

# Philosophy for Everyone: Considerations on the Lack of Diversity in Academic Philosophy<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The lack of diversity in academic philosophy has been well documented. This paper examines the reasons for this issue, identifying two intertwining norms within philosophy which contribute to it: the assertion that the Adversary Method is the primary mode of argumentation and the excessive boundary policing surrounding what constitutes “real” philosophy. These norms reinforce each other, creating a space where diverse practitioners must defend their work as philosophy before it can be engaged with philosophically. Therefore, if we are to address the diversity issue, these norms must change. I advocate for the community of philosophical inquiry to serve as a new standard of practice, as it requires a simultaneous reimagining of both norms, thereby addressing the issues that arise from the two elements working in tandem. With its emphasis on epistemic openness and constructive collaboration, and a broader definition of philosophy which conceptualizes it as a method of questioning/analyzing rather than a particular subject matter, I posit that its implementation would facilitate a more welcoming climate for diverse practitioners. While these changes are unlikely to solve the diversity problem “once and for all,” I argue that they would significantly help to improve it.

**Keywords:** professional philosophy, diversity, adversary method, community of philosophical inquiry, epistemic openness.

## Introduction

Philosophy has a diversity problem. Whether we look at the range of social identities represented by practitioners of philosophy or the range of subfields represented in the canon of philosophy, the lack of diversity is apparent. Given the academy’s history, it isn’t surprising that the *historical* canon is constituted overwhelmingly by white men. However, the problem is more significant given the *present* composition of the field. While many fields have diversified, philosophy lags behind. For example, women received only 29% of PhDs in philosophy between 2009-2014, as compared to 51% in humanities as a whole

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(Schwitzgebel and Jennings 2017). What's more, the proportion of women in philosophy reliably decreases across academic standing (i.e., introductory courses, majors, graduate, faculty) suggesting significant barriers to women's advancement in the field (Praxton, Figdor, and Tiberius 2012). People of color fair much worse. For example, in 2014, only 7.9% of all philosophy doctorates were awarded to traditionally underrepresented racial/ethnic minorities, as compared to 31% for women (Humanities Indicators). Black people represent a particularly small percentage. While 13% of Americans identify as black or African American, only 2% of PhDs in philosophy are awarded to black individuals (as compared to 7% across disciplines) and less than 0.5% of authors published in the most prominent philosophy journals are black (Cherry and Schwitzgebel 2016). At the time of Botts et al.'s (2014) survey, completed in May 2013, only 55 black women were identified in philosophy in the United States, a number unlikely to have risen much since, given the slow rate of racial diversification within the field (Shorter-Bourhanou 2017).

It isn't just diverse practitioners either. Non-traditional subdisciplines of philosophy (e.g., critical race theory, feminist philosophy) are widely undervalued, treated as less prestigious than their more traditional counterparts. As Gordon (2019) puts it, "At many philosophy conferences, 'the good old boys' point toward feminist and African American philosophers disdainfully with, 'They are not philosophers ... they're *sociologists*'" (sec. 2, para. 1). Indeed, philosophers from marginalized social groups are more likely to work in non-traditional subdisciplines (Alcoff 2013). Cherry and Schwitzgebel (2016) describe it as "a double whammy. Before one writes or opens one's mouth, cultural biases favor white men over others. After the words come out, cultural biases favor a certain style" (para. 15). For example, the top areas of specialization for black philosophers in the U.S. are Africana, Race, Social and Political, Ethics, and Continental and, for black women philosophers specifically, Race, Social and Political, Ethics, Continental, and Feminism (Botts et al. 2014).

While there are indeed differences across the range of philosophers mentioned above, following Dotson (2012) I refer to them collectively as 'diverse practitioners of philosophy.'<sup>2</sup> This is not meant to conflate the varied experiences of people who fall into the range of diverse social identities and philosophical approaches; of course, intersecting identities and philosophical practices will create a range of experiences. However, by adopting such a term, we can examine the experiences shared by many diverse practitioners.

While a number of issues may contribute to this "chilly climate" for diverse practitioners, in this paper I identify two intertwining norms of practice in

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<sup>2</sup> This term is meant to "refer to notoriously under-represented populations within western, academic philosophy. As a result, my use of 'diversity' here is meant to include not only racial, ethnic, gendered, sexual, and ability diversity, but to also include diverse approaches to philosophy, Eastern, applied, engaged, fieldwork, field, public, experimental, literary approaches, etc." (Dotson 2012, 5).

academic philosophy which I argue are particularly problematic if we wish to make the field more welcoming to them: the Adversary Method and the strict boundary policing of what is and is not taken to be philosophy. While these two norms have been well-documented within the field and have been considered separately, by examining them as a mutually reinforcing pair, we can better understand how the interaction creates a particularly hostile environment for diverse practitioners. In response, I propose an alternative to the standard practices, building on the approach of the Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI) adopted from Philosophy for Children (P4C) programs (Lone & Burroughs, 2016). If we wish to find practical ways to mitigate the diversity issue in academic philosophy, a fundamental shift in the norms of the field is essential. I argue that the CPI model is particularly well-equipped to fill this role by simultaneously questioning and reimagining both norms in tandem.

### **The Norms of Academic Philosophy**

While there is no singular way to practice philosophy, there are undoubtedly norms of practice that dictate acceptable methods and content within the English-speaking world. I start with the standard method – the Adversary Method – and then turn to the standard content, looking at how boundaries are policed. After considering each norm in turn, I then examine how they mutually reinforce each other, negatively impacting diverse practitioners.

