

# Third-Order Epistemic Exclusion in Professional Philosophy<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Third-order exclusion is a form of epistemic oppression in which the epistemic lifeway of a dominant group disrupts the epistemic agency of members of marginalized groups. In this paper we apply situated perspectives in order to argue that philosophy as a discipline imposes third-order exclusions on members of marginalized groups who are interested in participating in philosophy. We examine a number of specific aspects of the epistemic lifeway embodied by academic philosophy and show how this produces inaccessibility to the discipline. In addition to critiquing the discipline and its methods we also use this discussion to elaborate on third-order exclusion itself. We conclude by proposing an intersectional pedagogy as a step toward creating a more accessible discipline.

**Keywords:** epistemic oppression, intersectionality, pedagogy, lived experience, epistemology, metaphilosophy.

## 1. Introduction

Haslanger (2008) writes, “It is very hard to find a place in philosophy that isn’t actively hostile to women and minorities, or at least that assumes that a successful philosopher should look and act like a (traditional, white) man.” Beyond doubt to philosophers belonging to non-dominant identities, which make up a starkly small portion of professional philosophy, the way in which philosophy functions is exclusionary. Professional philosophy trains people to participate in a shared epistemic life. However, access to that life is limited by an individual’s willingness and ability to adopt certain norms and procedures. There is active, pernicious ignorance in professional philosophy that obscures how these norms and procedures cause epistemic harms and oppression and specifically about how these norms limit access to participation in the discipline itself. Here we argue that academic philosophy’s *epistemic lifeway* produces what Dotson (2014) calls third-order epistemic exclusion. We take this thesis to contribute to the explanation for the lack of diversity in academic philosophy, which has been addressed by a number of theorists (Haslanger 2008, Antony 2012, Dotson 2013, Leslie et al. 2015).

We begin in section 2 with an exposition of Dotson’s concept of third-order epistemic exclusion and its connection to epistemic lifeways. Then, in

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sections 3 through 10, we discuss aspects of academic philosophy's epistemic lifeway and identify ways in which it produces third-order exclusion. The concluding section 11 argues that resistance to change regarding the problems identified in the body of the paper is itself evidence that the epistemic oppression inflicted by philosophy's epistemic lifeway is of the third-order variety – it stems from the fact that the philosophical way of life developed by dominant epistemic agents resists being changed into something more accessible to members of marginalized groups. Here we also briefly suggest that a sweeping incorporation of intersectional theory into philosophy pedagogy could be an important step forward in solving the problem.

We approach the topic of this paper from a situated perspective. At the time of writing, one of us is an undergraduate cis woman of color and one is a cis white male lecturer with a PhD in philosophy. At points in the text where lived experience seems relevant, we will be more or less explicit about who is speaking, as in the following two paragraphs. (The shift in speaker is also often indicated by articulating a situated perspective, i.e. of teacher or student.)

Dr. Anderson was my professor, and now functions as my research mentor. Dr. Anderson's class was the first philosophy class I took where people who are not in the traditional philosophical canon were cited. Though I was already interested in philosophy, this illuminated for me that the discipline, under certain pedagogical conditions, had the prospect of being inclusive, and potentially even accessible. Conversations about non-traditional philosophers in office hours in addition to both frustration with and passion for the discipline eventually lead to the creation of this paper.

As a full-time lecturer employed primarily in teaching introductory-level courses, I've been concerned to create inclusive classrooms that center and engage with marginalized perspectives that were largely (if not entirely) left out of my philosophical training. The guiding idea has been: teach to students of diverse social identities rather than teaching to the 'generic rational agents' in the room, since teaching to generic rational agents really means teaching to the financially secure able-bodied straight cis white men in the class (Scheman 1995). Zahra and I are engaged in an ongoing conversation about how the discipline of philosophy seems to be intrinsically configured to exclude a multitude of diverse identities. Our project is aimed at articulating how this exclusion works and thinking about how to change the discipline to make it more accessible.

We take situated knowledge to be of special importance when investigating the norms that limit the accessibility of professional philosophy, because those norms are more obvious to those who are marginalized by them but their significance is difficult to recognize for those whom they enfranchise. This paper functions as a practical exercise in changing the epistemic lifeway of philosophy. Our situated perspectives are a crucial epistemic resource, illuminating distinct experiences that manifest relationally in academic

philosophy: student and teacher, woman of color and white man, working to create a more accessible philosophy classroom. Each of us brings an important part of the puzzle to the table. We believe our combined perceptions and experiences of the field allow for a more accurate, encompassing understanding of the field (though we recognize that our experiences are not all-encompassing and our position within the institution demonstrates an inherent privilege).

We conceive of situated knowledge along the lines proposed by Collins (2002) and thus take every situated perspective to be limited. We want to acknowledge that our perspectives leave many others out; collectively and individually we have privilege that allows us to write this and engage in this topic, and that means our reflections on what makes philosophy accessible or inaccessible are limited. Neither of us has experienced being totally excluded from philosophy. We also are deeply committed to Collins's view that meaningful transmission of knowledge across different situated perspectives requires political engagement in shared struggle. Our shared political project in this case is the overhaul of philosophy's epistemic lifeway in order to improve accessibility in the discipline for those who are less dominantly situated.

## **2. Epistemic lifeways and third-order epistemic exclusion**

Dotson (2014) introduces the idea of *epistemic lifeways*. Epistemic lifeways are amalgamations of many aspects of life pertaining to our ability to know, including thought processes, behaviors, goals, habits, routines, conceptions of reality, conceptions of authority, our ways of interacting with one another, our ways of acting within institutions, our decisions about who to trust and what claims to accept, and many more. The concept is meant to capture a very wide range of features of epistemic life in an open-ended way. The idea that there is a plurality of epistemic lifeways is meant to indicate that different epistemic agents or perhaps different groups conduct their epistemic lives in substantively different ways, and also to highlight the possibility of living different kinds of epistemic life.

