

Rejecting Beliefs, or Rejecting Believers? On the Importance and Exclusion of Women in Philosophy

GEOFFREY S. HOLTZMAN

Why has gender equality progressed so much more slowly in philosophy than in other academic disciplines? Here, I address both factual and theoretical matters relating to the causes, effects, and potential redress of the lack of women in philosophy. First, I debunk extant claims that women are more likely than men to disagree with their philosophy professors and male peers; that women are more sensitive to disagreements in the philosophy classroom than men are; and that the gender imbalance in philosophy is no worse than in many cognate disciplines. Second, I discuss ways in which the nature of philosophical inquiry and debate may provide uniquely strong opportunities for person-perception to hinder progress toward egalitarian treatment of interlocutors. And third, I argue that a diversity of perspectives in philosophy is essential not only for reasons of social justice, but also for philosophical progress. Efforts to improve philosophy should therefore countenance the role of person-perception in the practice of philosophical debate. For philosophy to become more diverse, the steps the profession takes to achieve that goal will have to go beyond—and not merely match—the steps taken to increase the numbers of women and otherwise underrepresented individuals in other fields.

Why are there so few women in philosophy, what can this gender imbalance teach us about the nature of philosophical practice, and why should we care? Lately, there has been a good deal of discussion about these issues. In particular, special attention has been given to a hypothesis put forward by Wesley Buckwalter and Stephen Stich (2014), whose view has been summed up succinctly by Louise Antony:

Their idea is that if women have different intuitions about standard thought-experiments than men do, and if men dominate philosophy, then women studying philosophy may come to the conclusion—or be told explicitly—that they just don’t “get” philosophy—that philosophy is not the subject for them. (Antony 2013)

This is only one of several explanations proposed recently, but it functions well as a point of departure for a broader conversation about gender exclusion in philosophy.

In developing such a conversation, I have three objectives. First, I debunk several popular causal explanations of the gender imbalance in philosophy. In this regard, I focus most heavily on discrediting the above-mentioned argument provided by Buckwalter and Stich (2014). Second, I provide an alternative explanation for the dearth of women in philosophy, which I base on a nontraditional picture of what philosophy is like, together with a very standard picture of what contemporary gender relations are like. The discussions in that section will be instructive for my third section, in which I describe three distinct but related problems caused by the dearth of women in philosophy. These problems are not only about gender equality, but also about progress in philosophical understanding itself, and they highlight the need to reduce the gender gap in philosophy.

1. DEBUNKING MYTHS

To date, explanations for the dearth of women in philosophy have attributed the problem primarily to two kinds of sources. The first are aspects of philosophy itself that lead women to opt out of the field. The second are aspects of the pedagogy, politics, and “business” (Friedman 2013) of philosophy that push women out. The first two explanations I take on here are of the first kind; the latter two are of the second.

1.1. THE MYTH OF NONSTANDARD INTUITIONS

Buckwalter and Stich have provided perhaps the most visible recent explanation for the dearth of women in philosophy. They note:

- (a) “Most of the faculty members who get to say which intuitions are correct (and ‘obvious’) are now, and always have been, men” (Buckwalter and Stich 2014, 334).

Thus, they suggest:

- (b) “In those cases where the majority of women have intuitions that are in conflict with those of their instructors (and the majority of males in their classes), a straightforward selection effect would lead to more women deciding not to continue in philosophy” (337–38).

They go on to present data that, they claim, supports the hypothesis that:

- (c) “When contemporary American and Canadian women and men with little or no philosophical training are presented with standard philosophical thought experiments, in many cases their intuitions about these thought experiments are significantly different” (307).

Having presented these data, they conclude:

(d) “So women students are more likely than men students to find that their intuitions about the thought experiments discussed in their philosophy classes are at odds with those of their instructor” (337).

Objections to Buckwalter and Stich’s argument for (d)—which Antony has dubbed their “different voices” hypothesis (Antony 2013; cf. Gilligan 1982)—have generally been of two kinds. Some objectors have questioned (c), denying that Buckwalter and Stich have actually provided reliable, replicable evidence of philosophical differences between untrained men and women (Adleberg, Thompson, and Nahmias 2015; Mortensen and Nagel forthcoming). These objectors have, in essence, suggested that what may be true of the limited study samples published by Buckwalter and Stich is *not true of the general population*. Some have questioned (b), suggesting that even if Buckwalter and Stich’s putative findings could be generalized to the broader population, such intuitional differences *would not impact the gender balance in philosophy* the way Buckwalter and Stich suggest it does (Adleberg, Thompson, and Nahmias 2015). But to my knowledge, no one has pointed out that evidence for (c) is not necessarily evidence for (d). That is, data about “women and men with little or no philosophical training” (307) *cannot*, on its own, justify claims about differences between male and female students and their instructors, even if most of those instructors are men. Only data about *both* philosophy instructors *and* women and men with little or no philosophical training can, when considered in tandem, address such claims.

Buckwalter and Stich claim that “there is little or no reliable data concerning professional philosophers’ intuitions in these cases” (335), but this is false. A portion of the data collected by Buckwalter and Stich about nonexpert philosophical beliefs can be soundly compared (Cohen 1988) to a sample of views collected from professional philosophers. For their paper, Buckwalter and Stich collected data on the relationship between gender and philosophical intuitions in three ways. First, Buckwalter reanalyzed data from one of his earlier research projects. Second, Buckwalter and Stich conducted a number of new studies aimed at discovering gender differences. And third, the authors reached out to a number of experimental philosophers and moral psychologists to see if they had found, or could find, gender differences in data they had previously collected for other purposes. It is this third approach that allows for a direct comparison of untrained men and women with professional philosophers.

Three of Buckwalter and Stich’s nine external results were originally tested for “Do Personality Effects Mean Philosophy is Intrinsically Subjective?” (Holtzman 2013), which measured the responses of both philosophers and nonphilosophers to nine “Yes” or “No” philosophical questions. To see if the women discussed in Buckwalter and Stich’s paper actually thought less like professional philosophers than the men did, I reanalyzed that dataset.