#### **Method**

The predominant mode of argumentation expected of academic philosophers has been termed the Adversary Method by Janice Moulton ([1983] 1996). She explains that “the philosophic enterprise is seen as an unimpassioned debate between *adversaries* who try to defend their own views against counterexamples and produce counterexamples to opposing views” (14). The use of this method is often likened to war, where opposing sides do battle, attempting to tear down their opponent’s argument. The argument left standing at the end of this trial-by-fire “wins.” In this way, “it is assumed that the only, or at any rate, the best, way of evaluating work in philosophy is to subject it to the strongest or most extreme opposition. And it is assumed that the best way of presenting work in philosophy is to address it to an imagined opponent and muster all the evidence one can to support it” (14).

Argumentation theorists often mirror this language. For example, Bettinghaus (1966) states that “[a]rgumentation is unique in its implication of controversy. It is difficult to imagine an argumentative speech in which there is no suggestion of an opposing side or, perhaps, of opposing speakers” (145). Still, Stevens and Cohen (2019) note the dangers of this argumentation style: “too much of it can turn a largely cooperative deliberation into a competitive negotiation, which in turn can spiral out of control into a no-holds-barred

quarrel!" (1). While this argumentation style isn't unique to philosophy, Moulton ([1983] 1996) is not the only one to note its particular hold on the field. Both proponents and detractors of the Adversary Method have recognized its prominence in philosophy (e.g., Garry 1995; Govier 1999; Aikin 2011; Dotson 2011; Hundleby 2013).

These facts alone do not necessarily mean that its use is problematic. It is oftentimes thought to be the best way to ascertain the truth. Yet as Moulton ([1983] 1996) holds, counterexample reasoning, a hallmark of the Adversary Method, is simply "not a good way to reach conclusions about complex issues" (21). It demonstrates that a particular argument in favor of some position is inadequate but does not help us reach any conclusion with our interlocutors. If the aim is to destroy the other's argument rather than build understanding, then other types of reasoning, which may be just as or more valuable in certain contexts, get left out.

Dotson (2011) echoes Moulton's worry, stating that "if the adversarial method becomes privileged as 'the' way to conduct oneself philosophically, such privileging renders other forms of philosophical engagement inherently 'unphilosophical'" (404). This approach neglects (1) people who may be uncomfortable adopting a more combative style of reasoning and (2) other philosophical traditions that place more emphasis on collaborative reasoning, painting them as inherently less philosophical.

The claim that the Adversary Method is more suited for men, and particularly white men, on account of their socialization and the limiting gender norms of politeness placed on women has been argued for by many (e.g., Moulton [1983] 1996; Burrow 2010; Hundleby 2013). Moeller (1997) describes her struggle to adapt to the highly adversarial environment of her graduate program, summarizing it succinctly and humorously: "At graduate school, I was enrolled in seminars in which men often outnumbered women three to one. The style of philosophy was often ruthlessly combative. Some women in the department came to describe the dominant discussion style as 'penis-waving'" (128). Continuing, she describes the feelings elicited in such spaces where the Adversarial Method was clearly the norm: "During graduate philosophy seminars, I often went into extreme panics, as discomfort with narrow intellectualist arguments in seminars gave way to feelings of danger at my visceral experience of male domination. The seminars may have been on philosophical topics, but the mode of argument felt like verbal, sexist violence" (128). Similar experiences have been widely shared by women in philosophy at a broad range of institutions (e.g., see Alcoff 2003).

## Content

As noted, 'philosophy' is often taken to be, specifically, traditional Western philosophy. Having one's work accused of not being "real" philosophy is a common experience shared by diverse practitioners. Dotson (2012) notes the

experience of being asked the question ‘How is this paper philosophy?’ upon presenting her work. As she explains, being asked this question is “undoubtedly a slight, whether the question-asker sees it that way or not. It is both a charge and a challenge” (8). It indirectly asserts that the paper is not believed to be philosophy, demanding the author to defend their paper as such before it be taken seriously. Syl Ko (Ko and Ko 2019) also notes this type of boundary policing in writing about her experiences as a philosophy graduate student:

[T]here’s been a general failure to investigate the walls separating one discipline or field from another – and the same with subfields – and how this plays into keeping things as they are. I came up against these disciplinary walls so many times when I was trying to plan out my dissertation research. I can appeal to *this* writer or tradition, but not *that* one because, technically, that one isn’t ‘real’ philosophy ... it’s ‘only’ cultural studies or history or something like that. If you try to push against this, now you’re infecting the methodology so *clearly* you don’t quite ‘get’ it yet! (53)

Similarly, Jenkins (2014) recounts an experience she had in grad school after explaining her work on the metaphysics of gender categories to a peer: “[H]e confidently told me, ‘That’s not philosophy’ – adding (presumably for good measure) that neither was it ‘interesting’” (262). She explains that “[f]eminist philosophy may be viewed as suspiciously close to sociology, politics or cultural criticism. I suspect that this marginalisation is the main factor in dismissive attitudes of the kind expressed by the graduate student who told me that my work...is ‘not philosophy’” (264).

Even in instances where there may *appear* to be some uptake to diverse work, it is not always very robust. For example, Anika Mann (Allen et al. 2008) writes:

My struggle has been trying to figure out ways to bring my blackness and my femaleness together with philosophy and to find acceptance of such philosophical worth within the academy. I think that most departments, to be honest, give lip service to this kind of acceptance. ‘Yes, we’d love to have someone come here to do African American philosophy. We’d love someone to come and do feminist philosophy and try to bridge these gaps.’ But when you actually come and say, ‘OK, this is what I’m going to do,’ then you get, ‘What philosophy do you *really* do?’... The implication becomes, ‘What within the *mainstream* Western canon can you really do?’ (172-3)

This is not to say that philosophy departments which genuinely value these types of philosophy don’t exist, only that they seem to be rare. Gines (2011) speaks to the difference working in such a department makes, describing her experience of being in a space that encouraged her to “examine philosophy through the lenses of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation while also being prepared to interrogate these very categories and concepts with the theoretical tools available to philosophy” as “affirming and transformative” (429-430).