We see philosophy departments as training undergraduates to participate in a certain kind of epistemic lifeway. This epistemic lifeway has been developed over the history of the discipline. In some ways it is explicitly specified and defended by the content of the discipline itself, which tells students what it means to be rational, what knowledge and justification are, how to construct an argument, how to construct a counterexample, and so on. But philosophical training also initiates us into many unstated practices: how to talk, how to argue, how to write in a philosophical voice, what topics are appropriate in philosophical discourse. It models what a real philosopher looks like, both figuratively and literally.

Epistemic lifeways give credibility to testimony, determining who is allowed to give testimony and whether that testimony is expert. They also influence behavior and culture in regards to teaching and learning. What gets

taught, how it gets taught, and what an appropriate interaction in a classroom looks like all fall under their scope. They condition our ideas about what is common sense and what is intuitive. Judgments about thought experiments might be conditioned by epistemic lifeways as well.

Epistemic lifeways are necessary for knowledge production and are therefore inherently useful. We simply cannot get by without one. But indispensable as they are, they also can and do inflict epistemic oppression. Dotson (2014) characterizes epistemic oppression as a persistent unwarranted infringement on the epistemic agency of knowers that hinders their contribution to knowledge production. Epistemic agency is the ability to utilize persuasively shared epistemic resources within a given community of knowers in order to participate in knowledge production and, if required, to affect the revision of those same resources or the introduction of new ones. Theories of epistemic oppression begin with analyses of the conditions for the production, distribution, and attribution of knowledge and focus on the ways in which these conditions create and reproduce systematic patterns of advantage and disadvantage with regard to epistemic agency. Our project is a description of the ways that epistemic norms operating within professional philosophy are inherently exclusionary and function as barriers against attempts to diversify the field; hence our project falls within Dotson's program.<sup>2</sup>

Dotson (2014) distinguishes three forms of epistemic oppression which are hierarchically ordered: first-order exclusion, second-order exclusion, and third-order exclusion. Our focus is on third-order exclusion, but let's briefly review first- and second-order. First-order exclusion happens when marginalized groups are denied equal participation in currently existing epistemic practices; for example, when a person of a marginalized identity is ascribed less credibility than a person of a dominant identity. Fricker's (2007) concept of testimonial injustice counts as an example of first-order exclusion. Second-order exclusion involves being restricted in the ability to participate in the creation and distribution of new epistemic resources, such as new terminology or new concepts. Fricker's (2007) hermeneutical injustice exemplifies this type of exclusion, as does Pohlhaus's (2012) concept of willful hermeneutical ignorance.

Third-order exclusion goes beyond marginalization with respect to the distribution or creation of epistemic resources. Third-order exclusion occurs when the epistemic lifeway adopted and supported by a dominant group or culture undermines or limits the epistemic agency of a marginalized group.

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<sup>2</sup> We want to emphasize that we also think there is a lot to love about philosophy. It's not wholly bad or corrupt. Our aim is to make it more accessible because we think it's a good thing to be able to participate in the world of philosophy. We are optimistic in thinking that the exclusionary norms can be changed and that the field can become more inclusive. We also want to acknowledge that there are many people working and making great progress towards this goal.

Dominant epistemic lifeways are created and reinforced within cultures maintained and controlled by dominant epistemic agents. They impose limits on marginalized epistemic agents, specifically by rendering certain important forms of knowledge as not-knowledge, by undermining, discrediting, outlawing, or destabilizing alternative epistemic lifeways that serve marginalized groups. They set up what it is to know in a way that inherently functions to exclude marginalized people from being full fledged epistemic agents, and they restrict the knowledge such people care about and depend on from counting as knowledge. Our approach to applying the concept of third-order exclusion to the issue of accessibility in philosophy is to identify features of the dominant epistemic lifeway inculturated within the sphere of academic philosophy and articulate ways in which this dominant epistemic lifeway functions to oppress, marginalize, discredit, debilitate, and exclude.

Addressing third-order exclusion requires overcoming what Dotson calls the 'resilience of epistemological systems.' Epistemic lifeways resist being changed or reconfigured. Resisting third-order oppression means overcoming the resilience of the epistemic lifeways of dominant groups. Epistemological resilience arises from the fact that epistemological systems are self-maintaining. Our systems for interpreting reality naturally resist being overturned or destroyed by new inputs. Dotson points out that epistemological systems are resilient for good reason. Our ability to be successful epistemic agents requires us to have some backbone; we can't throw out our whole way of approaching reality with each new argument or piece of evidence we encounter. Nevertheless, sometimes an epistemic lifeway must be shaken up or overturned.

Dominant epistemological systems do not yield easily to the efforts of marginalized epistemic agents. Dominant agents are not likely to change their epistemic lifeways in response to complaints of exclusion from marginalized agents. We perceive this situation to be abundantly present in the domain of academic philosophy. Philosophy as a dominant epistemic lifeway maintains its exclusionary nature through epistemic resilience. This is an inherently harmful phenomenon for the marginalized agent, but also provides insight into what must change. It is through encountering the resilience of philosophy's epistemic lifeway that we are best able to perceive its contours and push back against them.

The next eight sections present case studies of certain aspects of philosophy that produce third-order epistemic exclusion. Our aim is to both explain the sense in which academic philosophy trains its students in a particular epistemic lifeway and to explore the ways in which this epistemic lifeway promotes third-order epistemic exclusion for aspiring philosophers who are less dominantly situated. Our survey is by no means exhaustive. We present only a handful of illustrations. They are hints at a bigger picture.

### 3. Acting like a philosopher

The discipline of philosophy trains individuals to act like a philosopher, to perform the role of philosopher. This performance is difficult to describe in words but familiar for those who hang out with professional philosophers (think of friends or significant others at an event full of philosophers). It is also palpable for the person who is or is training to be a philosopher. We learn to fit in with crowds of philosophers; we start to notice when someone intentionally or unintentionally breaks a norm associated with being a good philosopher. It's a way of thinking, acting, of dealing with people, arguments, and ideas.