I collected data from 1,195 participants, of whom 234 held PhDs or DPhils in philosophy (Holtzman 2013). Two of these participants chose not to indicate gender, and so were excluded from the analysis described below. One hundred ninety-eight other participants indicated no formal background whatsoever in philosophy; of these,

one preferred not to indicate gender, and so was excluded from the reanalysis. All nine of my vignettes, not just the three reported by Buckwalter and Stich, were included in this reanalysis. Responses of untrained men and women were compared to one another, and also to the responses of seasoned philosophers. Nine separate three-way chi-square tests compared proportions of responses among male nonphilosophers ($n = 104$), female nonphilosophers ($n = 93$), and philosophy professors as a whole ($n = 232$; 17.3% female).

In *none* of the three cases reported by Buckwalter and Stich were there significant differences between untrained *women's* overall patterns of response and those of philosophy professors. On the contrary, *two* of the cases revealed significant differences between untrained *men's* responses and those of professional philosophers. Compared to philosophy professors, untrained men were significantly less likely to support compatibilism (Figure 1a; James 1884), and were significantly less likely to endorse the knowledge argument (Figure 1b; Jackson 1986). There were no significant differences between the responses of untrained men or women and those of philosophers regarding a question about reductivist physicalism (Figure 1c; Turing 1950; Churchland and Churchland 1981).

Three more cases from Holtzman 2013 revealed *no* differences between untrained *women* and professional philosophers (Figure 2). Yet in *two* of these cases, untrained *men* manifested significantly different patterns of response than professional philosophers did.

Finally, analyses revealed that in the remaining *three* cases from Holtzman 2013, there were significant differences between philosophers and untrained *women* (Figure 3). However, in *two* of these cases, untrained *men* also provided significantly different responses than philosophers did.

Of the nine vignettes I originally tested (Holtzman 2013), there were four cases in which untrained men's views differed significantly from those of philosophers but

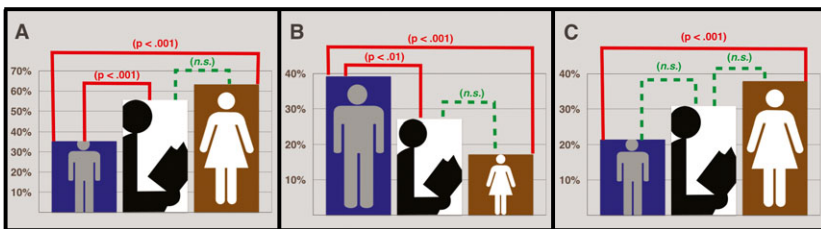


Figure 1 The three published cases from Holtzman (2013) showed no significant differences between untrained women and professional philosophers. However, there were significant differences between untrained men and philosophers in two of these cases. (A) Untrained men were less likely than philosophers to endorse compatibilism ($\chi^2_{315} = 11.405$, $p < .001$). (B) Untrained men were less likely than philosophers to support the knowledge argument ($\chi^2_{315} = 11.405$, $p < .001$). (C) Neither untrained men nor untrained women responded differently than philosophers regarding the electronic reproducibility of love.

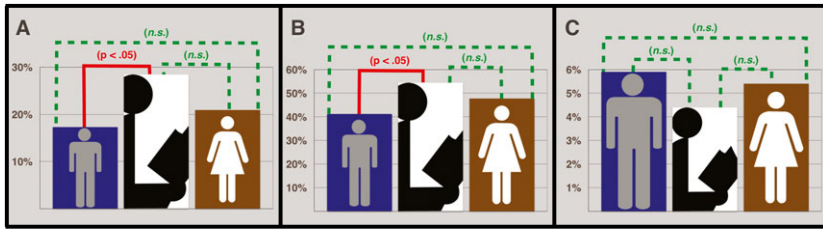


Figure 2 Three of the unpublished cases from Holtzman (2013) also showed no significant differences between untrained women and professional philosophers. But once again, there were significant differences between untrained men and philosophers in two of these cases. (A) Untrained men were less likely than philosophers to support a minimax principle ($\chi^2_{321} = 4.673$, $p < .05$). (B) Untrained men were less likely than philosophers to endorse embodied cognition ($\chi^2_{298} = 4.580$, $p < .05$). (C) Neither untrained men nor untrained women responded differently than philosophers regarding somatic identity.

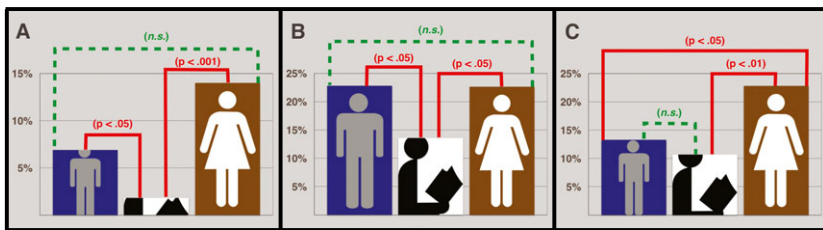


Figure 3 The three remaining unpublished cases from Holtzman (2013) all showed significant differences between untrained women and professional philosophers. As before, there were also differences between untrained men and philosophers in two of these cases. (A) Both untrained men ($\chi^2_{328} = 5.666$, $p < .05$) and untrained women ($\chi^2_{319} = 19.573$, $p < .001$) were more likely than philosophers to believe that justified true belief constitutes knowledge. (B) Both untrained men ($\chi^2_{321} = 4.265$, $p < .05$) and untrained women ($\chi^2_{213} = 3.902$, $p < .05$) were more likely than philosophers to endorse descriptivism. (C) Untrained women were more likely than philosophers to condemn sacrificing one life to save five ($\chi^2_{284} = 6.935$, $p < .01$).

untrained women's views did not. However, there was only one case in which women's views differed significantly from those of philosophers but men's views did not. Furthermore, this pattern, in which groups of untrained men were more likely than groups of untrained women to manifest different patterns of response than trained philosophers, was significant overall. Omnibus tests confirmed that among nonphilosophers who answered all nine questions, women were more likely than men to share the opinions of professional philosophers $F_{(2, 152)} = 5.018$, $p < .001$.