Moeller (1997), however, points to an issue specific to analytic philosophy:

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When we new graduate students discussed our interests, I talked about feminism and rethinking of ethics. One graduate student after another asked incredulously why I had come to philosophy to study *that*. One older student made a sweeping judgment that he did not care for any of the work I liked, since he cared about 'clarity and rigor.' I would later learn that insistence upon 'clarity and rigor,' the slogan of standards in analytic philosophy, can be used to belittle and discredit anything which a traditional philosopher does not understand or does not want to understand. (128)

Gines (2011) attributes the fact that her graduate philosophy department "took seriously the value of race and gender diversity among graduate students and faculty beyond mere lip service and tokenism" to it being "pluralistic in the sense that it offered training in both the analytic and continental philosophy traditions" (430). This may be due to phenomenology, perceived as a distinctly continental branch of philosophy, being the birthplace of certain fundamental concepts to feminist philosophies and philosophies of race, such as embodied experience. For example, Marcano (Allen et al. 2008) attributes the relative acceptance of her work on race with working within the continental tradition: "Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (SPEP) is the place where I can do stuff on race and it's also the place where I have felt significantly more comfortable in thinking about black feminism and philosophy's role. It hasn't been at the APA" (188).

While diverse forms of philosophical work do have specialized journals and conferences, they are still marginalized. Smaller, specialized journals often have lower impact factors and are often simply not taken as seriously, even in cases where they may be just as competitive as more mainstream journals. Cudd (2002) explains: "While there is a feminist journal of philosophy, *Hypatia*, it is still difficult to get one's male colleagues to accept it as equally valuable as, say, *Philosophical Studies*, which has about the same reported acceptance rate" (13). Yet higher impact, mainstream journals often do not accept what they may consider to be "specialized" work, leaving specialized philosophy journals and journals in other fields to be the only options: "The virtual absence of feminist philosophy in [high-ranking journals] stands in stark contrast to the acceptance of feminist work in other humanities and social sciences" (Haslanger 2008, 216).

### **Consequences for Diverse Practitioners**

Dotson (2012), drawing from her experience as a black woman in philosophy, states "philosophy is *seen* as a 'white man's game' and I am often made to feel a sense of incongruence as a result of that impression" (4). This "sense of incongruence" can, and does, come from both direct and indirect forms of gatekeeping against diverse practitioners. Gines (2011) describes being asked why she chose to go into philosophy, answering both regarding her passion for philosophy and her desire to change the "dismal numbers of Black women philosophers" (433).

Upon hearing this, the interviewer was surprised that I would go into such a white-male-dominated discipline rather than running in the opposite direction... I am often annoyed by this reaction to my being a philosopher. I wonder, 'Why wouldn't I (or *shouldn't* I) because of (or in spite of) my embodied existence – that is, my embodiment as a Black woman – be interested in philosophical reasoning and fields of inquiry?' I think to myself, 'Who gave white men ownership of philosophical discourse?' (433)

Similarly, Bell (2002) reflects on her experiences on hiring committees over her 40 years as an academic philosopher:

I have seen women and minority men with superb qualifications culled out of searches, some quite recent ones, owing to the vocal and mean-spirited opposition of a few colleagues... [They] assur[ed] me that they are indeed open, even anxious, to hire a woman or a minority man – if *only* one who was good enough would present herself or himself since, as they have actually and quite earnestly said, all they really want is to hire 'the best man for the job.' Then they lead the charge to hire yet another White man... I leave angry and amazed at the often incredible ways that those allegedly much prized standards shift from candidate to candidate and from search to search. (251-2)

This is not to suggest that those described by Bell and others like them are doing this from a place of overt racism or sexism. She notes that they respond to such accusations "with protestations of great indignation at being so misunderstood and even falsely accused" (251). Rather, this account highlights the insidious ways in which unconscious biases can influence decisions about who is allowed to work in the field.<sup>3</sup>

For those diverse practitioners that do get hired, going up for tenure produces similar experiences. As Cudd (2002) explains:

For example, a woman is denied tenure on the grounds that her work is not 'high quality' or not 'philosophical,' as judged by the perceived quality and titles of the journals she publishes in. It turns out that journals that her colleagues count as top quality philosophical journals turn down (as insufficiently philosophical), without review by referees, any article that considers gender to be a significant category of philosophical analysis. But the journals that she does publish in are considered 'non-mainstream' in the profession (e.g., they have 'feminist' in their titles or subtitles). (10)

Additionally, Superson (2002) explains that "[t]hose who work in feminism often are not credited or even docked for not publishing in such journals even if their [reviewers] have not done so. Even when their work is published in 'top tier' journals, reprinted in anthologies, and meets other standards of professional excellence... a biased department can discredit it" (103). Jenkins (2014) recognizes the double bind in which this places feminist philosophers: One can either adopt the status quo, sacrificing the value they put in feminist philosophy but maintaining the resources needed to work in the field,

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<sup>3</sup> For further analysis of implicit bias in philosophy, see Brownstein and Saul (2016).

or one can pursue the research which they value, challenging the status quo, with the risk of being pushed out of the field in these ways. While the authors cited here are largely focused on feminist philosophers, this can just as easily apply to any diverse practitioner. For those whose work is outside the mainstream, the same issues of publication and recognition apply.