When learning philosophy as an undergraduate, it becomes evident that professors will often place you in one of two categories: philosopher, or not philosopher. While this is not the same in every class, it is evident, through interactions with a given professor, which category one falls into. The “you get it or you don't mentality” is present despite the role a professor holds in teaching or explanation. It is almost the case that professors will suggest that a student is not meant to be a part of the discipline, as though there is something inherent in the mind of a philosopher which cannot be learned, but is instead natural.<sup>3</sup> Insofar as this is part of the dominant epistemic lifeway present in philosophy, it is inherently harmful to minorities in the discipline.

Students who excel in 100-level philosophy courses, who are seen as having the right stuff, typically become actively initiated in the epistemic lifeway. These students are often guided with special attention to become more like a professional philosopher through that first course. Those who major in philosophy, who take higher level courses, become more adept. Those who go on to graduate school are even more specialized. They are now recognizably different from ‘the folk.’ Philosophy graduate students speak and act with a certain rigorous affectation. They say things like “That is false” (practically no one but a philosopher will ever utter this phrase in ordinary conversation) and they say things like “Let's suppose that everything supervenes on the physical...” They are always scrutinizing assertions, generating counterexamples, formulating thought experiments in seminars and at social gatherings.

The philosophy graduate student also becomes indoctrinated in the need to adopt a logically coherent *view* of the world, with the expectation that one's view should provide answers to every question that could be raised for it, and to understand all the propositions her view commits her to accepting. She may be called on to defend her commitments at any time of day from whatever philosopher might approach her having dreamt up some counterexample to her thesis. These ways of behaving and of organizing one's cognitive activities are both gateways to further advancement into the professional field and aspects of the basic epistemological virtues of the well-trained analytic philosopher, according to the well-trained analytic philosopher.

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<sup>3</sup> See Leslie et al (2015) for empirical data supporting the ubiquity of this lived experience.

No two people live in exactly the same way, of course.<sup>4</sup> The point is there is a tangible and recognizable quality that philosophy programs seek to instill in their students. It is simultaneously a form of professionalization and a form of training for life as a knower. The echelons of professional philosophy regard this training as objectively valuable and objectively correct—correct in the sense that if one wants to live as an objectively rational person, then one should think and act as a well-trained philosopher does. These ideals trickle down even to our 100-level introductory courses. From day one we aim to train our undergraduates to live, epistemically, like philosophers. Or at least this is the prescribed program, the expectation handed down to lecturers and professors and conveyed to undergrads by the community at large.

As someone with a PhD in philosophy, and as a white male, I find myself struggling with these lessons infused into me through my training. Part of my work, which I see as continuous with the work of creating a more inclusive classroom, is the work of challenging these assumptions about philosophical ability that have been drilled into me. It's hard to express but I find that these assumptions are closely tied with the way one is supposed to act in order to be a good philosopher. One is supposed to exude philosopher-i-ness: cool, rational, smartest-guy-in-the-room (and I do believe 'guy' is appropriate here!). The work of creating a more inclusive pedagogical space, for anyone who has been trained to think and act this way, is partly a matter of inner transformation, in order to stop portraying this and enculturating it as a good ideal toward which students should progress. The bad formations transmitted from previous generations of philosophers need to be identified and undone so they are not passed on to the next generation of philosophy students.

But, we must add, we perceive these implicit presumptions about what philosophical ability *is* to be closely tied with patriarchal and white supremacist ideals. The philosopher's way of being and acting comes out of a culture and place in history. It's an affectation which was cultivated in a culture that promotes patriarchal and white supremacist power structures, a culture which makes it impolite and uncomfortable to recognize power differentials and structural hierarchies but which nevertheless ruthlessly implements them. So, challenging the exclusionary aspects of philosophy's epistemic lifeway cannot be disentangled from challenging patriarchy and white supremacy.

#### **4. The Canon: Legacy of White Dudes**

Undergraduate philosophy courses offer a lot of insight into who is regarded as important in the field. The scholars traditionally cited in a modern philosophy

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<sup>4</sup> Writing and saying "of course" all the time is also, of course, part of the philosopher's epistemic lifeway. It signals that the interlocutor should accept the statement under consideration without argument, implying that they are in some sense 'out of the conversation' if the statement is not accepted.

class, for example, ultimately will overwhelmingly center cisgender white men. An example of this occurred in my undergraduate history of modern philosophy class, in which the texts read came from the following authors: Descartes, Locke, Leibniz, Spinoza, Hume, Kant, Malbranche, and Conway. The sole (white) woman discussed, Conway, was for a mere single class period, unlike many of the others. Reading Conway was shocking for the class because reading a woman's writing seemed odd for a class on modern philosophy. This was deemed as a progressive move for the instructor. While this class is specific to one specific undergraduate experience, it's widely recognized that typical undergraduate philosophy courses follow the canon of white male philosophers.

Utilizing a syllabus for a course with only cis white men suggests that there were no valuable woman of color (for example) who contributed to the field. Because of this practice, my undergraduate understanding of modern philosophy has a deficit. Outside research is required in order to find diverse voices (for example, women of color). Further, while I (privileged to have an undergraduate education at an elite university) might have the resources and time to seek such knowledge, not all those who might consider entering the field do. Despite my relative privilege, time constraints and other commitments have made it so that I still could not name a woman of color from the period of early modern philosophy.

As a student in the philosophy department, it is expected that you have prior knowledge when attending many philosophy classes. Being able to cite authors during class discussion that were not part of the reading is deemed as virtuous. The professor doesn't even need to give an overt sign of approval. Merely letting the citation go unremarked is enough to give a class the impression that they should already know about the reference.<sup>5</sup> It was not until my last semester of college that a professor formally stated that students citing outside texts or concepts should be ready to explain them and their relevance to the class, so that others in the class who were not familiar with the new material could also participate in the discussion. In order to have equitable engagement, it is crucial that all students understand textual references that come from outside the classroom. If a student brings up a reference without explaining it in a way that other students can benefit from, then that student is monopolizing the moment for their own gain—appearing virtuous—and excluding others from the conversation. Most philosophy classes I've taken have not regarded this as problematic. However, experiencing discussions where a student brings up an author that many students have not read does not create a productive space of discussion. The burden is placed on students who might not feel comfortable asking for an explanation of a text deemed common knowledge in the discipline.

