

The problem(s) of women in philosophy: Reflections on the practice of feminism in philosophy from contemporary Aotearoa/New Zealand

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Abstract

Philosophy has always had, and continues to have, a 'Woman Problem'. Women remain under-represented as students, as scholars, in journal publications – especially in 'top' journals – and as philosophical subjects. In this paper, I discuss recent feminist philosophical scholarship on this issue, differentiating what I identify as three related but distinct Woman Problems. I consider each of these, focusing in particular on what I label 'The (Anti) Feminist Problem'. I continue by analysing the marginalisation of feminist voices in philosophical discourses as a case of epistemic injustice. Employing elements of a feminist standpoint approach to enquiry, I go on to consider the way in which experiences and reflections that start from lives lived on the margins of the discipline can be a rich source of philosophical insight that is neglected because of philosophy's problem with feminism.

Keywords

philosophy, feminism, epistemology, epistemic injustice, feminist standpoint theory

Introduction

Philosophy has always had, and continues to have, a Woman Problem. Women remain under-represented as students, as scholars, in journal publications – especially in 'top' journals – and as philosophical subjects. In what follows, I discuss recent feminist philosophical scholarship on this issue, differentiating what I identify as three related but distinct Woman Problems. I consider each of these, focusing in particular on what I label 'The (Anti) Feminist Problem'. I continue by analysing the marginalisation of feminist voices in philosophical discourses as a case of what Miranda Fricker (2007) has called *epistemic injustice*. Employing elements of a feminist standpoint approach to enquiry, I go on to consider the way in which experiences and reflections that start from lives lived on the margins of the discipline can be a rich source of philosophical insight that is neglected because of philosophy's problem with feminism. Working from within epistemology provides a means of offering a discursive analysis of all and any thinking and knowledge production, thus enabling me to offer insights into philosophical practice itself. Further, as I discuss later, epistemology is one of the sub-fields of philosophy in which feminist work has managed to gain traction and in which there is at least some intersection and cross-fertilisation between feminist discourses and more centred discourses.

Women in philosophy: The current state of play

For women, philosophy is the least welcoming of the humanities disciplines. Women's underrepresentation as scholars, as students and as subjects of enquiry is unsurpassed by any other of those disciplines. It has a gender profile more similar to (though sometimes worse than) disciplines in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) areas¹. A gender gap exists at almost all levels, with men outnumbering women from undergraduate students

to professors. Until this year, across philosophy departments in New Zealand universities, men outnumbered women by 3:1. Further, as Rini (2013) discusses in depth, only one woman has been appointed to a permanent (but part-time) position in a New Zealand philosophy department since 2005, while 20 men have been appointed². In Australia, women hold 28% of continuing positions in philosophy departments, in the USA, the percentage has remained at around 21% for the past decade, while in the UK, it stands at around 25.4% (Hutchinson & Jenkins, 2013, Appendix 1).

In her seminal article on the situation of women scholars and students in philosophy, Haslanger writes of her 'rage' about how she and others have been treated and how many women and others who are marginalised in philosophical discourses and in the professional, academic practice of philosophy, continue the struggle to be recognised and respected as philosophers (2008, p. 210). As she and others note, many simply give up that struggle, some scholars are lost to more welcoming intellectual homes – to disciplines that are more outward looking – while others are lost to the academy altogether. Unsurprisingly then, a persistent theme in contemporary feminist scholarship in philosophy brings philosophical resources to bear in offering critical analyses and reflection on this situation and the reasons for it, as well as explanations of why philosophy has, thus far, proved so resistant to change. In this literature, roughly two types of hypotheses are present: one cites factors external to the practice of philosophy as such, but part and parcel of the way in which women in philosophy are thought about and evaluated (factors such as stereotype threat, evaluation bias and implicit bias), while the other cites factors internal to the practice of philosophy, such that philosophy feels like a game that is alien to many women, because the ethos with which it is pursued feels unwelcoming and the questions that it raises often seem irrelevant³. As Margaret Urban Walker writes,

The presence of concerns, texts, and images that acknowledge women within undergraduate classrooms, graduate training, and professional media allow women students to feel that a discipline, literally, comprehends them, and that it is a space that they are free to enter and expected to enter. (2005, p. 156)

But in the case of philosophy, the relative absence of women from academic philosophy, along with the absence of women from the content of philosophical discourse, perpetuates and reinforces the 'chilly climate' that women encounter in philosophy⁴.

Philosophy's woman problem(s)

This chilly climate is a manifestation of philosophy's 'woman problem', which can be delineated into three distinct, but related, problems as follows: the Woman Problem 1 (WP1) – the problem of women's absence (enumerated above) from the discipline qua professionals/practitioners and students; the Woman Problem 2 (WP2) – the problem of women's absence from the discipline qua its discourses, the texts, debates, problems and conversations of which it is comprised; and the (Anti)Feminist Problem (AFP) – the problem of philosophy's marginalisation of feminist work even though it is legitimately philosophy, and its refusal to grant proper status to gender-conscious and feminist work. So while WP1 concerns the status of women within the profession of academic philosophy and as students of philosophy, WP2 and AFP concern the status of philosophical work by and about women. While these questions are closely related, and each problem may well be causally related to the others, the three questions are often conflated. Here, I want to deal with them separately in order to demonstrate the ways in which they are each instances of epistemic injustice and gender marginalisation.

I will focus mainly on WP1 and AFP, saying less about WP2. However, it is clear that WP2 remains a genuine problem with a long entrenched history. Philosophical work by women is largely absent from what is considered to be the mainstream canon of philosophical thought, and women are neglected, their very existence doubted, in the genealogical narratives of philosophical ideas. For instance, Socrates is afforded the status of a kind of paterfamilias of philosophy, having been Plato's mentor/teacher. But Diotima of Mantinea, identified in Plato's *Symposium* as Socrates' teacher and the person to whom he owed his expertise on love, is not afforded the certainty of her own existence. Scholars question whether she was a real person (real philosopher) or a mere fiction constructed by Plato for the purposes of his philosophical narrative⁵. Another familiar (anti)exemplar is that of Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, who wrote on the mind-body problem and tends to be acknowledged as a correspondent of Descartes but not as a philosopher in her own right (Elisabeth, 2007). While WP2 has deep historical roots, it is not restricted to neglect of historical philosophical figures. For instance, despite a recent upsurge of scholarly interest in Iris Murdoch's work, in the popular intellectual imaginary she tends to be remembered more for her decline and death from Alzheimer's disease than for her work on moral theory, moral development, aesthetics, and philosophy and literature, among other topics⁶. In similar vein, an examination of textbooks and collections of readings designed for undergraduate philosophy courses, including those considered by reviewers to be among the best of their type, reveals this general tendency to neglect work by women, thereby reinforcing the first impression that philosophy is properly a male pursuit and that, typically, philosophers are men.