While more traditional, Western practitioners of philosophy can also be asked to explain why their work is philosophy, the effects of being asked “how is this philosophy?” can differ depending on whether one already perceives oneself to be a member of the philosophical community. A white man who works on logic and inference through complex mathematical modeling may experience the question as an annoyance or evidence of a grumpy question-asker.<sup>4</sup> However, for a diverse practitioner of philosophy, it may be experienced as a personal attack. Still, this experience may be wider than one would expect. Reflecting on the response she received after publishing “How Is This Paper Philosophy?”, Dotson (2019) writes:

The most shocking thing made evident by [this] uptake ... is just how *many* people feel out of step with philosophico-orthodoxy. Even the most successful among us, Graham Priest and other ‘big name’ feminist philosophers ... are at varying times made to feel ‘put out’ if they do not toe a certain line. These people – these ‘big-name’ full professors – feel like they are diverse practitioners. When even the most successful among us feel alienated, then there is a serious problem with our professional culture. (10)

As such, not even success in the field necessarily guards diverse practitioners from the effects of the boundary policing and gatekeeping that are so prevalent.

Faced with either leaving the field and starting a new career or continuing in a field which is hostile toward them, even highly successful diverse practitioners often question whether they’ve made the right choice in staying in academic philosophy. Haslanger (2008) describes struggling over whether she should quit philosophy and give up tenure: “In spite of my deep love for philosophy, it just didn’t seem worth it” (210). Syl Ko describes a similar experience she had as a graduate student, only a year away from receiving her Ph.D. (Ko and Ko 2019). Unlike Haslanger, she decided that staying in academic philosophy wasn’t worth it. Dotson (2019) summarizes this widely shared feeling:

I remember the day when it all became crystal clear that I should quit academic philosophy. The day I realized that (i) the negative judgments, (ii) the snarling disregard for my ideas and projects as ‘philosophically uninteresting,’ and (iii) the general sense of not being welcome would characterize my professional life. I may have turned to my officemate ... and said, ‘I think I made a mistake.’ I am sure it was probably a run-of-the-mill day for her. After all, I said something like that every day, which may be a common feature of the graduate careers of most

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<sup>4</sup> Thank you to Conor Mayo-Wilson for providing this example.

diverse practitioners in professional philosophy. On that particular day, and every day since, I really meant it. (5)

As Haslanger (2008) puts it, “I don't think we need to scratch our heads and wonder what on earth is going on that keeps women out of philosophy... [M]ost women and minorities who are sufficiently qualified to get into graduate school in philosophy have choices. They don't have to put up with this mistreatment” (211-12).

Dotson (2012) diagnoses these issues of boundary policing and gatekeeping as stemming from the culture of justification endemic to the Adversary Method, arguing that there is “a heightened value placed upon processes of legitimation, or identifying congruence between accepted patterns and standards with one's own belief, project, and/or processing, for the sake of positive status” (7). Diverse practitioners are then required to defend their work *as philosophy* before the argument presented is even considered. Jenkins (2014) explains this extra hurdle, using feminist philosophy as an example:

[U]nlike a mainstream scholar, a feminist researcher will ... have to begin her argument from a more basic starting point, rather than simply picking up a well-defined issue and moving it forward ... Even if the works in question have already been criticised by other feminists, these criticisms may need to be rehearsed again for the benefit of those ... who are less familiar with feminist scholarship. (266)

In this way, philosophical approaches that deviate from the “accepted patterns and standards” require this extra step to be legitimized as philosophy – a step which mainstream philosophers need not consider – further increasing hostility toward diverse practitioners.

### Mutually Reinforcing Norms

It is not just that diverse practitioners are doubly disadvantaged, working against the hostile environment created by the Adversary Method while facing the boundary policing against the areas in which marginalized groups are empirically more likely to work. Rather, the takeaway here is that the Adversary Method is employed as a means of enforcing the stringent boundaries that are already in place. A diverse practitioner must defend their work as philosophy *using* the Adversary Method to even be let in the room.

The Adversary Method itself is often written into the very definition of “philosophy.” Ragland and Heidt (2001), editors of the anthology *What Is Philosophy?*, state in the introduction that there seems to be a consensus among the contributing authors that philosophy aims at “relentless, comprehensive examination and criticism of concepts and inferences” (4). Given the *relentlessness* of this criticism, we are left with a rather combative picture of philosophy, in which criticism is launched for the sake of criticism, a feature very much in line with the Adversary Method. Priest (2006) provides a somewhat

more nuanced account. He writes, “philosophy is precisely that intellectual inquiry in which *anything* is open to critical challenge and scrutiny” (202). While this doesn’t seem particularly different from Ragland and Heidt’s definition, he adds, “This may make it sound terribly negative, as though all that philosophers try to do is knock things down. That’s not a terribly attractive picture. Neither is it an accurate one” (203). Priest goes on to portray it as “a highly *constructive* enterprise” that is “responsible for creating many new ideas, systems of thought, [and] pictures of the world and its features” (203). Yet Priest doesn’t step too far from the combative picture of philosophy. For him, philosophy is ultimately defined by its “unbridled criticism” (207).

Given these definitional boundaries, we cannot simply aim to resist the Adversary Method without also rethinking our conception of what philosophy is and its proper scope. Responding to Priest’s (2006) definition and the culture of justification she identifies in contemporary academic philosophy, Dotson (2012) proposes a shift to a culture of praxis. This alternative has two components:

- 1) Value placed on seeking issues and circumstances pertinent to our living, where one maintains a healthy appreciation for the differing issues that will emerge as pertinent among different populations and
- 2) Recognition and encouragement of multiple canons and multiple ways of understanding disciplinary validation. (17)

Each component responds to one of the norms I have identified above: method and content, respectively. Within Dotson’s culture of praxis, the emphasis of philosophy is more on seeking understanding, rather than critiquing an opponent, yet this cannot take place without simultaneously questioning and widening the borders of what counts as “real” philosophy. Given the intertwining nature of these two components, we cannot rely on an intervention which fails to recognize their mutually reinforcing character.