But note that this practice typically only takes this course when the students are citing the white male canon. Authors from outside that canon would

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<sup>5</sup> Thank you to the editors of this volume for pointing out this aspect of the phenomenon!

be scrutinized or dismissed as often as not; certainly, citing Audre Lorde in class does not function to portray a student as a budding philosophical genius, whereas citing the views of Wittgenstein or Kripke might.

Professors must meet certain expectations for pedagogy. A history of modern philosophy class without the mention of figures such as Descartes, Hume, Hobbes, Locke, and Kant would be deemed inadequate. Professors are expected to teach certain canonical texts, but this role extends beyond mere syllabus construction. Making students become good, 'rational,' reasoners is also a task given to professors. Assigned term papers must follow a very rigid, philosophical format, answering a question and making an argument about the given the relevant figures.

As a lecturer in the philosophy department, it is my job to produce students who know certain things. I mostly teach 100-level courses. There is absolute pressure to make sure that students coming out of my Introduction to Ethics know who Kant is and can explain the difference between consequentialism and deontology. That is non-negotiable. Students who pass my Reason & Argumentation class should know what a deductively valid argument is. They should know what an ad hominem fallacy is. Moreover, if I've done my job well (according to prevailing pedagogical expectations) the students should care about whether an argument is deductively valid and they should stop committing ad hominem fallacies. These are some of the building blocks of the analytic philosopher's epistemic lifeway. Hence, teaching the canon is a cornerstone of inculcating the traditional epistemic lifeway.

The practice of requiring certain texts and authors is not inherently bad. However, these canonical texts are centered as the most important aspect of the concept being taught. This conveys the idea that all major discoveries and breakthroughs have been achieved by white men. That's false. Anyone coming into the discipline should be told that it's false, and that the whiteness and maleness of the canon is not due to the inherent genius of its authors but rather due to the exclusion of the many great thinkers who belonged to marginalized identities. The tools of the philosophical trade must also be scrutinized for their effect on accessibility. Often, these tools serve the function of directing philosophical inquiry to a particular kind of analysis, one that eschews social and political factors altogether in most cases.

Incorporating alternative material is difficult. Often proactive philosophers striving to diversify the discipline will struggle to work in feminist philosophy or intersectional critical race theory into the syllabus we're expected to teach. But centering alternative material, i.e. organizing the class around philosophy that is not part of the canon, risks delegitimizing the class altogether. Imagine teaching an epistemology course at the undergraduate level that does not address Gettier and the ensuing literature, but instead focused primarily on standpoint theory and epistemic injustice. Such a course would risk censure from a typical philosophy department (or maybe even the academic institution),

something like: this class does not satisfy the key learning objectives listed in the course catalogue for this course; students are not getting an adequate education in epistemology.

## 5. Racist philosophers

When taking philosophy classes, authors such as Kant and Heidegger are often discussed with little or no mention of their racist attitudes and ideas. I recall one class in which Heidegger was read and the merits of his arguments were discussed at length amongst the class. After this conversation had occurred for a substantive amount of time, the professor chose to enlighten the students about Heidegger's affiliation with the Nazi party. Students in the class, some of whom had family members who survived the Holocaust, were visibly upset. Students questioned why they had not been told this before reading such a controversial figure. Moreover, students wondered, how can an individual whose worldview is inherently incorrect make arguments about being? These questions are antithetical to a traditional philosophy class. Usually, the background of a person, other than maybe some dates, is run through quickly, if at all, with little discussion on how their ideologies might affect the quality of their philosophical inquiry. But we are told, and told to teach, again and again that we should not consider the author's moral shortcomings as part of any analysis of their ideas; so, the racism of philosophy's most influential thinkers is beside the point, or so we are told to accept.

Philosophy as a practice attempts to train the philosopher to ignore the socially situated position of other philosophers. In this way, philosophy whitewashes. Students are taught to think and write in a way that is absent from experience, ignoring notes in the text which blatantly suppose the inferiority of non-white races. This is standardized, as any such aspect is presented again and again to have no relevance to the argument at hand. Even more detrimental, any 'valid' argument is given some form of credibility for its logical structure. It is my duty as an undergraduate in philosophy to ignore Kant's racist anthropology, and instead only speak on the premises of his arguments. To assume that a philosopher's racist ideology is even remotely connected with his argument is an *ad hominem* fallacy.

This issue also connects with the question of teaching the canon raised in the previous section. As an instructor teaching Kant's deontology in *Introduction to Ethics*, I always mention Kant's racist anthropology (Eze 1997). Inevitably I find some students of color (and sometimes white students) asking me at some point, but why are we even reading this racist? I think this is a very important question for an undergraduate to ask. This approach contrasts with one, which is advocated by well-meaning colleagues, according to which we should not emphasize Kant's racism because it will cause students to dismiss him out of hand and thereby miss out on his important contributions. Implicit in this approach is (a) that Kant's racism is not implicated in his important

philosophical work and (b) to bring considerations of Kant's own personal moral failings to bear on his philosophy is to commit a version of the ad hominem fallacy. I think it's important to recognize that this way of thinking functions to portray the racism of our canonical philosopher heroes as irrelevant to their work and thereby justifies teaching that work in a way that avoids any confrontation with the cultural baggage that comes with the white male canon. Creating a more accessible classroom requires explicitly addressing the historical setting in which our most central texts were created, including their connections with prevailing political views of the time, especially when those views were explicitly endorsed by the author.