What should we make of these results? The data suggest that even advocates for women in philosophy are sometimes too quick to assume that when undergraduate men and women don't see eye-to-eye, it must be the women who have "nonstandard

intuitions” (Beebee 2013). The fact that researchers have heretofore overlooked this point suggests that it may also be exceptionally easy for philosophy professors to misconstrue the relationship between their own views and those of their students in a way that subjects women to an unwarranted credibility deficit (Fricker 2007; see §2.4. below).

Because the number of cases presented here is so limited, it would be premature to draw from this dataset any positive hypothesis about who thinks more like whom when it comes to philosophy. Nonetheless, these results have major implications for recent scholarship. For example, Helen Beebee provides a well-reasoned plan of attack for remedying the phenomenon discussed by Buckwalter and Stich (Beebee 2013). But given the evidence that there is no such phenomenon, Beebee’s suggestions might have a more limited impact on the problem than one would hope.

Beebee is right that “nonstandard intuitive responses to thought experiments should not automatically be viewed as deviant.” However, she fails to recognize a more fundamental distinction: different-from-eighteen-year-old-men’s responses should not automatically be viewed as nonstandard. This conflation seems not only mistaken, but also potentially harmful. The (evidently unwarranted) attribution of nonstandard status to women’s philosophical views has a problematic normative dimension. For comparison, consider the obviously combative tone in an assertion like “Buckwalter and Stich’s interpretation of Holtzman’s data is *nonstandard*.” Such a statement does not give the impression that that those authors’ interpretation should be taken seriously. Likewise, the aspersion that women have nonstandard intuitions about many canonical philosophical thought experiments—even if we condescend to note that “it’s okay to be different”—seems unlikely to promote the idea that women should be taken seriously in philosophy. It also seems unlikely to encourage women who may already feel alienated in their classes to speak up.

1.2. THE MYTH OF PEER PRESSURE

A number of philosophers have interpreted Buckwalter and Stich to mean that women may be pushed out of philosophy due to frequent intuitional disagreement with their *classmates*, rather than—or in perhaps addition to—their professors. At one point in their paper, they state that the average undergraduate woman is especially likely to find that “her instructor, whether male or female, *as well as a high percentage of her male classmates*, clearly think she is mistaken” (Buckwalter and Stich 2014; emphasis added). However, the available data do little to bear this theory out.

The statistical tests employed by Buckwalter and Stich can tell us who is more likely to endorse a certain view, but on their own, such tests tell us nothing about which views the *majority of students* (or the majority of male students) tend to endorse. Nor do they tell us whether women or men are more likely to disagree with the majority of male students. By analogy, consider that sufficiently large samples of male and female philosophy students will give significantly different responses to questions that require visually distinguishing green from red. In the general

population of the United States, around 7% of men are red-green colorblind, whereas only about 0.4% of women are. This is a statistically significant difference. Yet precisely because so many men are colorblind (due to an x-linked recessive gene), we can expect *men* to be exponentially more likely to diverge from the 93% majority of male students when attempting to distinguish green from red.

In the data presented by Buckwalter and Stich, men (39.2%) were more than twice as likely as women (17.2%) to *support* the idea that a person could theoretically figure out what apples taste like without ever having eaten one. Yet most men (60.8%) *denied* this possibility. Thus, even in cases in which men and women provide very different patterns of response to the very same question, men can be more than twice as likely as women to find themselves at odds with their male peers! Here, what Buckwalter and Stich categorize as “different” intuitions between untrained women and men is more rightly characterized as a case in which untrained men and women largely shared the same view. The only difference, it seems, is that consensus about that view was even *more robust* among women than among men.

1.3. THE MYTH OF CONFLICT-AVERSION

Recently, some authors have appealed to the somewhat dated suggestion that women are more likely than men to be turned off by the adversarial nature of the philosophy classroom (Moulton 1983). This aversion, the argument goes, at least partly explains why women are less likely to take subsequent classes. However, recent work conducted with philosophy undergraduates in Australia found no evidence to support this view (Dougherty, Baron, and Miller 2015). This claim is also at odds with patterns found in the similarly adversarial field of law. One study of law students found that while 16% of male law students preferred an adversarial negotiating style, 14% of female law students did as well (Burton et al. 1991). Moreover, women received 47.3% of all JDs granted by law schools from 2010–11 in the United States (American Bar Association 2014), a proportion nearly twice that for philosophy PhD recipients. Why, if adversarial style in the classroom were the issue, would such a discrepancy persist?

Beebee has made a different, more nuanced argument relating to the role of philosophy’s adversarial nature. She suggests that if adversarial debate is associated with masculinity, then such debates could prime women to think about their stereotyped role as unfit for philosophical debate (Beebee 2013). Thus, she argues, women involved in adversarial debates might experience stereotype threat, a psychological phenomenon in which excessive attention to stereotypes of oneself leads to poorer performance among stereotyped individuals (Spencer, Steele, and Quinn 2002). However, I am not sure that Beebee’s account hits the mark.

Not only does the stereotype of women running away from confrontation seem unfounded, but it is not even clear that it is a stable, widely held stereotype. Rather, it seems only to be a kind of *stereotype of convenience*. A Google search of the Internet—the arbiter of all things misogynistic—actually finds evidence for popular belief

in the opposite stereotype. As of this writing, Google returns 10,600 instances of the phrase “women are always arguing,” but only 8 examples of the phrase “men are always arguing.” “Men avoid conflict” according to 13,500 websites, but “women avoid conflict” according to only 1,310. The invocation of the opposite stereotype in philosophy—or in any context, for that matter—seems *ad hoc* at best.

In §2, I will entertain other explanations of why the situation for women is so much worse in philosophy than it is in other disciplines. Of course, this assumes that philosophy actually *is* that much more inhospitable to women than other disciplines are. I devote the rest of this section to showing that philosophy has, in fact, been more resistant to gender progress than many other disciplines have.

1.4. THE MYTH OF TYPICALITY

Many authors seem to think that the gender imbalance in philosophy is typical in academia more broadly. Some of these authors have tried to understand why the gender composition of philosophy is supposedly akin to that in STEM disciplines, rather than the humanities. This parallel is so often drawn that fully half (5 out of 10) of the authors in a recent volume called *Women in Philosophy: What Needs to Change?* (Hutchison and Jenkins 2013) mention engineering by way of comparison. But as Katrina Hutchison and Fiona Jenkins point out, introductory philosophical training is in many ways quite dissimilar from introductory training in STEM disciplines.