This is not to say that women's work, particularly feminist work, is absent from the practice(s) of philosophy. Indeed, discussions about the philosophical work of such historical figures as Diotima and Princess Elisabeth would most likely not even arise were it not for the work of feminist scholars in the history of philosophy, whose work, among other things, aims to restore women philosophers to the history of the discipline. In addition to revising the history of philosophy to include the works of previously neglected female philosophers, such as Margaret Cavendish (2000), Anne Conway (1996), Emilie du Châtelet (2009), Damaris Masham (2004) and Madelaine de Scudéry (2004), and ensuing recognition within the canon for philosophers such as Hannah Arendt, Simone de Beauvoir and Mary Wollstonecraft, feminist historians of philosophy offer critical re-readings and re-visionings of the traditional canon (Alanen & Witt, 2004). Australasian philosophers whose scholarship has resulted in rich contributions to feminist history of philosophy are Karen Green, Jacqueline Broad and Genevieve Lloyd (Broad & Green, 2009; Broad 2002; Lloyd 2002).

In feminist political and moral philosophy, recent thought includes a rich variety of work on topics such as (inter alia) autonomy (MacKenzie & Stoljar, 2000), vulnerability (Mackenzie, Rogers & Dodds, 2013), feminist politics (Zerelli, 2005; Krause, 2008, 2011), democracy (McAfee, 2008; Mouffe, 2000, 2005) and feminist approaches to issues in bioethics such as women's access to healthcare, reproductive ethics and biomedical technologies (Harwood, 2007; Kukla, 2005; McLeod, 2009; Mullin, 2005), globalisation, and health and applied care theory (Hamington & Miller, 2006). In the past 15 years or so, feminist philosophy has embraced intersectionality, recognising, analysing and theorising the interplay of diverse identities and oppressions. Thanks to the inter-connected nature of the questions and arguments it confronts and develops, much contemporary feminist enquiry in philosophy takes place at the intersections of the discipline's various sub-fields. New questions and new fields of enquiry are revealed in the interstitial spaces between the epistemic and the political, the metaphysical and the moral, and so on. This play of intersection flows through into the way in which specific questions are confronted and re-shaped. In metaphysics, feminist attention

to social kinds, social properties and the self often emphasises the self as relational, dynamic and embodied, thus connecting with questions about the metaphysics of embodiment and in turn acknowledging that the body is inscribed by sex, by race, by (dis)ability, by culture, and by nationality, opening up productive conversations between feminist metaphysics and critical race theorists, feminist disability theorists, and feminists working on health, illness and ageing (Alcoff, 2006; Garland Thompson, 1997; Gonzalez-Arnal, Jagger & Lennon, 2012; Kittay & Carlson, 2010; Kittay, Schriempf, Silvers, & Wendell, 2001, 2002). Meanwhile, feminist new materialists theorise the very materiality of the body, denying the post-structuralist claim that language is constitutive of the material, and thus of the body (Alamo & Hekman, 2008; Coole & Frost, 2010). Epistemology is another area in which feminist work has placed the relational and interconnected nature of lived experience at the forefront of theorising. In response to traditional, individualist conceptions of knowers, contemporary feminist epistemologists emphasise the contextualised and practical nature of enquiry and the relational interdependence of knowers. They point to the epistemic importance of communities as knowers and as contexts for coming to know. In recent years, epistemic (in)justice, the role of ignorance, and the (un)democratic structures of knowledge practices have provided rich veins of philosophical investigation for feminist epistemologists (Bohman, 2012; Fehr, 2011; Fricker, 2007; Intemann 2011; Medina, 2013; Townley, 2011; Tuana & Sullivan, 2006; Sullivan & Tuana, 2007; Wylie, 2011).

Clearly then, there is no absence of feminist work in contemporary philosophy, and within Australasia there are feminist philosophers contributing to these debates (see, for instance, Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2002; Mackenzie, Rogers & Dodds, 2013; Townley, 2011). But feminist work tends to remain on the margins rather than becoming accepted as one among a variety of approaches to philosophical questions. In part, this lack of a positive response to work by women is a result of the general absence of women from the discipline; that is, WP2 is caused in part by WP1. A lack of critical mass of women in many sub-fields of philosophy makes it harder to form the scholarly networks that would enable feminist work to gain recognition and become embedded beyond the margins of the discipline. The New Zealand philosophical community is perhaps a good example of these forces in play: the relatively small presence of women as academics and doctoral students in Philosophy departments here makes for a lack of critical mass among women in almost all sub-fields of philosophy, and means there is little potential for the formation of rich networks of philosophers working on feminist topics or using feminist approaches.

The woman problem 1

The relative absence of women from the philosophical canon reflects and reproduces the image of the philosopher in both the philosophical and the popular imaginary as a White man⁷. If the question 'Who/what is a philosopher?' is posed, the natural inclination is not to think of the philosopher as a woman. Even women themselves may seem to suppress this element of their identity. When asked what they do, women philosophers are more likely to say 'I teach philosophy', whereas men say 'I'm a philosopher'. Just as philosophy has historically failed to find a place for women as its subject, so it denies women space to *do* philosophy. Just *being* a woman philosopher can require a set of intricate negotiations both with oneself and with others that involve performing contortions of identity in order to be afforded credibility as philosophers by their colleagues and by their students. She tries to be a philosopher, but finds that she doesn't quite fit and isn't fully accepted by her (male) peers because she doesn't meet the markers of the philosopher norm. Women, and others who are similarly socially marginalised, then, remain

unlikely philosophers, misfits, who must negotiate space for themselves within the discourses of philosophy in ways that the majority of male colleagues appear to avoid, because they are taken more easily to embody the values and roles that are desirable in a ‘philosopher’, and in an ‘academic’ more generally. Since the *usual* philosopher is male, and White, we come to expect that, *normally*, philosophers are male, and White. Anyone else fails, in some gender- or race-determined way, to meet those norms. Of course, women can and do successfully ‘pass’ as philosophers, but the contortions of self that are required if one is to do so may feel like a perpetual duplicity. Crucially, the vast majority of men who are philosophers are not required to maintain this duplicity in order to earn and maintain their credibility as philosophers⁸.