### **An Alternative Model**

In this section, I propose an alternative model intended to help make the field more welcoming to present and future diverse practitioners. The proposed model, the community of philosophical inquiry (CPI), emphasizes an openness to recognizing alternative views and a more collaborative practice. In the first section, I explicate what this method of philosophy entails and offer Lugones’s (1987) concept of playful “world”-traveling to frame how we might transition into the type of mindset required for a successful CPI. I then consider how we may widen our notion of what counts as “real” philosophy to mitigate the boundary policing that many diverse practitioners face, proposing a definition of philosophy which positions it as a method of questioning rather than a specified subject area. In the final subsection, I discuss how the CPI model addresses not only the issues of method and content, but the issues that arise from their

interaction, and how employing something like it might work to mitigate the diversity problem.

### Method

In a community of inquiry, philosophical or otherwise, members of the community work together to “examine a problematic concept or situation, following the inquiry where it leads, consistent with logic and critical reasoning” (Lone and Burroughs 2016, 53). While disagreement can and often does arise, the community of inquiry does not pit one view against another; rather, members of the community co-construct ideas, work together to consider support for what they each believe, and help each other identify their assumptions. It is a collaborative effort rather than a battle to see who is right. This model, adapted to a community of *philosophical* inquiry, is frequently used in Philosophy for Children (P4C) programs.

The “rules” of the CPI fall primarily around modes of interaction. The CPI aims to create a space of “epistemological modesty” where it is acknowledged that all members of the community can be wrong, including the facilitator in P4C sessions. Groups are given some leeway to determine their own questions for discussion, and an open sharing of thoughts about the chosen topic is encouraged, without the prioritization of one person’s thoughts over another’s. While sound reasoning is still valued and others’ views can be challenged, interactions between members of the community do not mirror the Adversary Method. “Counterarguments” and critique aren’t unrelentingly aimed at finding and criticizing faults, but at examining what can be improved upon. As such, an attitude focused on “winning” is discouraged, replaced by one of collective synthesis. The goal is not to come to one settled answer, but instead to work towards understanding the topic at hand, considering and reconsidering one’s own view and the views of others collaboratively.<sup>5</sup>

The concept of epistemic openness is of particular importance to this process and the CPI. As Lone (2018) defines it, epistemic openness entails “a willingness to entertain unfamiliar (and sometimes uncomfortable and perhaps seemingly strange) possibilities” (58). We must be comfortable with uncertainty and willing to change our minds if presented with the appropriate evidence, including, I will suggest in the next section, when it comes to what counts as philosophy.

In her work on feminist epistemology and ontology, María Lugones (1987) presents a concept which we may apply here to aid in attaining greater epistemic openness: playful “world”-traveling. While Lugones does not provide a precise definition for what she means by a “world,” her descriptions give a sense of something like a community with behavior and value norms. One “travels”

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<sup>5</sup> This aim has received philosophical support outside of P4C theory as well (e.g., Midgley 2018).

between worlds when one enters the sphere of another world or community, adopting the norms of that world as part of their existence there.

We can travel between worlds either in an agonistically playful way (which Lugones ultimately characterizes as unplayful) or a lovingly playful way. She describes the agonistic sense as:

...one in which *competence* is supreme. You'd better know the rules of the game. In agonistic play there is risk, there is *uncertainty*, but the uncertainty is about who is going to win and who is going to lose. There are rules that inspire hostility... [T]he person who is a participant in the game has a *fixed conception of him or herself*... [T]he players are imbued with *self-importance* in agonistic play since they are so keen on winning given their own merits, their very own competence... The agonistic traveler is a conqueror, an imperialist. (15, emphasis original)

This is not to suggest that competence is unimportant; rather, what is often wrongly taken to be of highest importance is *demonstrating* one's competence, and specifically doing so in a way that matches the dominant world's conception of competence. Lugones further describes this type of play as the "western man's construction of playfulness" (16), and it shares many similarities with the standard method of Western philosophy. As with the Adversary Method, it is a method of competition, focused on "winning," where one must defend their competence against the attacks of one's competitor.

However, if we compare this to loving playfulness, we see that this is not the only possible method of either world-traveling or philosophy. To illustrate, Lugones imagines two people making a game of breaking rocks apart to see the colorful parts within. It's not a competition, but a playful, shared activity:

The playfulness that gives meaning to our activity includes uncertainty, but in this case the uncertainty is an *openness to surprise*... We are not self-important, we are not fixed in particular constructions of ourselves, which is part of saying that we are *open to self-construction*. We may not have rules, and when we do have rules, there are no rules that are to us sacred. We are not worried about competence. We are not wedded to a particular way of doing things. While playful we have not abandoned ourselves to, nor are we stuck in, any particular "world." *We are there creatively*. We are not passive. (16-17, emphasis original)

In a sense, this type of playfulness inherently includes epistemic openness, and we can imagine such playfulness in an exchange, not just between children playing with rocks,<sup>6</sup> but between two academic philosophers as well. Picture two philosophers at a conference discussing a given philosophical topic. Whether their views on the topic align does not matter for this type of play, but for the sake of illustration, let's assume they disagree. Perhaps they are used to different argumentation methods, perhaps one has been instructed in the analytic

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<sup>6</sup> Lugones does not specify that the two people in the example are children – in fact, she identifies one of them as herself – but many readers may assume this to be the case upon encountering the example.

tradition and the other in continental, or perhaps one is from a more traditional branch of philosophy and the other is from a marginalized subdiscipline. Regardless, they are both willing to ask the other questions about their view, not primarily with the aim of finding weak points in their argument, but to better understand where the other is coming from and to think about multiple ways of arguing for each person's view. Neither holds staunchly to their own views; they willingly participate in this type of world-traveling, to try out new possibilities, to be wrong, to learn from and with the other. They are not concerned with proving their position to be the correct one or even coming to one settled answer but with exploring the topic together, collaboratively learning. In this way, by practicing playful world-traveling, we can learn to be more epistemically open and thus better able to participate in the reasoning together of the CPI.

