BRIEF FOR AN INCLUSIVE ANTI-CANON

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Abstract

In this essay, I describe and defend an inclusive anti-canonical approach to the study of the history of philosophy. My proposal, based on an analysis of the nature of the history of philosophy and the value of engaging in the practice, is this: The history of philosophy is the history of rationally justified, systematic answers to philosophical questions; studying this subject is both intrinsically and instrumentally valuable; these benefits do not derive from the imposition of a canon, and indeed, there should be no canon; the absence of a canon leaves room for a thousand courses on a thousand different topics with a thousand different narrative structures; but a good syllabus should be relevantly diverse in a way that fits the thematic arc of the course; and this prescription for the discipline is inclusive, in ways that can only strengthen and enliven it for future generations.

Keywords: pedagogy, history of philosophy, canon, inclusive

When I was in high school, I was enamored of mathematics. Although philosophy was a required subject, I thought that philosophy and mathematics had little to do with each other. But one day, in the philosophy section of a local bookstore, I found Bertrand Russell's *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*; and, because it was a large book that

made me feel important as I walked to the checkout counter, I also purchased *A History of Western Philosophy*. At night, I took out my flashlight after lights out and read.

Recently, I took out my copy of Russell's *History*, and looked to see whether it discusses the views of women philosophers. In the index, I found nothing. But what of the famous correspondence between Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes? Surely Russell mentioned it, even if only in passing? He didn't. Instead, I found this:

> Unfortunately, through Chanut, the French ambassador at Stockholm, Descartes got into correspondence with Queen Christina of Sweden, a passionate and learned lady who thought that, as a sovereign, she had a right to waste the time of great men. (Russell 1945, 560)

I'm sure I read these words. I'm sure I took them at face value. Looking back, I feel shame and anger. Looking forward, I feel a sense of purpose.

My purpose is to argue for an inclusive anti-canonical pedagogy for the history of philosophy. Much of my argument builds on or responds to the work of others who have already thought very carefully about philosophical historiography and the place of the history of philosophy in philosophical pedagogy: Jonathan Bennett 2001, Martha Bolton 2014, Daniel Garber 2003 and 2005, Jessica Gordon-Roth and Nancy Kendrick 2015, Sarah Hutton 2014 and 2015, Eileen O'Neill 1998 and 2005, Jonathan Rée 2002, Donald Rutherford 2014, Lisa Shapiro 2004, Mary Ellen Waithe 2015, Bernard Williams 2007, and Charlotte Witt 2006, among many others. But I believe that the particular pedagogical

vision I present, though perhaps latent in the practice of many working historians of philosophy, has not yet been adequately articulated or defended.

I will focus on the following questions: First, what texts should historians of philosophy assign in their courses? Second, how should historians of philosophy approach the analysis of those texts? The most common answer to these questions is woven into the very structure of most undergraduate philosophy programs. First, teach the traditional canon: Plato, Aristotle, maybe some Stoics, Epicureans, and Skeptics, maybe some medieval figures (such as Thomas Aquinas and William of Ockham), then Thomas Hobbes, René Descartes, Baruch Spinoza, Nicolas Malebranche, Gottfried Leibniz, John Locke, George Berkeley, David Hume, Thomas Reid, and Immanuel Kant. Second, put these figures into conversation with each other, and maybe bring out actual conversations or reactions (Aristotle on Plato, Spinoza on Descartes, Berkeley on Locke, and so on). As many of the scholars I've mentioned have pointed out, it is shocking that the canon excludes women, and bothersome (though perhaps necessary, because of time constraints) that the works of some less well known men are not included. Some defenders of the classical canon will *think*, even if they will not always *say*, that this is the price we must pay for the sake of quality control. Is this the right pedagogical recipe? The answer, I believe, is no. But what, then, should we do instead?

In order to answer our two questions, we need to look deeper. The correct recipe will only emerge from a better understanding of the *nature* of the history of philosophy and of the *value* of engaging in the practice.

There is no shortage of proposals telling us what the history of philosophy is, and what it exists to teach us. I will begin by criticizing four leading options:

1. Antiquarianism

Some historians of philosophy are antiquarians (see, e.g., Garber 2003 and 2005). As they see it, philosophical systems and arguments of the past are contextually determined historical artifacts that are to be studied in the way one studies historical events, such as the First World War or the collapse of the Soviet Union. The suggested benefits of the antiquarian approach are that it will teach us about the way in which non-philosophical interests can impinge on philosophical beliefs, and more generally about how philosophy fits into a larger cultural context; and that it will thereby free us from a kind of confining essentialism about the nature of philosophy itself, and hence make us better philosophers.