An important source of women’s feeling of alienation from their role as a philosopher and from the practice of philosophy is the dominant culture within many philosophy departments. As Sally Haslanger points out (on the basis of her experiences in several departments), philosophy departments are often hyper-masculine and socially dysfunctional places. They are, she writes:

- competitive, combative (non-nurturing)
- highly judgemental
- oriented toward individual accomplishment, individual intelligence, and agency
- hostile to femininity (2008, p. 217).

These cultural features of the environment in which philosophy tends to be enacted on a day-to-day basis are so normalised that they have come to be thought of as inherent to philosophy. In the philosophical imaginary, this is what proper philosophical interaction and collegiality looks like. These behaviours and ethos provide the model and background against which PhD students and aspiring academics measure and develop themselves as philosophers, and thus the hyper-masculine pathologies of academic philosophy are reinforced and perpetuated – in the name of the Father.

When Iris Murdoch became a student at Somerville College, Oxford, in the 1930s, she was told that ‘women are still very much on probation in this University’ (Altorf, 2011). Alison Wylie (2011, p. 376) remarks, 85 years later, that little has changed in this respect. The ethos and practices that marginalise and exclude women from a full being as philosophers remain firmly in place despite an increase, since Murdoch’s day, in the numbers of women becoming students and scholars of philosophy and seeking to make the discipline their intellectual and professional home.

Although it would be both inaccurate and anachronistic to think of Murdoch as a feminist philosopher, her approach to philosophy can be seen as proto-typically feminist in so far as she sought to take everyday life and lived experience, as well as literature, as the reference point for her thinking⁹. In a similar vein, women who practise philosophy as feminist philosophers are committed to starting philosophical thought from within women’s lives and from a position of gender consciousness that is, and always has been, absent from philosophy more generally. But it is the very fact of this gender consciousness that has meant that despite consisting of a rich and varied array of discourses and achieving the critical mass that one might expect to lead to its recognition as a sub-field (or variety of sub-fields) within the mainstream of the discipline, feminist work in philosophy remains marginalised by the mainstream. In the next section, I discuss this marginalisation and canvass some reasons why it remains entrenched.

Philosophy’s (anti)feminist problem

As we have seen, over the past 35 years or so, feminist philosophy has grown substantially, both conceptually and in terms of the quantity of scholarship being undertaken and published and the number of philosophers participating in its discourses. Despite the presence of a rich

array of feminist work in the various sub-fields of philosophy, the extent to which it has gained any traction beyond its own, feminist, philosophical discourses varies quite considerably. One area in which feminist and other socially oriented contributions have received some degree of broader uptake is epistemology. Since Wilard Van Orman Quine's (1969) naturalising intervention in the 1960s, at least some epistemology has moved away from a priori theorising to take the empirical into account. This naturalising turn perhaps helped to make social and applied approaches to epistemology less alien to traditional discourses than they might otherwise have been and, it would not be unreasonable to think, the existence of social and applied approaches that take heed of social reality and of the epistemic qualities of agents might, in their turn, have made for a greater uptake of the rich array of feminist approaches in epistemology¹⁰.

As Heidi Grasswick remarks, when senior feminist epistemologists first began their careers, they recall being able to keep up with the literature across feminist philosophy (2011, p. xiii). Today, it is a challenge just to keep up with the literature in feminist epistemology itself. There seems a certain irony, then, in the fact that despite its broadening scope, its conceptual maturity and sophistication, and its international community of scholars, feminist philosophy remains on the margins of philosophy 'proper', considered illegitimate, not worthy of the attentions of the mainstream, and often disparaged. Philosophers practising philosophy as feminists have created safe and productive spaces in which to publish and discuss feminist work, spaces in which they feel at home and in which they escape the feeling of being both at home as a philosopher, yet unwelcome as a feminist. Outside of those discourses, however, feminist work tends to be treated as 'other' and as not fully credible as philosophy. Margaret Urban Walker (2005, p. 159) observes that while feminist philosophy might plausibly be thought of as having achieved the critical mass necessary to become mainstreamed, for its discourses to become part of the common conceptual property of the discipline, as they are in the study of literature, or in sociology, say, philosophy has resisted the inclusion of feminist discourses fully within its boundaries, preferring them to remain on the periphery where they can be better distanced from (what is considered to be) the genuinely philosophical. Walker identifies two aspects of this pattern of marginalisation. First, feminist philosophy has been institutionally marginalised. It may receive official recognition within the discipline – for instance, it may be listed as an area of competence or specialisation in job advertisements – but remains tagged and thought of in the professional philosophical imaginary as firmly bound down to its roots in feminism and in women. Philosophy practised in a gender-conscious manner, then, remains segregated and considered a special, minority, interest. With the segregation engendered by institutional marginality comes what Walker calls 'encapsulation', the tendency for the discourses of feminist philosophy to fail to gain traction beyond those engaged in feminist philosophy. Thus, not only is philosophy in general impoverished by its lack of engagement with feminist perspectives on a diverse range of philosophical debates and questions, but also feminist philosophy suffers from a lack of broader engagement with and within its discourses. Thus, feminist philosophy tends to turn inwards, its debates and developments taking place, in the main, in specialist journals and at specialist conferences, its philosophical insights, vibrancy, socio-political relevance, and critical contributions unexplored and unacknowledged by the vast majority of philosophers¹¹.