The CPI allows for a range of diverse views to be considered without the threat of boundary policing or hostile attacks. Yet adopting the CPI doesn't simply mean "playing nice" with one another. While treating each other with kindness is important, the primary focus is a commitment to reasoning together as opposed to reasoning against one another. As such, it is also a commitment to making space for and welcoming views unlike one's own. It's a space of "radical openness," as hooks (1989) may call it. Her work identifies the margins as "much more than a site of deprivation...it is also the side of radical possibility... It offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds" (20). In making room for diverse practitioners and not just allowing but encouraging a greater variety of ideas in the conversation, the CPI brings this sense of radical openness to philosophy.

## Content

We have seen how the boundary policing of "real" philosophy works to exclude diverse practitioners. Such a limited conception is problematic, but some limit is needed. *Everything* cannot count as philosophy. The question now becomes: How might we think about the limits of philosophy?

P4C theorists generally define philosophy by its process of inquiry and asking questions. Lone and Burroughs (2016) write, "For philosophers, questions – and the relationships between various questions – are the bedrock of the discipline. In order to articulate a philosophical problem, analyze an argument, or understand an alternative view, we have to be able to formulate clear and relevant questions" (20). While questioning can be done combatively (e.g., to search for flaws in the other's argument), what is meant here is the type of questioning which might be part of Dotson's (2012) culture of praxis. For example, questioning might arise out of curiosity toward something one hasn't considered yet, to better understand our interlocutor's position, or slowing down to fully attend to the complexity of an issue. As such, this conception of philosophy places significant emphasis on the constructive element of philosophy. As seen in our initial discussion of the CPI, characterizing philosophy

in this positive/constructive way does not foreclose the possibility of critique. Rather, critique is posed in a constructive and collaborative, rather than destructive, way that helps the other build their theory.

Here, the emphasis is not on the topics discussed within philosophy; it is on what it means to *do* philosophy, to *philosophize*. Philosophy is the way in which we approach a topic, not the topic itself. However, we still need some limit. Just as *everything* cannot count as philosophy, *all types of questioning* cannot count as philosophy. Some questions aim for scientific or factual answers; some explore the significance or meaning of the object of inquiry, while others dig into under-explored assumptions. To help explore where the boundary may lie, let's take a question that often arises in P4C sessions: "Why is the sky blue?"

Despite this being a simple question, it can be asked in several different ways. Initially, it may seem to be a question of physics, where we may appeal to the wavelengths of different colors of light and how certain wavelengths are reflected or absorbed. It may be a biological question regarding how the eye works so that we may see the blueness of the sky. Or it might be a philosophical question, taken either epistemologically to mean "How do we/Can we know that the sky is blue?" or phenomenologically to mean "What is my embodied experience of the sky's blueness, and what significance does it have?" Albeit, some of these may be better phrased than simply "Why is the sky blue?"; nonetheless, each questions the meaning of the sky's blueness in some way.

What is the difference between the scientific and philosophical meanings of this question? To help delineate this distinction, we might look to Bertrand Russell's ([1912] 2001) *The Problems of Philosophy*. The distinction, he says, lies in how we may answer the question:

[T]he answers suggested by philosophy are none of them demonstrably true... [I]t is part of the business of philosophy to continue the consideration of such questions, to make us aware of their importance, to examine all the approaches to them, and to keep alive that speculative interest in the universe which is apt to be killed by confining ourselves to definitely ascertainable knowledge. (83)

Contrarily, the sciences ask "those questions which are already capable of definite answers" (83).

This provides us with a baseline for distinguishing philosophical from other types of questions, but what might it mean to ask a question *philosophically*? Here again, I turn to Russell:

Philosophy, though unable to tell us with certainty what is the true answer to the doubts which it raises, is able to suggest many possibilities which *enlarge our thoughts and free them from the tyranny of custom*. Thus, while diminishing our feeling of certainty as to what things are, it greatly increases our knowledge as to what they may be; *it removes the somewhat arrogant dogmatism of those who have never travelled into the region of liberating doubt, and it keeps alive our sense of wonder by showing familiar things in an unfamiliar aspect*. (83-4, emphasis added)

If, then, we wish philosophy to free us from “the tyranny of custom,” we must approach our questioning with a sense of “liberating doubt” rather than “arrogant dogmatism,” a sentiment very much in line with the CPI’s epistemic openness. If we do not, we risk limiting philosophy by its own dogmatic norms, perpetuating the excessive boundary policing and gatekeeping that has come to dominate the field. This is what is meant by the *type* of questioning. If the question is asked in this open philosophical spirit, it counts as a philosophical question and, therefore, as a matter that is appropriately investigated by the field of philosophy.<sup>7</sup>

### Benefits for Diverse Practitioners

What makes the CPI, as it is employed in P4C, a particularly useful model in addressing the issues associated with the current norms is that we, in a sense, must work from the ground up. Children in the P4C classroom rarely have much, if any, formal experience with philosophy prior to their experiences with P4C. This puts the P4C facilitator in a unique position where questions of content (i.e., what makes something properly philosophical) and method (i.e., how the discussion should be conducted) need to be considered in tandem, rather than treating them as two separate elements. With the Adversary Method and boundary policing intertwined and mutually reinforcing, our intervention must simultaneously address both in a way analogous to the CPI.

If academic philosophy becomes a place of greater epistemic openness, the climate should become much less hostile towards diverse practitioners. Perhaps the most obvious way in which this would help would be in mitigating the adversarial nature of the field. As Superson (2002) writes:

Professional philosophers tend to be identified with their own work, as it is often inspired by events in their lives or reflects a lifelong quest for answers to questions that interest them. When one’s work comes under an onslaught of unfair criticisms, especially ones that amount to a gender-based attack, one feels as if one’s very self, in addition to one’s livelihood and well-being, is threatened. (108)

The CPI model welcomes diverse perspectives as a way to “play” in a broader set of worlds and to start to understand a broader range of views.