## 6. Casual uses of violence as illustration

Philosophy often utilizes unnecessarily graphic examples. One moment comes to mind in a *Philosophy of Art* class in which we were discussing a famous case of art vandalization. A student in the class likened the vandalization to rape. This analogy trivializes rape and sensationalizes the vandalization. It makes use of the imagery of rape to make a point about something other than rape, without any interest or concern for considering rape itself. It draws on the suffering and the appropriate moral condemnation of an element of systemic oppression against women and applies it to an example that has none of those features, but these disanalogies are ignored in the rhetorical use of the analogy itself. The analogy only succeeds because these disanalogies are ignored, i.e. because the profound harm of sexual violence is ignored. For these reasons this use of the analogy is disrespectful and harmful. It might also very well be triggering to some in the class. It's not a suitable analogy. But these reasons for which it is not suitable are not immediately recognized within the context of a philosophy class. In the traditional epistemic lifeway, participating in philosophy class means people get to say whatever they like as long as the argument sounds cogent to the white male ear. It is epistemically virtuous to make commentary in the classroom, regardless of how that commentary may affect others.

After I started teaching, I began noticing how much the philosophical discourse is saturated with violent content. Take for example the first chapter of Sam Harris's book *Free Will*. This seemed like an ideal introductory text when I began designing my first ever intro class. But the first chapter describes in gruesome detail a horrible crime that really happened (Harris 2012). The rhetorical effect is supposed to be: we need to have a theory of free will or else we must say that the perpetrators were blameless for this horrible crime. But is it necessary to make students contemplate a horribly disturbing crime in order for them to think clearly about free will? What are the pedagogical benefits of subjecting them to such material?

One could argue we have a duty as teachers to avoid introducing such violent material when less disturbing thought experiments can make the same point. Yet many professional philosophers will affirm that such violent intuition

pumps are necessary and important. They will maintain, consequently, that doing philosophy well requires having a thick skin and subduing basic emotions. This is another aspect of the epistemic lifeway that philosophers are trained to participate in. Set your emotions aside and read the horribly violent intuition pumps. Make up your own horribly violent intuition pumps and share them in class. Anyone who is disturbed or upset by this practice is simply unable to control their emotions, thus not fully rational and a subpar philosopher.

Relatedly, we find many examples that connect with themes of oppression but do not address or analyze the oppression involved. For example, in a famous counterexample to utilitarianism (appearing in introductory textbooks), McCloskey (1957) constructs a thought experiment wherein “a sheriff [is] faced with the choice either of framing a Negro for a rape that had aroused hostility to the Negroes (a particular Negro generally being believed to be guilty but whom the sheriff knows not to be guilty) – and thus preventing serious anti-Negro riots which would probably lead to some loss of life and increased hatred of each other by whites and Negroes – or of hunting for the guilty person and thereby allowing the anti-Negro riots to occur.” The purported upshot of the thought experiment is that utilitarianism recommends framing an innocent person. Regardless of whether this provides an effective objection to utilitarianism, our point here is that such a flagrantly racially charged example is presented in McCloskey’s essay without any analysis of racism. There is no discussion of systematic racialized violence in the form of angry white mobs or of the controlling image (Collins 2002) of Black man as rapist. Moreover, the use of the word “negro” is problematic (we even debated including it here) because the use of this word by a white man in the 1950s is connected with jim crow era oppression. I would hazard a guess that many white male professors who have taught this example have not paused to consider these things in classroom discussion, either.

Why is such a complex example of racialized violence chosen, only then to ignore all the complexities of the case and its connections to systemic oppression? The thought experiment objectifies racialized violence to make a point about justice in general while being unwilling to actually engage in a sustained analysis of racism. Similar concerns can be raised for countless other examples, including familiar appeals to slavery and the holocaust to support intuitions of moral realism. The casual use of such examples is drilled into philosophy students from the very beginning. Our fluency with such examples and the norm of ignoring their implications for the social fabric is an aspect of our epistemic lifeway that causes third-order exclusion. As long as philosophical pedagogy condones uncritical and objectifying uses of examples drawn from the history of oppression without enforcing a norm of deeply analyzing the structures of oppression in connection with those examples, it will continue to be pedagogy aimed at educating those who do not face such oppression.

## 7. Safe spaces and content warnings

As an undergraduate in a college environment, there is a lot of talk on how to make classrooms places in which discourse can be shared and created in an open and safe environment.<sup>6</sup> Many professors in other disciplines will utilize content warnings in class when discussing issues (such as sexual violence), that can be triggering to some individuals. Generally speaking, philosophy laughs at safe spaces (although there are certainly exceptions!). While philosophers are not necessarily shunned for using or requesting content warnings and implementing safe spaces, the idea that a department should make such things central to their pedagogy would surely meet strong resistance.

We think this resistance is deeply connected with philosophy's epistemic lifeway. Philosophers are trained to disregard emotion and personal concern as irrelevant, especially with issues that are sensitively connected with social justice. The way in which philosophy centers figures such as Kant, despite blatantly racist ideologies, suggests the inferiority of students of color. Why should the ideas of individuals who have done so much wrong be held so highly? Yet this thought is not taken seriously, nor is there any forethought or concern with teaching students of color the work of racists without warning or comment, precisely because philosophers are well-rehearsed in ignoring such details and separating the content they engage with from any historical contingencies in which the content arose.

Likewise, the ideal philosopher is supposed to have no emotion at all when confronting racist or sexist ideas. If such emotions do arise, the best thing to do is practice setting them aside. A philosophy professor deeply enmeshed in this epistemic lifeway might even think it would be helpful to have students of color defend racist ideas, just to help them practice setting their emotions aside. Such a philosopher surely sees no use for content warnings or safe spaces, which could only function to safeguard emotional fragility and prevent students from developing the iron skin required to face the facts and make the strongest possible arguments.

By the same token, students' arguments are valid if they follow a specific form, regardless of their content. An argument can be valid even if it conveys harmful ideas. If no one can poke holes in the argument, then its conclusion stands. If the conclusion strikes people of color as racist and upsetting, well they can either live with that or engage in the iron-clad, emotionless battle of logic required to refute the problematic conclusion. To restrict such arguments with the goal of providing a safe space is seen as refusing to engage in truth-seeking, to flee from 'our' responsibility to seek the truth regardless of where it may lead, and 'our' responsibility to disabuse those with racist or sexist ideas through sound and cogent arguments.