The marginalisation and othering of feminist philosophers and their work is both an ethical and an epistemic challenge. From an ethical perspective, it poses questions of equity, fairness, social inclusion and social justice. From an epistemic perspective, it is a question of injustice, of marginalising certain knowers, denying them full credibility within the inquiries of philosophy, and marginalising certain work, denying it full status as knowledge. The exclusion of particular

knowers, on the grounds of misplaced scepticism about the type of philosophy they do, limits the diversity of knowers and knowledge within philosophy, thereby undermining the prospects of complete inquiry. The epistemic injustice done to feminist philosophy also raises questions about the ethics of the profession. If we disregard or marginalise certain kinds of work – work that, arguably, strengthens philosophy – we aren't doing the best that we could to uphold the standards of the profession.

Among the original virtues of philosophical inquiry is the sense that anything is a site of legitimate philosophical investigation, even the standards and norms by which the discipline judges its own practices. And yet, the prejudices and ideologies that have been unduly influential in shaping the hegemonic understanding of what counts as philosophy and what its central concerns are and should be remain largely free of critical examination within the mainstream or 'core' discourses of philosophy. As a result, philosophy as a discipline fails to meet its own standards of enquiry. It has become, in the words of Robert Solomon (2001, p. 101), lamenting philosophy's failure to recognise its own cultural and historical boundedness and to take a critical perspective on standard conceptions of what it is, 'constricted, oppressive and ethnocentric', distant from the liberating concept it once was¹². In place of critical examination of these standards and norms, the burden of proof is placed squarely on the shoulders of those whose philosophical practices are marginalised. Scholars are asked to explain how 'your project is philosophy', to answer the question 'How is what you do philosophy?' Again, as Kirstie Dotson (2011, p. 407) points out, this represents a failure to uphold the very standards that such a questioner seems to think fail to be met by the project the legitimacy of which is being questioned. For the question commits the fallacy of complex question. It assumes that there is some standard accepted set of criteria by which philosophy is defined and then assumes that certain projects, questions and approaches fail to meet those criteria. Yet no critical examination of either the norms themselves or the assumption that there would be one set of defining characteristics that permits an enquiry to pass as philosophy has been performed within the discourses that are accepted as the mainstream of philosophy. There are no good grounds for the assumption that there is just one definitive way of thinking about philosophy. Indeed, the very existence of feminist philosophy in the Academy as well as that practised by other diverse people, seems, on the face of it, to undermine the assumption. Unless, of course, we are prepared to beg the question and deny that it is, indeed, philosophy. Moreover, as Dotson observes, when one presses for a justification for the assumption that a certain conception of what counts as philosophy is the single, correct, one, the responses – appealing to tradition, authority or personal intuition – are equally fallacious.

Why, then, the marginalisation and double standards? At least two distinct, but related, explanations can be canvassed. The first can be framed in terms of the result of an ideological reaction; the second, an arguably more philosophical reaction. Both reactions start from unjustified assumptions: in the first case, an assumption about what is permitted within the boundaries of philosophical discourses; in the second, an assumption about standards and norms of reason and objectivity.

From its outset, feminist philosophy has aimed to be transformative and liberatory, both of philosophy itself and of society more broadly. An upshot of this has been that the mainstream of philosophy has tended to view feminist philosophy as a potential threat to core philosophical values. While almost all philosophy aims to be critical in some sense, indeed, a critical stance has been taken by some to be definitive of what philosophy is, the critical stances taken by feminist philosophy may feel different because, informed by dialogue with other discourses – feminist theory, queer theory, critical race theory, post-colonial theory (inter alia) – its aim is not only to do philosophy, but also to change it by making it gender aware. Thus, feminist

philosophers' critiques often involve, but are by no means limited to, meta-philosophical critiques of existing philosophical discourses. Part of feminists' contribution to philosophy involves calling attention to the very presence of gender and to injustice, be it social, political, economic or epistemic. Engaging in such work can involve a degree of courage in the face of both professional and personal risk. Naturally, such work can be conceptually disruptive and unsettling for those embedded in discourses the rigour and fairness of which are being called into question. Feminist philosophers engage in a kind of epistemic disobedience that challenges the boundaries of what is considered speakable and thinkable within philosophy. Those challenges may be apprehended as a kind of dissent. Feminist philosophy, then, can be a kind of dissident philosophy.

What is more, as feminist philosophers, we do philosophy as an X – as a woman, as a feminist, as a woman of colour, as an indigenous woman, as a lesbian (inter alia). In doing so, in acknowledging and conceptually embracing our positionality, we issue a challenge to a conceptual framework that usually (normally!) goes unacknowledged. That framework generates the largely unexamined standards and norms that edge feminist and other, positioned, philosophical discourses out to the margins of the discipline. For to speak with a voice that knowingly locates one in terms of one's gender, class, race, or sexuality is to speak with a voice that is traditionally illegitimate in philosophy. In the mainstream philosophical imaginary, the gold standard of philosophical inquiry involves adhering to standards according to which objectivity requires neutrality and impartiality – an impossible view from no position at all that, among other things, serves to elide differences in gender, race, class and sexuality, and so on. This deeply ingrained commitment to gender-blind neutrality and impartiality is reinforced by the traditional approach to reading philosophical texts. In the analytic tradition prevalent in English-speaking academic philosophical communities, including Aotearoa/New Zealand and Australia, philosophy tends to be read as argument(s) and unacknowledged as text. Neglecting the hermeneutic in this way privileges and creates expectations of readings of philosophy that are ahistorical and asocial, with no attention paid to any external factors that may have influenced the author's thinking on the issue at hand. This philosophical folk story about objectivity and good inquiry encompasses the idea that any kind of positionality is suspect and poses a threat to pure, neutral, impartial inquiry. Reason is conceived of as embattled, as needing to defend itself. This narrative is itself gendered. A now familiar insight first articulated by Australian philosopher Genevieve Lloyd (1993) in her ground-breaking work, *The Man of Reason*, reveals the way in which philosophy operates according to internalised cognitive schemas, the genealogy of which can be found in Greek philosophy. Aspects of reason – impartiality, neutrality, the irrelevance of contextual factors, objectivity – are associated with and conceptualised as the masculine, while aspects of what is alleged to be unreason – passion, instinct, body, nature – are associated with and conceptualised as the feminine. Thus, reason is imagined as embattled, as constantly pressed to guard against the threat posed by the feminine, by unreason. So when we do philosophy from a feminist stance that not only acknowledges our gender, our class, our race, our sexuality, our lived experiences within those positionalities, but also seeks to bring those markers/concepts to bear as tools of analysis within philosophical discourses, it poses a threat not only to philosophy and the standards with which it has uncritically aligned and defined itself, but also to reason itself. In a far-reaching article on the 'ontological tyranny' of this particular conception of objectivity and of reason, Elizabeth Lloyd (1995, p. 368-9) notes the incongruity of acknowledging that various of our social practices should be taken into account when trying to gain an understanding of objectivity, truth, knowledge and meaning, while at the same time denying the relevance of sex and gender to that understanding, given that anthropologists overwhelmingly agree that those