By focusing less on the content boundaries of philosophy, we allow a greater breadth of questions to be analyzed by the field. With the CPI’s emphasis on epistemic openness and philosophical questioning, topics or approaches that may otherwise be left out (e.g., applied philosophy, non-Western philosophy, *both* analytic and continental philosophy) become welcome. Philosophy no longer implicitly means ‘Western philosophy,’ but anything approached

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<sup>7</sup> I do not pretend to have definitively answered what it means for a question to be asked ‘philosophically,’ but for the sake of brevity, I will leave my proposed boundary for philosophy with these considerations from Russell.

philosophically, including those areas that have often been excluded (e.g., critical race theory, Eastern philosophy, applied philosophy), and diverse practitioners need not “prove” themselves worthy just to have a seat at the table.

Dotson (2012) states that the question isn’t “whether black women are good enough to do philosophy. Of course, we are. But we doubt whether the environment provided by professional philosophy is good enough for us” (4). Diverse practitioners should not have to feel as though they must defend their right to be in the field or question whether the field can allow them to thrive. By building from a model that addresses both the method and content norms in unison, it is my hope that the CPI’s benefits will help to make the field more welcoming to diverse practitioners.<sup>8</sup>

### **Further Clarifications on the CPI**

One still may worry that the CPI might simply create a veneer of inclusion rather than creating a space of true inclusion. Here, I wish to expound on two features of the CPI to help clarify it as the latter. First, I discuss an issue raised by Tempest Henning (2018) that non-adversarial approaches cater to white women and ignore the communication styles of black women, positioning them as adversarial. Briefly stated, while I do not argue against Henning’s claim regarding non-adversarial feminist argumentation models (NAFAM) in general, I wish to distinguish my approach from other NAFAM in that it leaves room for a variety of communication styles, including ones that may seem adversarial to outsiders of a given CPI. Second, one may wonder how to approach those who do not abide by the rules of engagement of the CPI. Undoubtedly, some participants would still be bigoted, condescending, or simply not epistemically open, and they might create damage within a community if their words are not restrained in some way. I discuss what we may wish to do in those cases.

Henning (2018) raises concerns regarding what she calls “non-adversarial feminist argumentation model[s] (NAFAM)” (197). As she describes them, the majority of NAFAM wish to restrict argumentation to an entirely non-adversarial model, which does not leave room for African American women whose linguistic practices can include what is perceived as “lewd or indecorous language, signifying, culturally toned diminutives ..., simultaneous speech, and talking with attitude” (203). Since many of these linguistic practices are perceived as “unprofessional, ill educated, and hostile” (203) by the dominant culture, NAFAM do not leave space for them in the conversation. If these speech patterns were intended to be hostile, we may well have reason to discourage them, but Henning notes that “within our community, these practices do not usually carry the negative connotation that they hold within dominant culture” (204). Instead, it is

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<sup>8</sup> Admittedly, this paints a rather rosy picture. Many systematic and individual changes would need to occur to reach this point. For recommendations for action, see Haslanger (2008), hooks (1994), Kidd (2017), Kings (2019), and Shorter-Bourhanou (2017).

seen as “a sign of confidence, knowledge, authority, and even as a means of resistance [against the dominant culture]. Usually, it is deemed as impolite [only] if it is incorrectly deployed, done with strangers outside of the community, or excessive for no reason” (204).

Henning writes, “One person’s harmful argumentative practice is another’s form of ‘tough-love,’ assertiveness, or act of resistance” (205). Context here is key. It matters from whom it’s coming and towards whom it’s directed. From an outside perspective, seemingly adversarial practices, such as interrupting one’s interlocuter, may in some contexts actually be “affiliative and cooperative” (206). Henning uses the following example to illustrate this point:

A Black woman might be arguing with a friend about x, and while making her points the friend can ‘interrupt’ the speaker with expressions such as ‘uhm,’ ‘uh-huh,’ ‘I hear you,’ ‘girl,’ ‘bitch,’ or a plethora of other responses... The interruption can function as affirmation that the listener is indeed listening. Being entirely silent while a speaker is speaking, within many AAWSC [African American women’s speech communities] practices actually has the opposite effect as what the NAFAM purports... To not partake in this call-and-response model is seen as not partaking in the dialogue or not listening – and for us that’s just rude. (206)

Henning clearly argues that to take certain actions or phrases as inherently adversarial leaves certain communities out. To make the CPI welcoming to all, we need to guard against this sort of mentality. How might we do this? Henning suggests that “[e]ducation regarding the various cultural practices of politeness has the potential to not render AAWSC as hostile when our speech practices are enacted (by us) within arguments or debates” (207-208). In addition, I would like to add that we should ask for clarification in cases where we haven’t been educated or are unsure. This may seem like an obvious suggestion, but when we are met with what we perceive as adversariality, it is easy to become defensive and adopt an adversarial mindset ourselves. A simple clarificatory question about the intended meaning of a person’s statement has the potential to head off this type of escalation and should feel very much at home in the question-centered CPI.

One’s next question might be whether my proposed model is a NAFAM. It is certainly non-adversarial in nature and has been influenced by feminist philosophy. However, I do not see it as a NAFAM in the way that Henning describes. I will not dispute Henning’s definition, as many non-adversarial feminist approaches do follow her description. Yet the CPI leaves open the possibility that what counts as respectful philosophical dialogue may differ between different philosophical “communities.” If, in a particular instance, one’s current “community” is a small group of friends, respectful dialogue may look different than if the present community is comprised of fellow academics attending a conference.

