interfered within our lives is problematic at the base level and even further is exclusionary of almost all of the voices that should matter the most when discussion social justice and ethics.

Under this mode of thinking, one that prioritizes the ability to apply a universal maxim to any ethical situation, there can be user error. The error of allowing our emotions, prior experiences, and knowledge of our own bodily existence to get into the way. Under this system user error seems to flourish and be seen as a problem. Often when our bodies are policed so heavily, as every minority experiences, making decisions have many more levels than just a “right or wrong”. Existing within a structure that imposes norms onto us causes for ethical decisions to involve more thought, white cisgender men often do not have to think about how the decisions they make could affect their right to exist or their right to be “correct”. Yet, it seems

²⁶ Spinoza, Descartes, etc.

that in most moral judgment situations those who are situated in precarity must take these factors of constant violence against their existence and knowledge into account. This forces anyone that exists outside of the “normative” within society to be punished for ethical decisions that, often, cannot have a correct answer that is deducted through pure reason. An example of a thought experiment that requires this is given to us by Cohen when she explains that often it is harder for minorities to feel comfortable answering the thought experiments and it takes them longer as often there is a greater expectation to uphold a nonthreatening and “perfect” reputation. It is key to guide students along their paths and to not place philosophy into a “one size fits all box” to allow for a better diversity.

Success

We see that often within academic philosophy, success is considered to be a one path journey. It is to attend a prestigious grad school and further the education of philosophy within the individual, yet it is quite clear that this path is only for a select few. When diving deeper and interrogating the lives of post-undergraduate philosophers there is a clear distinction found²⁷. This distinction separates white men from minorities. This is that often-white men are capable of taking this path that is so accepted while minorities do something else, like community work. (Beebee 28). In today’s society the majority of impactful community work, such as running non-profits or charitable organizations is spear headed by philosophy majors, those who have the critical question-asking skills to truly understand the core of change. This work is highly undervalued and is often not seen as successful within the academic community.

²⁷ Kings, 3

As aforementioned, success is a key reason why many would not identify with philosophy or feel as if they belong within the community. Redefining what success is and teaching that early allows for many to feel as if they are included within the discipline. This allows for a safe space for philosophers to be more than just a philosopher, and to have a further identity that often allows for more people to be reached by the impact the discipline may have. It is quite easy to say that we underestimate the number of minorities in philosophy due to the fact that they are often excluded from the discipline through deciding to leave due to systemic issues, and that, actually, there may be a larger number, but it seems that even if these people exist, the fact their existence is never considered still points to a greater structural problem.

Summation

The only way for philosophy to solve its diversity problem is to change and evolve, a process that philosophy seems to pride itself so loudly upon doing every day. There is no easy fix to the problems that I have detailed and even the solutions that I give can only do so much. I write with hope that if these changes can be implemented and understood that a cycle will begin. One where more women feel valued in these spaces and thrive more, and that once other women can see others thrive that it builds confidence and courage—something men have held within the discipline for years. The path to diversity in philosophy is not an easy one, but it can be done with the help of a few deviant women.

This problem is presented to us through our use of the Socratic Method, one that is extremely adversarial as it is hierarchical and aggressive. This is a method that has been used in philosophy for longer than necessary, as the times have changed so has who participates in philosophy, the Socratic Method is alienating to women and other minorities and causes large

stigma and exclusion within access to the discipline. Alienation from something one loves should never happen and even if you do not buy this, it is key to have a diversity of opinion in philosophy, for any of our questions to be truly encompassing of all who exist in our society.

APPENDIX

Ratio of articles by women		
in areas related to philosophy	<i>Mind and Language</i>	26.5%
	<i>Linguistics and Philosophy</i>	24.4%
in major philosophical journals		12.4%

Figure 1

Rank		Leiter #s	%	Confirmed #s Women / Total	%	Full Women	Tenured Assoc Women	Untenured Assoc/Asst Women
1	NYU	2/18	11%	2/18	11%	1		1
2	Rutgers	4/29	14%	4/29	14%	2	2	
3	Princeton	4/19	21%	4/21	19%		1	3
4	U. Michigan	1/22	5%	1/22	5%	1		
5	U. Pittsburgh	4/29	14%	3/20	15%		1	2
6	Stanford	7/24	29%	6/24	25%	1	1	4
7	Harvard	5/17	29%	4/16	25%	4		
8	MIT	2/11	18%	2/11	18%	2		
9	UCLA	3/17	18%	3/17	18%	1	1	1
10	Columbia	8/22	36%	8/22	36%	4		4
11	UNC	3/22	14%	3/22	14%	2		1
12	Berkeley	4/16	25%	3/16	19%	2	1	
13	U. Arizona	6/21	29%	6/21	29%	1	3	2
14	Notre Dame	5/41	12%	6/42	14%	2	2	2
15	UT-Austin	2/27	7%	2/27	7%	2		
16	Brown	3/13	23%	3/13	23%	2	1	
17	Cornell	3/14	21%	3/14	21%	2	1	
18	USC	3/19	16%	3/19	16%	1	2	
19	Yale	6/17	35%	6/17	35%	4	1	1
20	UCI	4/21	19%	4/21	19%	3		1

Figure 2

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