roles are foundational to all other social structures and the practices that occur within them¹³. When we bring to mind the way in which feminist philosophy tends to induce nervousness in the mainstream of philosophy, light is shed on why sex and gender are neglected while other social practices are taken into account. The transformational goals of feminist philosophy, its agendas for change within the discipline and within society more broadly, make philosophy nervous because they are (in part) political goals and agendas and, according to the folklore that shapes the philosophical imaginary, the neutral, impartial sport of philosophy has no space for the political¹⁴. So a kind of blind spot develops with respect to the relevance of certain social structures and practices to philosophical inquiry. To do philosophy as an X – as a woman, as a feminist, as a working class woman, as a woman of colour, as an indigenous woman, as a lesbian, as a woman with a disability – then, remains, in itself, to do philosophy transgressively.

Epistemic injustice

Earlier I claimed that the marginalisation and othering of feminist philosophers and their work was not only an ethical but also an epistemic injustice perpetrated on someone in their role as a knower. In this section, I develop this idea drawing on the resources of Miranda Fricker's notion of epistemic injustice, which, though neither explicitly nor exclusively feminist, offers resources for an epistemic analysis of marginalisation of feminist philosophers and feminist philosophy as an instance of injustice.

Fricker identifies two types of epistemic injustice – testimonial injustice and hermeneutic injustice – both of which are, arguably, manifest in the relationship between feminist and mainstream philosophies. Testimonial injustice occurs when someone is denied credibility as a knower solely on some identity-related grounds, that is, for *ad hominem* reasons; for example, when we discount a child's testimony over that of an adult on the sole ground that, as a child, they could not possibly be as credible as an adult. So when a feminist philosopher is challenged to explain how their philosophical work qualifies as philosophy just because it is feminist, or when a philosophical approach is excluded as properly part of the 'Western intellectual tradition' purely on the *ad hominem* grounds that it is feminist, testimonial injustice occurs – the philosopher is being denied credibility within philosophical inquiry because her work is feminist. More generally, when a woman has the familiar experience of having her contribution to a philosophical discussion more or less ignored, only to be picked up enthusiastically when repeated by a man – the phenomenon of 'mansplaining' is alive and well in philosophy as elsewhere in the academy – testimonial injustice occurs: the woman is denied authority as an inquirer, while the man who articulates the same idea or question is not. Hermeneutic injustice occurs when there is unequal participation and authority within a discourse because of the marginalisation of some group(s) by another(s). The injustice occurs because the marginalised group is denied an equal role in shaping and determining the practices within which we make sense of certain aspects of the world and of our experiences of it. The lived result of hermeneutic injustice can be a cognitive dissonance whereby the discourses in which one tries to participate fail to provide the linguistic and conceptual means to express and make sense of one's experiences. Thus, many of the instances of meaning-generation that emerged from feminist consciousness-raising in the 1970s and 1980s can be understood as instances of the overcoming of hermeneutic injustice. For example, until feminist activism succeeded in reconceptualising the way in which sexual assault was thought of so that, eventually, the term 'date rape' was coined and there was a name for, and a way of understanding, rape that was perpetrated by someone that the raped woman already knew, an epistemic injustice occurred

because the norms of thinking and talking about rape – of what properly counts as rape – had been established and policed within practices from which women were largely excluded as equal participants and which failed to make sense of their experiences. Similarly, until women were able, collectively, to create discursive spaces in which they could rename and reconceptualise unwanted attention and abuse of power as sexual harassment and as something that should not be tolerated, rather than as men ‘having a bit of fun’ that any woman who is not ‘uptight’ ought to appreciate, a hermeneutic injustice occurred. Women were subjected to behaviour that was at best frustrating and at worst dangerous and frightening, but their marginalisation in relevant discursive practices meant that thought and talk were inadequate to express that frustration, fear and outrage¹⁵.

While it seems clear that a feminist experiences testimonial injustice in her role as a philosopher, it is perhaps less obvious that she experiences hermeneutic injustice in her role as a philosopher. For feminist philosophers do participate in philosophical discourses, and they are well versed in the conceptual resources that enable them to do so. However, we should bear in mind the observation made earlier that for all its success as an approach to doing philosophy in a gender-aware way, to bring philosophical attention to gender as an analytical resource of which the philosopher can and should avail herself, feminist philosophy has not yet had the influence on or acceptance within mainstream philosophical discourses that one might reasonably have hoped it to have had. So while there exists a wealth of rich and varied feminist philosophical discourses, in so far as feminist philosophers attempt to participate in mainstream discourses, feminist approaches remain hermeneutically marginalised within them. Feminist work in philosophy continues to be seen as suspicious and not really philosophy. So if feminist philosophical work provides a means by which gendered concerns and interests can be explored, critically analysed and furthered using philosophical resources and strategies, then its (partial) hermeneutical exclusion from mainstream philosophical discourses means that those discourses fail to afford conceptual resources for articulating and tackling those concerns and interests. While gender, race, class, sexuality and other markers of identity according to which people are first othered and then marginalised remain, if not wholly ignored, then at best neglected within mainstream discursive practices in philosophy, hermeneutical injustice continues to be perpetrated on feminist philosophers. The effects of this injustice lie not just in the (partial) silencing of feminist philosophers and philosophy within the mainstream, but in the alienation of women students who might otherwise have fully engaged with and stuck with philosophy had it been engaged with issues that concern and interest them, and in the loss to mainstream discourses of feminist insights into many of the issues with which its many sub-fields – metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of language, philosophy of science, ethics, bio-ethics, for example – are preoccupied. The original, ancient, philosophical preoccupation was with the humanistic question of how to live well, how to live a life in which one is fulfilled and fulfils one’s responsibilities and obligations to others and to society at large, a life through which one aspires to flourish – to achieve *eudaimonic* happiness. So the broader effect of the hermeneutic exclusion of feminist philosophy from philosophy’s mainstream is that the concerns, interests and experiences of those whom it marginalises are excluded from philosophy’s deeply rooted and long-standing investigation into how best human beings can live their lives.