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<sup>6</sup> For extensive discussions of safe space policies, see Rom (1998), Holly & Steiner (2005), and Palfrey (2017).

In these ways, philosophy's epistemic lifeway is antithetical to many practices that are designed to keep marginalized students safe and engaged on equal epistemic footing with their more dominantly situated classmates. Safe spaces are made for marginalized students, who have much more at stake when classrooms become unsafe. Dominant students who think marginalized students should just toughen up fail to recognize the trauma connected with things like racism and sexual assault. Pushing back against the dominant epistemic lifeway therefore means finding ways to shift norms around safe spaces and content warnings.

## **8. A priori methodology**

Philosophers often draw conclusions on the basis of a priori reasoning. The practice is so common that a priori reasoning is often treated as coextensive with doing philosophy. Philosophers adopt apriorism as methodology insofar as the use of a priori justification is normatively accepted as a staple of philosophical practice and as an important source of philosophical knowledge. While apriorism is hardly ubiquitous – there have been many dissenting empiricist positions over the centuries – it is certainly a hallmark of philosophy as a discipline. Students are sure to encounter its influence in every philosophy course they take.

We claim that apriorism as methodology contributes to third-order epistemic exclusion within academic philosophy. Reliance on a priori methods reinforces the epistemic authority of dominant agents and diminishes the epistemological significance of lived experience of members of marginalized groups. This is especially noticeable when dominant agents make a priori arguments about issues connected with social identities and social justice, but the effect is present in all fields of philosophical inquiry. Here we delve into just a few of the ways that we see apriorism contributing to exclusion.

A priori methodology drives and is driven by the ideal promoted within our discipline that we can arrive at universally valid conclusions on the basis of individual thought and reflection. This ideal seems to go hand in hand with the dismissal of lived experience. If the lived experiences of marginalized groups were somehow necessary for a priori philosophical knowledge (of ethics, or metaphysics, or anything) then such philosophical knowledge would not be universally accessible, and this in turn would seem to threaten the universal validity of a priori reasoning and the scope of the conclusions drawn. It would also render many traditional philosophical procedures dubious. For example, the practice of sitting around in a seminar room filled with mostly white and/or male graduate students talking about philosophy comes to be seen as insular and narrow, once diversity of lived experience is treated as of epistemic importance.

Certain complex issues might be raised here having to do with specific details of a priori knowledge acquisition. One such issue concerns enabling experiences. It is often conceded that the possibility of obtaining a priori

knowledge of some proposition P can depend on having had certain experiences, specifically if possessing the concepts necessary for contemplating P requires having had certain experiences. In such cases, enabling experiences are necessary for a priori reflection. For example, perhaps knowing that green is a color requires having had an experience of green in order to grasp the concept of being green. Likewise, it might be that knowing truths about racism or sexism requires having had certain life experiences in order to have those concepts, or at least requires extending conceptual credibility to someone who has grasped those concepts. We think, when understood along these lines, a priori knowledge can be an important part of philosophical theorizing within an inclusive environment. But standard philosophical practice regularly ignores or denies any role for lived experience in theorizing, especially with issues seen as 'deep and fundamental,' which are typically conceived as utterly disconnected from social or political life.

A priori justification is also often taken to be defeasible. What is justified after *some* a priori thinking might be shown later to be unjustified after *further* a priori thinking. So, by standard a priori methodology, a white male philosopher with no experience of racism or sexism could be a priori justified in reaching certain conclusions, e.g. that it is possible to be racist and sexist to white men. Indeed, many white men have seemingly reached this conclusion by a priori reasoning. Even if such reasoning can be defeated by further considerations, prevailing epistemic norms support the assessment that these white men have defeasible a priori justification for their own homebrewed theories of racism and sexism.

This presents a deep obstacle for women and people of color to access the discipline of philosophy. The systematic reliance on and endorsement of a priori justification bestows epistemic power (Dotson 2018) on dominant agents to reach their own conclusions about issues of justice and equality without consulting the lived experiences of those who experience systemic injustice and oppression. Here epistemic power refers to the ability to ignore input from less powerful epistemic agents, even when confronted directly with such input.

A defender of apriorism might protest as follows. We've conceded that a priori judgments can be overturned by further a priori thinking. So, all that's required is for marginalized agents to contest the a priori judgments of dominant agents with further good reasoning, to convince the dominant agents to rescind whatever wrong-headed view they've thought up. Such a response, however, fails to take seriously how epistemic power works in philosophical exchanges. If many members of a dominant group claim to know a priori that P or take themselves to have an a priori argument for P, then lived experiences that weigh against P can often be 'legitimately' dismissed on the strength of considerations in favor of P. After all, the considerations are mutually accepted among many dominant agents who support and encourage one another's judgment. Even if lived experience is given some credibility, it may still be ignored pending an

'adequate' response to the a priori argument for P. For the dominant agent, claiming to know something a priori is like seizing the high ground, especially when other members of the dominant faction vocally support the a priori warrant. We think pushing back against this kind of scenario requires seriously reconsidering the role that a priori judgements are legitimated to play within philosophical discourse.

## 9. Rationality

Rationality is a standard of excellence among philosophers. It is commonly interpreted as believing and acting in accord with reason. Perhaps the two most characteristic features of the term "rationality" are (i) it expresses a central and potent evaluative concept within philosophical discourse, applied to arguments, beliefs, and people themselves, and (ii) uses of the term are extremely variegated and contested among philosophers, so much so that there is no widely accepted theory of rationality; often differences in use are bound up with different theoretical conceptions of justification and other epistemological virtues. What we have then is a term that carries a lot of weight and authority, which can be used to silence and censure people and arguments that are deemed "irrational," but which has no widely accepted definition or theoretical explanation.