In that same volume, Hutchison emphasizes the fact that “disciplines such as mathematics and science explicitly teach methods” (Hutchison 2013, 118) whereas in philosophy, fundamentals like formal logic are often not taught until higher-level courses. Since the absence of methodological standardization seems likely to contribute to (or perpetuate) inequalities, asking why the numbers in philosophy are so similar to those in the STEM disciplines may be a nonstarter. As with *nonstandard intuitions* (§1.1.), the proper starting point for any inquiry into the *typicality* of the gender imbalance in philosophy is to ask whether the phenomenon exists at all.

My suspicion is that the persistence of the gender imbalance in philosophy is not all that typical in academia. I have encountered a great deal of resistance to the suggestion that the situation really is worse in philosophy than in other fields. I certainly think that a great many fields need to do much more than they are presently doing to increase the representation of women in their ranks. And yet I also think that whatever efforts have been made in academia in general in recent years to increase gender equality have likely faced more resistance in philosophy than in other disciplines.

To see whether philosophy really has made less progress than disciplines that routinely use empirical observation and mathematics to adjudicate disputes, I compared the gender composition of PhD recipients in philosophy over the last two decades to the gender compositions in mathematics, engineering, and the physical sciences (Figure 4). Data were collected from a number of documents available from the National Science Foundation (NSF) website, which contained information on the numbers of

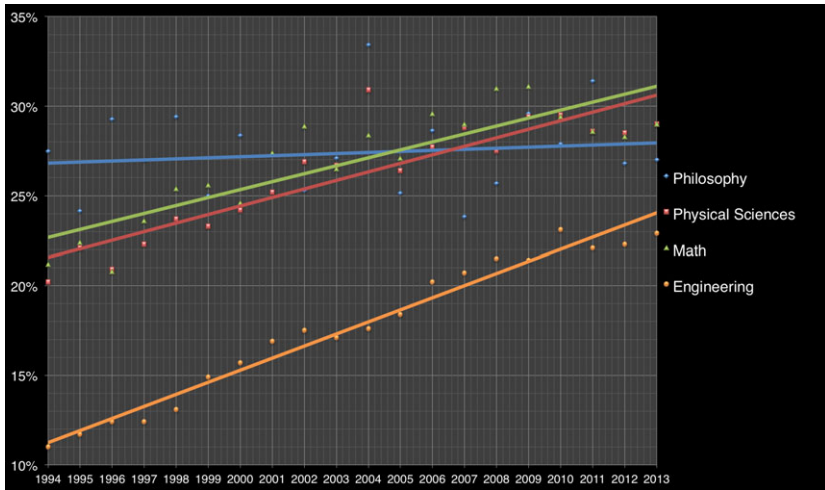


Figure 4 The proportion of PhDs granted to women in philosophy has not changed in twenty years. A linear regression found that the gender composition in the STEM disciplines changed significantly in favor of women between 1994 and 2013. Disturbingly, there has been no statistically significant change in the proportion of philosophy PhDs granted to women over the same period.

men and women granted PhDs in various disciplines in specific years between 1994 and 2013 at US institutions (National Science Foundation 2015a; 2015b).

Engineering has seen the greatest increase in the proportion of PhDs granted to women ($r^2 = .969$, $p < .001$), followed by the physical sciences ($r^2 = .797$, $p < .001$), and then math ($r^2 = .735$, $p < .001$). Shockingly, philosophy has not just made *less* progress than these fields; it has made *no* statistically significant progress whatsoever ($r^2 = .021$, $p = .545$). In 1994, 27.5% of PhDs in philosophy were granted to women; in 2013, 27.0% were.

The lack of change in philosophy is not due simply to the fact that there were more women in the field twenty years ago than there were in the STEM disciplines. Many fields in which women were better represented than they were in philosophy twenty years ago have nonetheless outpaced philosophy in the advancement of women since then. For instance, in 1994 the proportion of history PhDs granted to women was already 54% higher than the proportion of philosophy PhDs ($OR = 1.54$). By 2013, the proportion of women in history had increased significantly ($r^2 = .759$, $p < .001$), while that in philosophy had stagnated, so that the ratio of women to men had become 122% higher in history than in philosophy ($OR = 2.22$). Even in psychology, in which 62.2% of PhDs granted in 1994 went to women, significant progress ($r^2 = .806$, $p < .001$) had pushed the proportion of women receiving PhDs up to 72.3% by 2013, while philosophy had shown no improvement (National Science Foundation 2015a).

2. UNDERSTANDING PHILOSOPHY

What could explain philosophy's dreadful lack of change during a period when so many other academic disciplines have been doing so much better (though perhaps not well enough)? There is little doubt that basic issues of discrimination, bias, and harassment play large roles in the exclusion of women from philosophy (Haslanger 2008). These problems need to be addressed in order to best provide opportunities for women (and other underrepresented groups) in the field. But all of these issues likely play roles in other fields that have nonetheless managed to improve their hospitality to women. Thus, there is reason to suspect that there is something distinctive about philosophy that has enabled the factors that shut women out of any number of fields to go unchecked. In this section, I study the nature of philosophy for clues as to why the field has been so stubbornly resistant to changes to its current—and as I have just shown, decades-old—gender composition.

I argue that the nature of philosophical practice allows one's perceptions of and attitudes toward interlocutors to have especially marked effects on the views one endorses or disavows. Attributions of credibility and various other social heuristics, on which we rely to infer a person's status as a reliable source of information in general (Winston et al. 2002), may loom much larger in philosophy than in many other disciplines. In what follows, I describe several ways in which the nature of philosophical pursuit may make the discipline especially prone to undue influences that could contribute to the exclusion of women.