In an attempt to extend and deepen Fricker’s account of epistemic injustice, in particular the idea of hermeneutic injustice, Gaile Pohlhaus Jr. (2012) developed the notion of wilful hermeneutic ignorance. This concept gives us a way of talking and thinking about what occurs when a collectively developed epistemic resource for dealing with some issue or injustice is intentionally dismissed, misrepresented or ignored by those who are privileged relative to the

situation. The reaction to many of the all too frequent instances of sexism and misogyny on university and college campuses seems to me to involve wilful hermeneutic ignorance. For instance, here in Aotearoa/New Zealand, a student at the University of Otago recently set up a 'Rack Appreciation Society' on Facebook to which users could post explicit pictures of women. When the University received a formal complaint, the student offered his apology to anyone upset or harmed by the page, while maintaining, apparently in mitigation, that 'It was created purely for a recreational purpose where people were able to share bikini-clad models and other professional pictures on the internet with their friends' (Leask, 2014). On other campuses, young men have reacted to codes of conduct that prohibit the use of university halls of residence internet provision for accessing pornography as unwarranted restrictions on their freedom of speech. Feminist theory and analysis provides the epistemic resources for members of university communities properly to make sense of what is going on when images of women are used in this way. Conceptual resources that aid understanding of why using images of women in these ways is oppressive, exploitative and objectifies women are easily accessed in intellectual communities, but many men (and some women) refuse to engage with and employ them, resorting instead to simplistic libertarian arguments.

Returning to the more specific arena of philosophy and the epistemic relationship between feminist philosophy and the mainstream, it seems to me that Pohlhaus's notion of wilful hermeneutic ignorance offers resources to explain and analyse the way in which mainstream philosophical discourses continue to neglect and ignore insights and conceptual interventions from feminist, and other marginalised, discourses within (with-out) philosophy. Take, for instance, a case considered earlier – conceptualisations of objectivity. We saw there that even those discussants who seek to overcome what Elizabeth Lloyd labels the 'ontological tyranny', even those who do recognise that the traditional conception of objectivity as neutral, impartial, disembodied and asocial offers a standard for objective enquiry and for understanding truth, knowledge and meaning that is both unattainable and conceptually incoherent, and who argue for taking social practices into account in philosophical investigations of meaning, truth and knowledge, refuse to acknowledge or simply neglect the role of gender (among other social markers) as a resource in philosophical investigation. Consistent with Pohlhaus's account, these resources have been developed collectively. They are openly available to the philosophical community, but the mainstream of philosophy remains wilfully ignorant of them, while arguing (see, for example, Searle, above) that feminist enquiry is flawed as enquiry. In the social world, wilful hermeneutic ignorance results, in the very least, in the harms of perpetuating and excusing misogynistic and sexist behaviours. In the philosophical world, it has the effect of not only perpetuating the marginalisation of feminist work and those who undertake it, but also hindering philosophy's original goals in coming to understand the world and to see how best one can live within it and with others¹⁶.

Epistemic advantage: Feminist philosophers as outsiders within

Although feminist philosophy and feminist philosophers have been unjustly marginalised, and the conceptual, critical and potentially transformative resources they offer have often been wilfully ignored by the mainstream, the position of feminist philosophers as insider-outsiders – insiders by dint of being authentic philosophers, outsiders by dint both of being women in the discipline and of practising the discipline as feminists – has the potential to afford them epistemic privilege in certain, relevant, contexts¹⁷.

Feminist philosophers are in a unique position from which to understand how things are within the discipline from gender perspectives. They occupy the position of insiders who enjoy

some degree of power and privilege both professionally and personally as philosophers, and as members of the Academy more generally, while at the same time they have an understanding, derived from lived experiences, of how things are from the position of someone who is marginalised as a result of her gender and the nature of her philosophical work. The dual vision available to someone in this position leaves her well placed to recognise the underlying assumptions and evaluative commitments that drive and shape the dynamics of power within the discourses of the discipline, while at the same time providing her with a critical frame of reference derived from her own experience as a philosopher within which potentially to gain a better understanding of the ways in which certain philosophers and approaches to philosophy are marginalised. Dual vision such as this, then, could form the basis of a feminist standpoint within philosophy, a standpoint that generates challenging questions about gender within philosophy.

Crucially, though, a standpoint is not simply a perspective that one occupies by dint of social location. It is an achieved collective identity or consciousness, a collective process that occurs in part through the recognition and acknowledgement of others who occupy more or less the same standpoint as oneself. A central tenet of feminist standpoint theories is that a standpoint is not merely a perspective occupied simply by dint of being a woman. Whereas that perspective may well provide the starting point for the emergence of a standpoint, a standpoint is earned through the experience of collective political struggle – through activism.

The epistemic and political advantages that can be accrued once a standpoint emerges are not limited to providing a truer account of the lives of those whose lived experiences form the basis of the standpoint, but of all of the lives and socio-political relations within which those lives are enmeshed. Starting enquiry within the lived experiences of the marginalised, mediated via the politicised consciousness that emerges within a feminist standpoint, reveals the way in which male-dominated ideologies distort reality. Standpoints make visible aspects of social relations that are unavailable from dominant perspectives and in so doing they generate questions that will lead to more complete and truer accounts of those relations. Feminist standpoint theorists have pointed out that, in order to survive within those structures within which one has been pushed to the margins, one is required to understand practices of marginalisation, to understand both the marginalised and the centred, but this epistemic bipolarity is neither required of nor available to the dominant. The double vision afforded via the social location of women and other marginalised groups can provide the epistemic advantage of insights into social relations that are unavailable to the non-marginalised.