2. Collegialism

Some historians of philosophy see no difference between their discipline and the practice of philosophy more generally (see, e.g., Bennett 2001). To the collegialist, historical figures such as Descartes or Spinoza are philosophers with whom we would be conversing, both in person and through academic journals, if only they were still alive. The job of the historian, then, is to consider what, if anything, these long dead figures might have to teach working philosophers now. Collegialists tend to come in two flavors: optimistic and pessimistic. The optimistic collegialist thinks that a particular philosopher has discovered the keys that will unlock the mysteries of the universe, and then devotes her or his life to the charitable (often, as I see it, excessively charitable) exposition and defense of that

philosopher's views. The pessimistic collegialist mines past historical works for mistakes, mistakes from which we can learn, mostly by avoiding them.

3. Disruptivism

For some historians (see, e.g., Williams 2007), the function of the discipline is to uncover and describe wondrous and strange theories of old, with the idea that confrontation with unfamiliar and bizarre conceptual schemes will help us to question assumptions that are so embedded in our current ways of thinking that we simply take them for granted. To the Disruptivist, the value of the history of philosophy lies in its potential for creative disruption: to learn to see the world through the eyes of an Aristotelian, Cartesian, or Kantian is to acquire a kind of mental facility that permits the fashioning of new insights in the present.

4. Dialecticism

For some historians of philosophy (see, e.g., Rutherford 2014), the discipline involves reconstructing the dialectical history of philosophy itself, with the idea that it is impossible to achieve a complete understanding of current philosophy without understanding its dialectical history. As a form of intellectual investigation concerned with our understanding and assessment of what philosophy has already accomplished, the history of philosophy would, on this view, be seen as a branch of metaphilosophy, itself a branch of philosophy. For the dialecticist historian, then, the history of philosophy is valuable inasmuch as philosophy itself is valuable: for the former discipline is merely one part or aspect of the latter.

I begin with antiquarianism. There are, I agree, benefits to be derived from treating past philosophical systems and arguments as culturally constrained artifacts. By studying the different ways in which existing prejudices (e.g., about the natural abilities of women and men) affected the philosophical systems of the past, we learn to be more diffident about our own affirmations of impartiality and objectivity. In seeing how the very understanding of what counts as a philosophical problem has changed through the centuries, we become more open to the possibility that our present understanding is too confining. But the antiquarian thinks it unimportant if contextualist historical research reveals little or no continuity between the methods or systems of the past and the methods or systems of the present. The benefits of the history of philosophy are purely contingent: if we found a way to acquire philosophical diffidence and broad-mindedness other than by studying historical artifacts, the only reason to study past philosophical works would be, well, antiquarian. And, from the pedagogical point of view, there would be no point to teaching the history of philosophy to graduate students in philosophy, many of whom would have no more reason to study Gottfried Leibniz or Margaret Cavendish than they would have to study the structure of a sonata or enzyme.

As for collegialism, there are, of course, benefits to be derived from treating past philosophers as if they were our colleagues, interrogating their works as if one were interrogating the works of Frances Kamm or Charles Mills. Collegialist history puts us in a position to avoid repeating past mistakes and reinventing the wheel. In places, here and there, collegialism earns its keep: modern defenders of something approaching a theory of innate ideas or dispositions will find illumination in the study of the debate between Locke

and Leibniz; modern political philosophers find it rewarding to study John Stuart Mill and Mary Wollstonecraft; and so on. But, as some antiquarians have pointed out, the urge to hold a meaningful conversation with past philosophers poses a serious danger of anachronism. In many cases, especially outside of ethics and political philosophy, the conceptual schemes of the past do not map onto the conceptual schemes of the present. And when this happens, there is a serious risk of distorting past works to fit one's own conceptual presuppositions. It doesn't help that pessimistic collegialists are busy poking holes in the arguments and positions of the brilliant philosophers of the past, who are not here to defend their work against what often turn out to be misreadings and misunderstandings. And even optimistic collegialists surely overstate the case when they insist that the object of their adulation didn't put a foot wrong. Sometimes it is worth conversing directly with the dead; but sometimes it isn't, because we just know more than they ever did, or because their conceptual repertoire is outdated, or because the conversation has moved along and achieved a level of sophistication undreamed of before the advent of modern science, the computer and the world wide web.

As for creative disruption, I am all for it. If an unfamiliar and challenging way of looking at the world makes it possible to open our minds to possibilities that would otherwise have seemed foreclosed, that is all to the good. But surely the benefits of learning the history of philosophy do not derive solely from its potential to shake things up. Sometimes a philosopher from the past manifests genuine insight that doesn't disrupt the dominant worldview; and even when insight is hard to come by, it doesn't follow that there is nothing to learn or appreciate from the scrutiny of past philosophical systems and arguments (more on this below).