2.1. PHILOSOPHICAL DISPOSITIONS ARE FICKLE

Philosophical beliefs are malleable and inconstant. It would be nice to believe that we exert autonomous control over our philosophical stances, but mounting evidence suggests this is not the case. Philosophy professors' views on classic questions seem to shift with the winds. A given philosopher's attitude toward certain statements made by William James (1884) seems to depend, to some extent, on that philosopher's personality (Holtzman 2013). Ethicists' judgments of a principle originating from Saint Thomas Aquinas (1274) can be primed by the presentation of simple vignettes (Schwitzgebel and Cushman 2012). The answers professional philosophers give to various philosophical questions sometimes differ significantly depending on the order in which those questions are asked (Schwitzgebel and Cushman 2015). Why not consider the possibility that trained philosophers' professional opinions are especially prone to the influence of interpersonal attitudes?

Philosophical beliefs are attitudes toward philosophical propositions. A proposition is "the action or an *act* of propounding or proposing *something*" (Brown 1993; emphases added). Philosophers often use the word "proposition" to connote only the *something* being propounded. This definition aligns with the special definition of "proposition" in mathematics. In mathematics, a proposition is "a formal statement of a truth to be demonstrated" (Brown 1993), that is, a conventionally structured

formulation of the constitutive essence of that truth. But in philosophy, conventionally structured formulations are *not* typically the targets of belief or disbelief. In fact, much of philosophy involves arguing *against* convention, and invoking *nonessential* (but nonetheless paradigmatic) cases, exemplars, or thought experiments. Thus, philosophical beliefs may be as much attitudes toward propositional *acts* as they are toward propositional *somethings*. As such, person-perception may be afforded a significantly larger role in the formulation of philosophical beliefs—that is, attitudes toward philosophical propositions—than in the formulation of other academic beliefs. This could help explain the lack of women’s progress in philosophy as compared to other disciplines.

2.2. PHILOSOPHICAL DISPUTES LACK UNIVERSALLY ACCESSIBLE ADJUDICATION CRITERIA

The lack of objective adjudication criteria for philosophical disputes may lead those attempting to identify philosophical expertise to rely especially heavily on social cues. Hutchison has discussed this issue in the context of efforts to discern the *trait* of philosophical expertise in pupils (efforts that may, she points out, be inherently misguided) (Hutchison 2013). We can reasonably extend these arguments to also explain attempts to discern the *state* of expressing something philosophically valuable. The lack of universally accessible adjudication criteria may also disfavor women when others make judgments of the worth of particular statements they make. This may occur when philosophers evaluate the assertions of colleagues at the graduate or professional level, or when they assess the assertions of their students.

In the absence of access to ground truth, decision-making in social contexts often becomes subject to various social psychological pressures. Importantly, philosophical propositions are generally conveyed in settings that betray various factors about whomever is doing the propounding, including the gender of that person. Thus, attitudes toward philosophical propositions may not, in many cases, be made independently of all other attitudes. The way in which the words of a given interlocutor are interpreted may depend heavily on the perception, position, and so on of that speaker. This is apparently widely understood by philosophers as a general phenomenon, even if it is infrequently acknowledged as a source of gender bias in the classroom. It is, after all, one of the explicit reasons many journals engage in anonymous review (Scholz 2015). There is reason to think that the same words may be evaluated differently by journal referees depending on whether they are written by an adjunct lecturer, or by a distinguished professor. Similarly, there is reason to think that the same words spoken by a female undergraduate may be interpreted differently than when spoken by a male undergraduate.

Of course, this is not unique to philosophy, and it might not even *depend* in a strong sense on the social nature of philosophy. However, the absence of universally accessible adjudication criteria in many corners of philosophy could certainly *exacerbate* the extent to which egalitarianism dominates philosophy. Many of the explanations that others have given for the lack of women in philosophy may also apply

in other fields, but perhaps not to the same extent as in philosophy, if those fields allow by objective reference to some set of externally available facts the adjudication of disputes.

2.3. PHILOSOPHY IS A DEEPLY SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

In the physical sciences, the yardstick of success is prediction relative to observable phenomena. But that is not the case in philosophy. In any academic discipline, both authority and consensus may play central roles in the sanction of knowledge (Gross 2006), but at least the adjudication of disputes is subject to external appeal and pressures in math and science in a way that it is not in philosophy. In the physical sciences, appeal to objective, material evidence and metrics can not only help adjudicate disputes, but may also help indicate when disputes are caused or mediated by interpersonal perceptions, including gender biases. And in math, a quantifiable failure of internal coherence should, *a priori*, always be identifiable in cases of disagreement. But in philosophy this is not the case. The only external evidence we have as philosophers may be the opinions of others, and if so, our evaluations of these opinions are infused with social values such as appeal to authority.

Philosophy may be an inherently social discipline in the following sense. Problems in philosophers' theories generally arise from those theories' introduction to *other philosophers* and their objections, rather than the application of those theories in something like ecologically valid environments, or their subjection to physical testing. And while problems in analytic philosophy are often scrutinized under logical principles akin to those in mathematics, the detection of a contradiction in a philosophical argument does not sound the death knell for that argument in the same way it would in mathematics. A mathematical argument that reduces to $2 < 1$ or $xy \neq yx$ can be immediately discarded. The same cannot be said for a philosophical argument that reduces to Killing (as a means to save lives) $<$ Killing (as a consequence of saving lives), or to Knowledge (by acquaintance) $\neq$ Knowledge (by description).

The acquisition and development of philosophical skill, as with other academic skills, comes from participating in something like a lab environment; but it is the seminar, not the Bunsen burner, that provides budding philosophers with their first real taste of hands-on philosophical experience. Furthermore, imprecision and mistakes in philosophy are not generally due to miscalibration of instruments, or to imprecise measurements. Of course, they can be due to miscalculation, failure to attend to detail, or shallowness of knowledge. But just as often, they arise due to interpersonal misconceptions, or to attaching too much or too little epistemic weight to the words of a speaker.