In the case of the professional practice of philosophy, then, in certain cases, at certain moments, a feminist standpoint has been achieved. Feminist philosophers have formed informal communities that have enabled them, in the first instance, simply to share their experiences of marginalisation and professional challenges, and then to go on to issue challenges to the philosophical mainstream that seek productively to disrupt and to transform both the political and social structures of the profession and the form and content of philosophical discourses. Thus, feminist standpoints on philosophical practice and philosophical issues have emerged, and as a result of those standpoints, feminist philosophy itself has flourished within its own communities, and women are doing feminist work in almost all areas of philosophy. The effects of this on philosophical discourses are the emergence of new questions and new interpretations, the removal of falsehoods, and hence, new understandings of our being in the world and with each other.

However, as remarked earlier, the relative isolation of women in philosophy departments can make the formation of a feminist community of enquiry challenging. While it is possible to be part of informal communities that are globally distributed, because it is usual (and *normal*)

for a woman to be the sole feminist in a department it can be difficult to form collectives of feminist philosophers locally and to share experiences and solidarity on a day-to-day basis, and this undermines the possibilities for the emergence of feminist standpoints within philosophy. So while feminists (and women more generally) in philosophy are undoubtedly located in insider-outside spaces from which they can potentially benefit epistemically, their relative isolation from one another makes collective activism more difficult. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, for example, while some women philosophers are working together effectively to seek changes in the social and political structures of the discipline, feminist philosophy itself has a tiny presence, and those of us working in the field must look overseas to form communities. So while we may accrue epistemic and political advantage from our insider-outsider location, only political advantage is able to be employed productively in local collective action.

This situation exemplifies a further point about the challenges of establishing feminist standpoints that also plays out in philosophy: while the outsider-within position can afford the epistemic advantage of double vision, in the absence of the kind of political context and consciousness of which a standpoint is constituted those benefits can remain unrealised – for instance, as women philosophers suppress their identities as women and as feminists in order to pass as philosophers. As Uma Narayan has argued, it should be acknowledged that there is a ‘dark side’ (as cited in Harding, 2004, p. 221-3) to being an insider-outsider, and women adopt various survival strategies. In order best to negotiate and cope with the various contexts in which she finds herself having to operate, a woman might suppress part of herself in some of those contexts while assuming the persona best suited to each. Thus, some women emphasize only those characteristics considered valuable in their professional context, allowing themselves to be women and feminists only in private contexts. Alternatively, a woman might simply try to imitate the traits, habits and practices of the dominant group while suppressing herself entirely. For the feminist standpoint theorist, an alternative to these strategies is to attempt to remain within the contradictory contexts, but to do so critically. This is, potentially, the most epistemically powerful response, but it is also the most challenging given the risk of alienation from oneself and from those with whom one may have the most in common, and given the challenges of working in isolation from potential allies.

The difficulty of surmounting such challenges might account, in part, for the tension inherent in many feminist standpoint theorists’ accounts of epistemic insight. This tension arises between, on the one hand, recognition that epistemic insights occur as a result of an *individual’s* insider-outsider experience and, on the other, the central claim that a standpoint is a *shared*, rather than an individual, achievement. Perhaps the existence of this tension reinforces the claim that, while epistemic insight is achievable on the basis of individual insider-outsider experience, it is only from the political context and shared consciousness of a standpoint that such insights can be truly advantageous and move those within it from improved understanding of the realities of their lives towards social and political change.

Although it pre-dates Fricker’s account of epistemic injustice, feminist standpoint theory can be understood as an attempt to address both testimonial and hegemonic epistemic justice. With its emphasis on starting thought from women’s lives, from their lived, embodied, experiences, a standpoint approach has the potential to redress testimonial injustice in the first instance by recognising the marginalised as credible knowers, whose testimony and contribution to enquiry is as valuable as that of those whose social location is further from the margins¹⁸. Once a standpoint is achieved, a powerful collective voice can emerge that demands, and gains, credibility with respect to accounts of how the world is when one is marginalised in a particular way and how the centre looks when one is out on the margins, thereby overcoming testimonial injustice.

With respect to hermeneutic injustice, a standpoint approach to knowledge has the potential to redress injustice by offering a means by which the marginalised can come to participate in determining the practices by which we give meaning to and make sense of their experiences of being in the world and with each other. The achievement of a standpoint involves the carving out of a discursive space within which the marginalised are empowered to find, and own, language and concepts that make proper sense of their lives and enable them to articulate their experiences in ways that disrupt and, potentially, transform the discourses within which they have, up to now, been misrepresented and muted. With respect to philosophical discourses, then, the achievement of standpoints by feminists in the discipline has provided a route to reclaiming credibility and authority as a philosophical enquirer, and has offered a way in which (some) feminist philosophers have been able, collectively, to create spaces within and shift the boundaries of certain philosophical discourses and debates. Indeed, Fricker's work on epistemic injustice is itself an example of an influential re-framing of thinking about knowledge in terms of power relations.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have presented reflections on the role and status of feminist philosophy within the discipline, drawing on conceptual resources from within feminist epistemology itself to provide an analysis of the situation for women practising philosophy as feminists and of the reception and take up of their work. I have discussed philosophy's 'Woman Problem', delineating three connected, but different problems: WP1 – the absence of women from the discipline of philosophy qua teachers, researchers and students; WP2 – the absence of women from the discipline qua its discourses, the texts, debates, problems and conversations of which it is comprised; and APF – the problem of the marginalisation of feminist philosophical work. I have analysed the causes of these problems, arguing that WP2 and APF are a result, in part, of WP1. I have observed that the Aotearoa/New Zealand philosophical community provides an example of those forces in play. We represent a relatively small presence in a relatively small community, making for a lack of critical mass among women in all sub-fields of philosophy, generating little potential for the formation of rich networks of philosophers working on feminist topics or using feminist approaches. I have provided an in-depth analysis of APF, arguing first that the necessarily politicised nature of feminist philosophy has been seen (wrongly) as a potential threat to core philosophical values; and second, that the acknowledged situatedness of feminist philosophical approaches and voices means that they are considered transgressive, the result of which is continued marginalisation from the mainstream of philosophical discourses. Drawing on Miranda Fricker's work, I have argued that the situation of feminists in philosophy is a case of epistemic injustice, both testimonial and hermeneutic. More positively, in the final section of the paper I have considered the extent to which feminist philosophers have been able to achieve standpoints within philosophy and the barriers to and risks attendant in doing so. I have argued that, at certain moments, feminist philosophers have succeeded in achieving feminist standpoints. While the formation of globally distributed informal communities has perhaps become easier thanks to the possibility of forming digital communities, the relative isolation of feminists in philosophical communities, as is the case in Aotearoa/New Zealand, continues to make the formation of genuine standpoints challenging for feminist philosophers. In keeping with my intention of providing reflection on women's situations as feminists in philosophy in the early decades of this century, I have provided a snapshot of feminist work in many of philosophy's sub-fields. Sadly, very little of this work originates from Aotearoa/New Zealand. Significantly, the piece I have cited focuses on WP1 (Rini, 2013). Until we overcome