The difference between these two cases is in how these norms were constructed. In the case of the group of friends, a mutual construction of norms is

more likely given that each member of the community knows the others well. Each community member understands that, what may appear as hostile adversariality to an outsider, is meant to be cooperative and respectful. This is significantly less likely, if possible at all, when the community in question is large, diverse, and most community members don't know each other, such as at a conference. A short-term community of audience members typically will not all know each other well enough in the limited time of the conference for such norms of engagement to be truly co-constructed. The risk, here, is that members of the community from dominant social groups will simply assert their norms of communication, leaving marginalized members feeling unwelcome in the same way that Henning suggests. However, this is something we can guard against.

The co-construction of a CPI undoubtedly requires a give and take on all sides, but as Bierria (2014) notes, there may need to be a little more "give" from those with privilege. As Bierria explains, two agents of the same social group "acknowledg[e] one another's intentions via a mutually constructed background of meaning," and due to this shared background meaning, cases of misunderstanding are "often addressed through correctives such as clarification from the agent, increased imagination from the observer, or a third party's explanatory intervention" (131). However, between agents of different social groups, this shared background meaning may be absent. This is particularly problematic when a disenfranchised agent is misunderstood by an enfranchised one. Because the shared background meanings of enfranchised agents are already given institutional backup, supporting their mistaken reading of the disenfranchised agent's actions, they are less likely to engage in the types of corrective processes that often occur between agents who share background meanings. Even if the disenfranchised agent attempts to clarify, "her explanation does not benefit from the kind of productive self-doubt from others needed to realistically challenge or correct others" (Bierria 132). If we are to make the field more welcoming to diverse practitioners, those with privilege must make the effort to break of the habit of this active ignorance, consciously adopting a stance of "productive self-doubt."

Of course, even if the CPI were widely adopted within the field, there would undoubtedly be individual actors who would choose not to make this effort and continue to be bigoted, overly aggressive, and/or simply rude. What do we do with these "bullies"? I believe the first step should be confirming that they are actually bullies. For example, suppose A says X, which is bigoted in some way. B, as a member of their philosophical community, can respond in a number of ways. Here, we'll consider three possible responses: (1) B assumes A said X with bigoted intent and responds adversarially, shutting A down; (2) B takes a pause in the discussion of the topic at hand to ask A why they believe X; (3) B

assumes A didn't actually mean X, simply continuing the conversation.<sup>9</sup> Option 3 immediately seems ineffective if we wish to maintain a space of radical openness; we need some set of rules for respectful engagement so that all members feel respected and safe. Even if A didn't actually mean X, it doesn't mean that A should be free to say it.

For many, option 1 may seem more natural, especially if X refers to a social group to which B or someone close to B belongs, and I do not want to discount the anger and fear that can arise from hearing another use bigoted language. However, if we are to maintain a space of radical openness, option 2 is likely to be more helpful under the CPI model. This is *not* because we wish to be open to bigotry, but because we wish to recognize that A may be ignorant of how X is bigoted. If A is ignorant, option 2 both gives them a chance to be educated, so as not to say X again in the future, and to explain what they really meant. This method of "calling in" (as opposed to calling out A in option 1)<sup>10</sup> is in line with the epistemic modesty required for the CPI – a recognition that we are all fallible and hold views that could be mistaken – thereby helping to build a space of openness.

Sadly, it is possible that option 2 reveals that A understood the implications of X and said it intentionally. At this point, some may feel that meeting these hostile actors in an adversarial manner is required, arguing that the bigoted view is incorrect. Others may be uncomfortable with this tactic and feel that they need to remove themselves from the conversation. Because B needs to make their individual decision based on what they feel comfortable doing, I don't believe there can be one singular way to proceed from here. Nonetheless, it is clear this is not something which can be allowed if we are to maintain a safe intellectual space of radical openness.<sup>11</sup>

## Conclusion

Bell (2002) writes: "My sadness comes from my recognition that my own discipline seems one of the most recalcitrant to change. I'll never understand why philosophy, the proud discipline of Socrates and the examined life, attracts

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<sup>9</sup> The suggested handling of this scenario is meant to represent an ideal case (i.e., one in which B has the mental and emotional energy to engage A and feels safe doing so). In non-ideal cases, individuals may not feel comfortable responding in the suggested way for a variety of reasons. For example, B may choose to simply continue the conversation if they feel unsafe broaching the subject further. B's outward behavior looks like option 3; here, however, B might assume that A truly did mean X because it may be safer to assume this to be the case and avoid potential confrontation than to assume the opposite and risk potential harm. This response, however, is still different than assuming that A didn't intend X in a bigoted way and is, therefore, not worth bringing up (i.e., Option 3).

<sup>10</sup> See Ferguson (2015) for further discussion on the differences between "calling in" and "calling out."

<sup>11</sup> For further considerations on the importance of and what contributes to intellectually safe spaces, see Schrader (2004).

such a large number of mean-spirited individuals who are so reluctant to examine their own prejudices, so fearful of change, and so determined to narrow the province of philosophy" (256). This does not have to be the case.

Philosophy is one of the last fields in the humanities to diversify, and it's no wonder. While these issues are not unique to philosophy, as we have seen, the current emphasis on the Adversary Method and the excessive boundary policing of "real" philosophy has left the field hostile to diverse practitioners. Yet things do not have to stay this way. The CPI provides an approach that can help expand our methodology beyond the simply combative, and in conceiving of philosophy as primarily a method of questioning and analysis, we can move away from these gatekeeping practices. By emphasizing the co-creation of respectful community norms, we can create spaces of radical openness within the discipline in the hopes of making academic philosophy more hospitable. As philosophers, so inclined to devote ourselves to theory, we must keep in mind that these concepts are not *just* things of theory—they are things of *action* as well. If we wish to mitigate the lack of diversity in our field, we must take action lest we make ourselves complicit in the problem we wish to solve.

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