There are a variety of reasons that the opinions of women are taken less seriously than those of men in various contexts, but the effect is always the same. The effect is that the testimony provided by women is given less power to shape people's beliefs than men's testimony is. Given that the act of providing testimony in favor of some view may play a relatively larger role in philosophy than in other fields, gendered

patterns of discreditation are likely to be more pronounced in philosophy than in other fields. Not only is this inherently problematic in its effect in marginalizing women, but evidence in social psychology also suggests that such unwarranted, prejudicial dismissal of interlocutors can ultimately lead to degradation of the quality of information provided by those interlocutors (Morrow et al. 1990). Thus, the treatment of women as inferior in the philosophy classroom may be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

2.4. NORMS OF PHILOSOPHICAL BEHAVIOR COINCIDE WITH LOCAL GENDER NORMS

There is yet another potential barrier for women being treated fairly in the philosophy classroom. Although I have expressed doubt that women are especially put off by adversarial style (§1.3.), such a style may be received differently when adopted by women. Participation in philosophy classes may require, or at least may often involve, forms of engagement and participation that, when undertaken by women, are liable to be viewed by many (consciously or unconsciously) as violating social norms (Saul 2013). If, as some authors have asserted, adversarial behavior is frequently seen as masculine and “unwomanly,” and if the philosophy classroom often is adversarial, then women who want to participate are forced to make a choice. They must decide whether they are willing to break a gender norm and to incur the social consequences that may bring. If they do participate, professors and classmates might respond more negatively to what they say not because of the contents of their assertions, but as a reaction to *perceived contemporary social norm violations*.

This might explain some of the negative reaction to women in the philosophy classroom. It may not so much be that professors and peers *disagree* with women’s philosophical views as it is that they are *put off* by women’s participation in debate *qua* debate. But this is of course no reason to treat women any differently in the classroom, or to push them aside, and so it must be addressed for what it is: bias.

One way to characterize this cause for the lack of women in philosophy involves the *disbelief* of claims made by women, precisely because they are made by women. In the framework provided by Miranda Fricker, the identification of a speaker as a woman by a hearer can lead to the prejudicial tendency to view that speaker as less credible than she may actually be (Fricker 2007). This kind of *identity-prejudiced credibility deficit* is a form of *testimonial injustice*. Given that philosophical beliefs may be more prone to any number of biases than certain other beliefs (§2.1.), philosophy might prove especially fertile ground for identity prejudices to bias credibility attributions as well.

Using Fricker’s framework of identity-prejudiced credibility deficits, we can account for Buckwalter and Stich’s observations without resorting to their explanation for it, or even acknowledging those observations to be veridical (since it seems that they were not). When male and female students express equivalent views, women’s views may simply be more likely to be rejected or viewed as inexpert. In such cases, we would not necessarily expect to see male undergraduates agreeing with

their professors more frequently than female undergraduates do. Rather, philosophy professors may only *interpret* them to be in agreement or to be expressing “good ideas” more frequently.

In a different framework, commonly employed in the social sciences, *implicit biases* (Ridgeway and Correll 2004) in a person listening to the opinions of women may lead them to draw on subconscious associations that lead them to reject women and their testimony (cf. Saul 2013). This involves noncognitive aversion to the speaker and reduced attributions of credibility to that speaker, and to devaluation of propositions associated with her. This is slightly different from a credibility deficit, which involves strict disbelief in the statements that a speaker makes. But it might be a complementary process contributing to the marginalization of women in philosophy.

Typically, both credibility deficits and implicit biases are assumed to affect the process by which the interpretation of what a speaker has said is evaluated. However, when engaged with a speaker who is perceived to have a low credibility status, or toward whom a listener is otherwise biased, a listener may fail to make an appropriately effortful, charitable interpretation of what that speaker means in the first place. This can result in the rejection of propositions that ought to be rejected, but which are not actually endorsed by the speaker. Thus, knee-jerk rejection and curt dismissal of women’s views may be more common in the philosophy classroom than similar reactions to men’s views.

3. MOTIVATING CHANGE

The considerations in the preceding section may be able to tell us something about why we should care about the lack of women in philosophy, and what we might do about it. They suggest that more than just fairness to women is endangered by the gender imbalance in philosophy. They suggest that the discipline itself and all who practice it may be harmed by inequalitarian practices. The discussion of the nature of philosophy not only helps explain why philosophy *has* remained so exclusionary, but also helps explain why philosophy *must not* remain this way if it is to accomplish its aims. From this point of departure, I want to address why everyone should care about the dearth of women in philosophy. The reasons to care about the problem, I show, are more numerous and varied than many people seem to think.

3.1. CAUSES FOR CONCERN

There are at least three reasons to care about the dearth of women in philosophy. I will refer to these as *moral*, *epistemic*, and *metaphilosophical* concerns. These concerns can be distinguished, but they are also deeply interconnected. The first two have been discussed elsewhere, but metaphilosophical concerns have largely been overlooked. They are also the ones most deeply connected to the discussions herein, and they provide new insight into improving practices in the field. For these reasons, I

will begin by briefly discussing moral and epistemic concerns, and then I will focus more heavily on metaphilosophical concerns.

Moral concerns begin with the understanding that women and men deserve equal opportunities. When these are not provided, a morally unacceptable harm is done to the group with fewer opportunities. The dearth of women in philosophy undoubtedly reflects a degree of unequal treatment of, and unequal provision of opportunities for, women and men. Therefore, fulfilling our moral obligation to treat men and women equally would almost certainly entail increasing the proportion of women in philosophy.

Epistemic concerns arise because the need to improve any field demands a principle of inclusiveness, rather than a tolerance of exclusion. As John Stuart Mill said of women in politics, “any limitation of the field of selection deprives society of some chances of being served by the competent, without ever saving it from the incompetent” (Mill 1869/1998). In philosophy, improvement comes in the form of increased understanding, which is why the concerns raised are epistemic. Given that the exclusion of women reduces the number of competent individuals contributing to philosophical understanding, such exclusion does epistemic harm to the entire discipline and those who practice it.

Finally, we arrive at *metaphilosophical* concerns. These arise from the potential limitations on knowledge incurred by any philosophical society that excludes from its ranks individuals with unique or privileged access to certain experiences and phenomena.

3.2. METAPHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTIONS

It is not just that philosophy is impoverished by the exclusion of women because the *quantity* of work in the field is thereby reduced. Nor is it just that the *quality* of the work is being diluted as a result of, shall we say, “extrameritorious” selection. Rather, the *kind* of work being done may be limited in its very scope as a result of the exclusion of women. There may be a significant portion of truths to which philosophers will not have access unless we increase the diversity of experiences, and the number of persons with access to diverse experiences, in the field.