that, the potential for the formation of feminist communities of enquiry and for a strong body of feminist philosophical work emerging from here remains somewhat limited.

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Notes

- 1 But while the underrepresentation of women in those disciplines is considered an educational, economic and political issue, and public and private resources are directed into initiatives to encourage and promote women into and within STEM disciplines, the relative absence of women from philosophy goes unnoticed beyond the discipline.
- 2 Partly as a result of pressure from women in the profession in Aotearoa/New Zealand, three women have been appointed to positions in philosophy in the past 12 months: one to a continuing position, two to fixed-term positions.
- 3 For a detailed account of stereotype threat, evaluation bias and implicit bias as they occur in academia, see Valian (1998).
- 4 For more on the concept of the chilly climate, see Hall and Sandler (1982, 1984).
- 5 For more on Diotima, the woman and the philosopher, see Waithe (1987, Vol I).
- 6 See Altorf (2011) for an insightful critical reading of biographies of Murdoch, particularly their limited attention to gender issues, and how this has affected portrayals and understanding of Murdoch as a philosopher.
- 7 In a recent Guardian article (Ratcliffe & Shaw, 2015), Patrice Haynes, a Black woman philosopher based in the UK, recounts her father's reaction to her announcement that she wanted to pursue a Master's in Philosophy – He was 'pretty horrified. Philosophy is for posh White boys with trust funds.'
- 8 The blog What is it like to be a woman in philosophy? is a rich source of testimony regarding women's day-to-day experiences in the profession of academic philosophy. <https://beingawomaninphilosophy.wordpress.com/>
- 9 It is fair to say, though, that Murdoch's diurnal lived experiences – as a privileged middle-class Oxford academic married to another academic – were in many ways untypical of most women of her time.
- 10 I am grateful to Miranda Fricker for this suggestion (private conversation). A similar pattern can be seen in Philosophy of Science where the very nature of science requires that the actuality of the (scientific) world cannot be entirely disregarded in philosophical theorizing.
- 11 It should be acknowledged that as philosophy becomes ever more specialised into narrower and narrower sub-fields, philosophers themselves, especially emerging scholars, tend to become more and more specialised in the scope of their interests and expertise, and, to a certain extent, this is understandable in those who want to survive in an absurdly competitive employment market. That said, however, other sub-fields tend not to be dismissed as unreflectively and on such specious grounds as feminist philosophy tends to be.
- 12 Solomon is concerned, in the main, with drawing attention to the way in which discourses of philosophy – the historical and cultural origins of which lie elsewhere than Western – enlightenment traditions are also marginalised by the mainstream(s) of Western philosophy, but his point applies equally well to feminist philosophical discourses.
- 13 Lloyd is discussing the work of Stanley Cavell, John McDowell and John Searle, authors who do address the ontological tyranny and seek to overcome it, yet, in the face of anthropological evidence to the contrary, neglect the role of sex and gender in determining and maintaining our meaning-making practices. That is not to say, however, that their approaches are such that they do not admit of interstitial spaces into which analyses of the roles of sex and gender could be inserted via feminist enquiry.
- 14 An emphasis on neutrality and impartiality are also part of imaginary of a broader, 'Western rationalistic tradition', which is allegedly under threat from political agendas. See Searle (1993, pp. 72, 74).
- 15 I am by no means saying that naming an experience takes away the trauma and the moral injustice – the substantive injustice – but the accompanying epistemic injustice serves to perpetuate that substantive injustice. As recent campus and legal initiatives in the UK and the USA demonstrate, it is still the case that we have to keep on explaining and finding new ways of getting men to understand that 'no' means 'no'. It is still the

- case that some men won't accept that calling out to women on the street, for example, is unacceptable and is harassment. See the Everyday Sexism blog for myriad accounts of women's experiences on the streets, on public transport, in the workplace, and so on. These refusals to accept that certain behaviours are unacceptable exemplify what Gaile Pohlhaus Jr (2012), has called 'wilful hermeneutical ignorance', which I discuss shortly.
- 16 Of course, epistemic injustice is relative. As Althorff acknowledges (2011, p.398), the treatment of women and feminist philosophy within the profession of philosophy is by no means the most egregious example of epistemic, or social, injustice to which one can point and, as I have noted, as academics, feminist philosophers, particularly those in tenured positions, enjoy a life of relative epistemic, social, political and economic privilege.
 - 17 Though, of course, that authenticity is often called into question and undermined within the discourses that dominate the discipline.
 - 18 Of course, other factors influence someone's value as a knower in a particular situation. In the case of specialised technical knowledge, for instance, the knowledge of someone who is appropriately trained, is more likely to be helpful than that of the untrained. We are more likely to trust the trained mechanic to work out why our car won't start, for example, than we are our accountant neighbour.

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