Nevertheless, some characteristic features of rationality are widely recognized and function to guide usage of the term within the epistemic lifeways of philosophy. Rationality requires (a) being internally consistent, (b) obeying some set of inference rules (which tends to vary from theory to theory), and (c) thinking and acting so as to make good decisions and arrive at true beliefs.<sup>7</sup> Each of these features potentially functions to exclude persons of marginalized social identities from full participation in philosophical discourse, insofar as they can be deployed from the 'high ground' to dismiss ideas and thought processes that are deemed to fall short of the murky ideal. It's not that these features should be dispelled from the philosophical imagination, but their use to delegitimize ideas and thought processes must be taken in the context of prevailing power relations within classrooms and discourses in order for an appropriately sensitive recognition of how they might be used to exclude.

Moreover, rationality has traditionally been reserved for white European men, and so uses of the word carry a historical connotation that excludes women and people of color. The term "rationality" suggests a form of exclusivity that only 'true philosophers' rightfully partake in. Women and people of color have not traditionally been welcome in this upper echelon of academic society. Hence the language of rationality has been coded historically to marginalize non-dominant groups. It is clearly present in white patriarchal ideology. Black women are marked as too angry; white women are regarded as hysterical; all women are seen as tending toward emotionality and consequently an inability to

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<sup>7</sup> These characteristics of rationality are catalogued by Wedgewood (1999).

think clearly. As Antony (1995) points out, this does not mean we should necessarily reject the concept of rationality altogether; instead we might be concerned to argue that women and people of color are fully rational. Our point here is only that the concept of rationality has historically been used to exclude and carries a strong potential to continue excluding for the foreseeable future.

Rationality has also been used as the demarcating feature that justifies white supremacy. During the historical development of the concept of rationality (in Europe) rationality was seen, especially by Kant, as a kind of evolutionary destination<sup>8</sup> toward which humanity was progressing (Eze 1997, Mills 2014). White people, of course, were accorded the place of pride at the vanguard of this advancement of human consciousness toward more perfect rationality, while Indigenous peoples were seen as lagging behind, either permanently stagnated or in need of white assistance to gain ground. This is the fundamental aspect in which Indigenous peoples are rendered primitive as compared to whites. Further, as Aristotle argued, rationality is the distinguishing feature of humanity, and widely seen as such. Animals are the irrational brutes. Then, insofar as women and Indigenous peoples are construed as inherently less rational than white men, those groups are represented as closer to animals – more in tune with nature, perhaps, but less apt for rational thought. All of these ideological connections are present within the classroom, where norms of rationality are explicitly and implicitly communicated; the ties to oppressive social hierarchies are felt by those who are marginalized but hardly ever acknowledged by those in power.

What are the norms that philosophy's interest in rationality imposes? Make rational arguments. Don't make irrational arguments. Don't let emotions dictate your beliefs. Do not be emotionally or personally connected to your beliefs or explanations of things, for personal interest and emotion cannot inform; they can only detract from clear understanding.<sup>9</sup> Personal experience can provide evidence, but only insofar as that evidence could be appreciated by everyone. If your own experience has some evidence in it, then that evidence must be equally appreciable by everyone, even those who have had very different experiences.

In light of these norms, teaching feminist epistemology and other epistemologies of resistance can be seen as running counter to the learning objectives of undergraduate philosophy. Teaching students that situatedness matters, that emotionality is not incompatible with rationality, that lived experience is relevant – these lessons conflict with the overarching narrative that students receive in other philosophy classes. Hence there is resistance to centering resistant epistemologies.

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<sup>8</sup> ...as if evolution has a destination...

<sup>9</sup> These ideas are forcefully developed in the feminist epistemology literature. See, for some examples, Scheman (1995), Code (2012) and Collins (2002).

As a teacher, there is pressure to offset the presentation of counter-hegemonic ideas by presenting the traditional conception of rationality and its attendant norms as a fully legitimate alternative to the epistemologies of resistance. Often we teach the classical canon, then teach feminist critique as a potential response. This pedagogical approach has the effect of first legitimating the classical conception, then criticizing it. A more radical approach would be to begin by teaching feminist epistemology as if it were the received view, then presenting the traditional conception in the course of critiquing it as an ideological bulwark of patriarchy and white supremacy. But such an approach certainly risks delegitimation of the course itself, as more conservative or classically liberal students and colleagues would likely see such course content as ideologically loaded, biased, and ultimately inappropriate given the prevailing traditional epistemic norms.

We see here again how the epistemic lifeway of philosophy manifests its epistemological resilience. An attempt to push back against the traditional exclusionary way we understand rationality and its attendant norms clashes with the norms themselves, which renders the attempt to push back against them as itself problematically irrational. In the case considered above, the attempt to teach resistant critiques of traditional conceptions of rationality is rendered as politically motivated; hence, it appears as problematically irrational.

## 10. Socratic method

The philosophical hero Socrates challenged assumptions relentlessly until he was put to death by those who did not want to answer his questions. Asking questions has been the hallmark of philosophy. Inquiring into everything and leaving no stone unturned, philosophers cannot be barred from pursuing any inquiry. Performing traditional philosophy requires accepting that all questions are open questions. On the flip side, a philosopher is expected to explain and defend her views whenever she is questioned by another philosopher. Socrates teaches that no belief is sacrosanct. One can always appropriately be called on to defend any belief, and it is always inappropriate to refuse to explain and defend that belief.

This practice leads to difficulties for marginalized persons who wish to participate in academic philosophy. The open question methodology entails that the experiences of marginalized persons and their understanding of their own oppression can be called into question. Even their existence qua their identity can be called into question.