Note that while differences in lived experience may *contribute* to differences in intuition, the two kinds of difference are not identical. Rather, it is a lack of commonly held (but potentially universally accessible) experiences that may lead different people to pursue and develop well-informed views toward different philosophical questions in the first place. Thus, philosophy may be reducing the number of experiences it is capable of explaining because the field cuts out people whose contributions to the field may not only be valuable, but also unique.

There is something very ironic about this. The very processes that lead to the exclusion of women—such as bias, distrust, and objectification—are some of the most interesting psychological, social, and ethical issues we might hope to understand. And these are processes with which women often have more familiarity than men,

and therefore might also have more insight. Yet women are precisely the people who are being deprived of opportunities to study and discuss these issues. Personal connections with and insight into these issues should be prized—not eschewed—by the philosophical community.

After reflecting on both *epistemic* and *metaphilosophical* concerns, it should also become clear that the *moral* concerns described above are incomplete. Not only are *women* harmed by obstacles to their studying and working in philosophy, but *all persons* who might benefit from their scholarship and pedagogy are thereby harmed.

3.3. TOWARD PROGRESS

These considerations make it clear that change needs to occur, but figuring out how to achieve such change is a trickier matter. Given the unique challenges philosophy may face in improving the representation of women in the field, difficult questions arise as to how to make these improvements. Fortunately, many thoughtful suggestions have already been put forward. Readers interested in pursuing such improvements should turn to many of the authors discussed earlier, as well as to other works by philosophers (e.g., Paxton, Figdor, and Tiberius 2012), and by scholars in related disciplines such as law (Working Group 2004). To their specific suggestions, I wish only to add a few general remarks based on the considerations herein.

It is important for professors to be honest with ourselves if we are to improve the environments in our classrooms. The preponderance of research suggests that most of us, as human beings in contemporary society, probably *are* biased against women in some way. And we all know how easy it is to dismiss views we think are incorrect when we are trying to get through a lesson in a timely fashion. But because our attitudes toward statements may be biased against women's statements, and our dismissal of women's comments may therefore be unwarranted and unjust, we must countenance and work to counteract our social-prejudicial inheritance.

Although some people might view efforts to temporarily increase the proportion of women in philosophy—such as scholarship contests—as mere “patches,” I do not think that is the case. Any effort to improve gender equality in philosophy should strive to change what the face of the archetypical philosopher looks like. Therefore, seemingly short-lived changes to the gender composition of philosophy might have sustainable, permanent effects in improving egalitarianism in the field. Such changes may contribute to a positive sense among students and professors that women do, in fact, belong in the philosophy classroom if they so choose.

4. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The available evidence fails to support the idea that self-selection due to differences in philosophical belief is a major obstacle to the retention of women in philosophy classes. It simply is not the case that women leave philosophy because they “become

convinced that they aren't any good at philosophy, since they do not have the intuitions that their professors and their male classmates insist are correct" (Buckwalter and Stich 2014). Nor are there good reasons to think that the confrontational nature of the philosophy classroom is especially likely to lead women to opt out of the field. Gender equality has been steadily improving in similarly adversarial fields such as law, and surveys of philosophy students have failed to find that women leave the field because it is too adversarial. Thus, while an effort among professors to embrace students' "minority intuitions" (Beebe 2013) may improve the classroom experience for all students, it is unlikely to increase retention among women any more than among men. The assertion that it might do so only reinforces the very same "different voices" mindset that Antony so convincingly cautions against (Antony 2013).

Nonetheless, the lack of gender progress in philosophy is unique, not seen to the same extent in many cognate areas of higher education. This suggests that the forces keeping the proportion of women in philosophy at a standstill are not entirely independent of philosophy itself. After all, every academic department in the United States was at one time more inegalitarian, more dismissive of women's "essential" capacities, and more permissive of sexual discrimination and misconduct than the average philosophy department is today. Thus, the critical question is not why there are so few women in philosophy. The critical question is why there has been so little improvement in women's representation in philosophy, especially as compared to so many other disciplines. Only if we can identify the reasons for this special incorrigibility can we hope to make meaningful strides in improving gender diversity in philosophy.

This is not to say that those who complain that philosophy has long remained a misogynistic boys' club are mistaken. It is only to say that this point fails to explain the field's utter lack of gender progress in recent years. We need a deeper understanding of *why* interpersonal attitudes and person-perception might maintain such a tenacious role in determining the gender composition of philosophy. I have only scratched the surface of such an understanding, but in doing so, I hope to have revealed how valuable further explorations in this vein may be.

For philosophy to become more diverse, the steps the profession takes will have to go beyond—and not merely match—the steps taken to increase the numbers of women and otherwise underrepresented individuals in other fields. And for philosophy to be practiced and to develop in the most comprehensive way possible, it will have to become more diverse. Those who conceive of the gender imbalance in philosophy as a problem that concerns only women, or that only reduces the number of worthy minds tackling philosophical issues, have underestimated the problem. The depth and breadth of philosophy as a discipline depend crucially on the variety of human experiences and perspectives it is able to incorporate into the images of the world that it produces. By excluding women from philosophy, we as a profession are doing more than unfairly excluding individuals and losing their contributions to our efforts. We are cutting ourselves off from aspects of the world that we should be seeking to better understand and describe.

Albert Einstein wrote that "in any ontological question, our concern can only be to seek out those characteristics in the complex of sense experience to which those

concepts refer" (1934/1954). From this perspective, we can see how dire a problem the gender imbalance in philosophy poses, and how vital it is that we adjudicate that problem. Inasmuch as philosophy seeks to explain and make sense of as wide a swath of human experience as possible, the exclusion of people who have diverse experiences is not just of concern to those whose experiences are being excluded. Their exclusion leads to a poverty of understanding within the discipline itself.

NOTE

For invaluable comments on previous drafts, I am grateful to John Greenwood, Jennifer Mangels, Barbara Montero, Kaija Mortensen, Eddy Nahmias, Ian Olsav, Jesse Prinz, Hagop Sarkissian, and two anonymous referees. I am also grateful to Amanda Bryant, Elisabeth Hildt, Kelly Laas, Robert Ladenson, and Brian Leiter for helpful discussions regarding this paper's subject matter. Please note that the figures can be seen in color in the online version.

REFERENCES

- Adleberg, Toni, Morgan Thompson, and Eddy Nahmias. 2015. Do men and women have different philosophical intuitions? Further data. *Philosophical Psychology* 28 (5): 615–41.
- American Bar Association—Commission on Women in the Profession. 2014. A current glance at women in the law. http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/marketing/women/current_glance_statistics_july2014.authcheckdam.pdf (accessed December 22, 2015).
- Antony, Louise. 2012. Different voices or perfect storm: Why are there so few women in philosophy? *Journal of Social Philosophy* 43 (3): 227–55.
- Aquinas, Thomas. 1274. *Summa theologica*.
- Beebe, Helen. 2013. Women and deviance in philosophy. In *Women in philosophy: What needs to change?*, ed. Katrina Hutchison and Fiona Jenkins. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Brown, Lesley, ed. 1993. *The new shorter Oxford English dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Buckwalter, Wesley, and Stephen Stich. 2014. Gender and philosophical intuition. In *Experimental philosophy: Volume 2*, ed. Joshua Knobe and Shaun Nichols. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Burton, Lloyd, Elizabeth D. Gee, Larry Farmer, and Lorie Johnson. 1991. Feminist theory, professional ethics, and gender-related distinctions in attorney negotiating styles. *Journal of Dispute Resolution* (2): 199–257.
- Churchland, Paul M., and Patricia S. Churchland. 1981. Functionalism, qualia, and intentionality. *Philosophical Topics* 12: 121–45.
- Cohen, Jacob. 1988. *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences*. London: Routledge.

- Dougherty, Tom, Samuel Baron, and Kristie Miller. 2015. Why do female students leave philosophy? The story from Sydney. *Hypatia* 30 (2): 467–74.
- Einstein, Albert. 1934/1954. The problem of space, ether, and the field in physics. In *Ideas and opinions*, ed. Cal Seelig. Trans. Sonja Bargmann. New York: Wings Books.
- Fricker, Miranda. 2007. *Epistemic injustice: Power and the ethics of knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Friedman, Marilyn. 2013. Women in philosophy: Why should we care? In *Women in philosophy: What needs to change?*, ed. Katrina Hutchison and Fiona Jenkins. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gilligan, Carol. 1982. *In a different voice*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Gross, Alan G. 2006. *Starring the text: The place of rhetoric in science studies*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Haslanger, Sally. 2008. Changing the ideology and culture of philosophy: Not by reason (alone). *Hypatia* 23 (2): 210–23.
- Holtzman, Geoffrey. 2013. Do personality effects mean philosophy is intrinsically subjective? *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 20 (5–6): 27–42.
- Hutchison, Katrina. 2013. Sages and cranks: The difficulty of identifying first-rate philosophers. In *Women in philosophy: What needs to change?*, ed. Katrina Hutchison and Fiona Jenkins. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hutchison, Katrina, and Fiona Jenkins, eds. 2013. *Women in philosophy: What needs to change?*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Jackson, Frank. 1986. What Mary didn't know. *Journal of Philosophy* 83 (5): 291–95.
- James, William. 1884. What is an emotion? *Mind* 9 (34): 188–205.
- Mill, John Stuart. 1869/1988. *The subjection of women*. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Morrow, Paula C., James C. McElroy, Bernard G. Stamper, and Mark A. Wilson. 1990. The effects of physical attractiveness and other demographic characteristics on promotion decisions. *Journal of Management* 16 (4): 723–36.
- Mortensen, Kaija, and Jennifer Nagel. Forthcoming. Armchair-friendly experimental philosophy. In *A companion to experimental philosophy*, ed. Justin Sytsma and Wesley Buckwalter. Hoboken, N.J.: Blackwell.
- Moulton, Janice. 1983. A paradigm of philosophy: The adversary method. In *Discovering Reality*, ed. Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer.
- National Science Foundation. 2015a. Survey of earned doctorates. May 21. <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/srvydoctorates/#tabs-2> (accessed December 22, 2015).
- . 2015b. Survey of graduate students and postdoctorates in science and engineering. April 14. <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/srvygradpostdoc/#sdandtabs-2> (accessed December 22, 2015).
- Paxton, Molly, Carrie Figdor, and Valerie Tiberius. 2012. Quantifying the gender gap: An empirical study of the underrepresentation of women in philosophy. *Hypatia* 27 (4): 949–57.
- Ridgeway, Cecilia L., and Shelley J. Correll. 2004. Unpacking the gender system: A theoretical perspective on gender beliefs and social relations. *Gender and Society* 18 (4): 510–31.

- Saul, Jennifer. 2013. Implicit bias, stereotype threat, and women in philosophy. In *Women in philosophy: What needs to change?*, ed. Katrina Hutchison and Fiona Jenkins. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Scholz, Sally. 2015. Referees, gender neutrality, and diversity in publishing feminist philosophy. In H. Lindemann (Chair), Best practices in publishing. Symposium conducted at the Central Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association, St. Louis. February.
- Schwitzgebel, Eric, and Fiery Cushman. 2012. Expertise in moral reasoning? Order effects on moral judgment in professional philosophers and non-philosophers. *Mind and Language* 27 (2): 135–53.
- . 2015. Philosophers' biased judgments persist despite training, expertise, and reflection. *Cognition* 141: 127–37.
- Spencer, Steven J., Claude M. Steele, and Diane M. Quinn. 1999. Stereotype threat and women's math performance. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 35 (1): 4–28.
- Turing, Alan M. 1950. Computing machinery and intelligence. *Mind* 59 (236): 433–60.
- Winston, J. S., B. A. Strange, J. O'Doherty, and R. J. Dolan. 2002. Automatic and intentional brain responses during evaluation of trustworthiness of faces. *Nature Neuroscience* 5 (3): 277–83.
- Working Group on Student Experiences. 2004. Study on women's experiences at Harvard Law School. <http://www.law.harvard.edu/students/experiences/FullReport.pdf> (accessed December 22, 2015).