Consider the question: "Are trans women really women?" According to widespread and familiar norms of philosophical discourse, raising such a question is always legitimate.<sup>10</sup> Philosophy teachers should allow or even encourage discussion of such a question. But such conversations are not neutral,

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<sup>10</sup> See Bettcher (2019) for discussion.

abstract inquiries. While they can be conducted as a mere academic exercise among a crowd of cis philosophers, discussing the question of whether trans women are really women inflicts heavy burdens on trans students and trans faculty. By raising the question as if it were an open question, the questioner shifts the conversational context so that the truth of the proposition that trans women are women can't be taken for granted.<sup>11</sup> Further, the norm that philosophers must defend and explain their beliefs entails that trans women philosophers can be called on (at any time, at any location, by any philosopher) to defend the legitimacy of their gender.

Thus, the socratic norm functions as a barrier to equal participation of trans women within the community. In similar ways, the open question norm allows the existence and extent of sexism, racism, classism, and homophobia to be called into question without provocation or warning. All that is required is mere curiosity, or even feigned curiosity. This curiosity can involve asking for conceptual arguments or empirical data to back up the claims made by marginalized agents about their experiences of oppression. The norms of philosophical discourse demand that 'adequate reason' be provided for anything a person believes, and a philosopher may be called on at any time to provide a defense of her beliefs. Predictably, treating lived experiences of oppression as open to doubt and re-interpretation by members of dominant groups who don't experience those oppressions will function to alienate and disempower members of marginalized groups who are interested in academic philosophy.

## 11. Conclusion

In sections 3-10, we examined a number of aspects of the epistemic life of an academic philosopher, identifying various ways in which these aspects produce third-order exclusion. We remarked at the outset that third-order exclusion is somewhat difficult to characterize due to its abstract nature. We hope that through our presentation of these case studies we have provided some practical examples of third-order exclusion in action. We have also implicitly suggested a number of ways of remedying the situation, viz. by addressing and changing the problematic aspects of philosophy's epistemic lifeway adduced above. These problems are very hard to address though, because philosophical training teaches its practitioners to see them as non-problems and to see solutions to the problems as inappropriate, irrational, unwarranted, biased, censorious – the list could go on and on, enumerating the ways in which philosophers will defend the

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<sup>11</sup> To be clear, this question is not one that should even be asked. Asking it is an attack on trans people. Questioning gender is a way of denying somebody's gender, of dehumanizing them. It denies their gender in the sense that, by calling their gender into question, it denies their authority to say what their gender is and thereby dehumanizes them and delegitimizes their experience. In a certain sense, we think the question itself is invalid – it's harmful and not even a meaningful question to ask – although saying exactly what this means and defending it is beyond the scope of this paper.

status quo by appeal to the very epistemic lifeway we seek to change. Indeed, this is what makes the problem one of third-order exclusion.

Specifically, the resistance to change that an oppressive epistemological system exhibits is evidence that we are dealing with third-order exclusion. Where we find an epistemic lifeway that promotes problematic exclusion and epistemic oppression, and where it is the lifeway itself and its resistance to change that produces the exclusion and oppression, that is where we find third-order exclusion. Hence, identifying ways in which philosophers are likely to push back against initiatives to change the way we teach and practice philosophy in order to make it more accessible, where those ways of resisting change are generated within philosophy's self-reflective epistemology, provide examples of the epistemological resilience of philosophy's epistemic lifeway. As such, they serve to further illustrate the sense in which academic philosophy inflicts third-order exclusion.

We want to create a new epistemic lifeway that makes philosophy more accessible. To achieve this goal, it is imperative that we make some major changes in the way we conduct ourselves as philosophers, both in teaching and in our communal practices. We do not have the space here to provide an in-depth plan of action – here our goal was only to theorize the sense in which academic philosophy produces a distinctive epistemic lifeway that generates third-order exclusion. But we want to conclude with a very brief outline of a suggestion for producing a better future.

Our suggestion put simply is to teach intersectionality in every philosophy class. Intersectionality theory should be incorporated into every philosophy course in one way or another using source texts and drawing connections to whatever canonical material is covered.

The purpose is to bring philosophy into conversation with discussions of intersecting oppressions and marginalized identities. We believe that texts written by such luminaries as Lorde (2012), Crenshaw (2022), Collins (2002), Roberts (1999), and hooks (2000) provide a wealth of topics in ethics, epistemology, philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, and metaphysics, as well as in a very wide range of philosophy's sub-disciplines including feminist philosophy, philosophy of race and gender, philosophy of science, philosophy of law, aesthetics, philosophy of history, and many others.

The challenge is to bring the content of philosophy as traditionally understood into conversation with such intersectional texts. The fact that there is very often no straightforward way of doing this is the result of philosophy's disconnect from the lives of non-dominant identities. Nevertheless, we think it is a challenge that must be taken up whole-heartedly if philosophy is to be transformed into a more accessible discipline for members of marginalized groups.

Again, we recognize that there will be strong resistance to such a program. Many philosophers would vehemently protest any such requirement and would

find plenty of justification and support in their protest from within the discipline – both the content of the discipline and its practitioners. But this is more evidence of the fact that philosophy produces third-order exclusion. The very content and organization of the discipline produces resistance to engaging with the interests and struggles of marginalized groups. Overcoming the epistemic resilience that (for the most part) keeps intersectionality out of philosophy classrooms is daunting; here is not the place to develop an elaborate plan of action, as our goal has been the modest one of articulating and arguing for the thesis that philosophy produces third-order exclusion. Nevertheless, we have high hopes that philosophy as a discipline can incorporate intersectionality in a comprehensive way, as many other departments in the humanities have done.

We have laid out our conception of philosophy's epistemic lifeway as a source of third-order exclusion. We have illustrated what this means by providing examples of how epistemic norms enforced by traditional philosophical thought and pedagogy inflict third-order exclusions on marginalized groups. We believe steps can be taken to radically transform the discipline, bringing it closer in line with other humanities which are more focused on issues of oppression and injustice. Philosophy provides its own self-contained justifications for preventing its own transformation into a field that would be more accessible to members of marginalized groups. This is the nature of third-order exclusion. Overcoming this resilience is obviously a tremendous task and one that we believe deserves a lot of attention.

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Zahra Thani, Derek Anderson

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