What of dialecticism? Again, when understanding the dialectical history of a particular philosophical problem or argument is needed to gain a complete understanding of where we now stand in the relevant philosophical debate, I am all in favor of a dialecticist approach. It's just that I don't think we find ourselves in this situation all that often. There is a long history of discussion of the problem of material constitution. Maybe the best way to set up the problem mimics some aspects of past instantiations of the debate, but the idea that we *need* to run through ancient discussions of the Ship of Theseus, or Hobbes's tweaking of the problem, in order to get a grip on it strikes me as a mistake. Similarly, I don't think we need to understand the debate between Stoics and Skeptics over whether there are any cataleptic impressions to set up the skeptical challenge to our empirical knowledge claims. It is definitely nice to know that the mind-body problem has a history: but I don't think we *need* to know this history in order to understand or solve the problem as we now understand it.

It is largely for these reasons that I am not an antiquarian, collegialist, disruptivist, or dialecticist, though all of these approaches sometimes bear fruit. But mine is not a *via negativa*: to criticize views of the discipline that I do not support (at least, not fully) is not yet to set out the view of the discipline that I endorse. This view emerges organically, I hope, both from the nature of philosophy and from the qualities that are internal to the primary sources that draw many students to the history of philosophy.

As I understand it, philosophy is the attempt to provide true, rationally justified, systematic, and empirically supported answers to philosophical questions, i.e., questions that concern the most basic features of the universe and the place of human beings in it. This understanding of the discipline makes sense of the fact that we tend to divide up the

field, very roughly, into metaphysics, epistemology, and value theory, broadly understood: we want to know what there is and what the things that exist are like, how we can know (or at least acquire justified beliefs) about the things that exist, and what things are valuable, permissible, and required, in which ways, and why.

It is important to recognize that the questions and even the answers to those questions by themselves do not define what philosophy is. Philosophy is at least partly defined by the *way* these questions are answered, that is, by the *shape* of the answers and by the *methods* by which the answers are obtained. I might write a novel, say, in which the various characters exemplify or act out what I conceive to be an answer to a philosophical question. Or I might write a poem that is in some ineffably subtle way supposed to capture the nature and grip of such a question. But when I do this, I am *inspired* by philosophy; I am not *doing* philosophy. Rather, I am using philosophical themes and tropes in the service of artistic expression. On the interpretive side, you might read one of my novels or poems (or you might listen to a piece of music, such as Richard Strauss's "Death and Transfiguration", or scrutinize a painting or sculpture) and find some philosophical themes in it. You might find yourself saying something like this: "Here is a character whose actions are constrained by various environmental and psychological factors. The obvious question, perhaps one that the novelist intends that we ask, is whether the character is acting freely and whether she is morally responsible for what she does." (This is the sort of question that comes up, for example, in literary criticism directed at understanding Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*.) But the meaningful ascription of philosophical *motives* to the author, or the meaningful extraction of philosophical *themes*

from the artist's product, doesn't entail that the work of art is also a work of philosophy. In many cases, it's not.

If philosophy aims at providing rationally justified and systematic answers to metaphysical, epistemological, and normative questions, then it must aim at making *assertions*, and it must be prepared to defend those assertions on the basis of theories or arguments. If you climb Mount Kilimanjaro and come away with the sense that your life is meaningful in a way it wasn't before, this is not the result of a philosophical inquiry or investigation into the meaning of life. If I manage to change your answers to certain philosophical questions by spiking your drink with LSD or by subjecting you to electroshock therapy, neither of us is engaging in the activity of philosophy. The end of philosophy is Truth, and the proper method of acquiring Truth is Reason.

It is sometimes said that the Enlightenment was a period, roughly corresponding to the 18th century in Europe, characterized by the fight against superstition and by the veneration of reason. But, as I understand it, the Enlightenment stretches from the present day as far back as the first use of reason to answer philosophical questions, which takes us well beyond the surviving fragments of the Presocratics, back at least to the Upanishads. I will overstate my claim ("overstate", because I distinguish between science and philosophy, and yet of course recognize that science is also a reason-driven activity) by saying that the Enlightenment is not just one of many different periods in the history of philosophy: the Enlightenment is the *entire* history of philosophy.

What, on this understanding of philosophy, is the *history* of philosophy? The answer should be plain: it is, primarily, the accurate reconstruction of past attempts to provide rationally justified, systematic, and empirically supported answers to philosophical

questions. Many practitioners of the history of philosophy, having been trained as philosophers, are also attracted to an activity that follows very naturally upon the results of historical reconstruction, namely, the *evaluation* of those results (as successful or unsuccessful, whether absolutely or dialectically). To take one example, one might reconstruct all of the arguments in Plato's *Parmenides* (see, e.g., Rickless (2007)). This is part and parcel of the history of philosophy. It is then natural to ask whether those arguments are valid (or sound), or, at least, whether it would have been reasonable for Plato to have believed that they were valid (or sound). We might also ask whether it would have been reasonable for Plato to think that the arguments would be good enough to rationally convince an unbiased interlocutor. But I think that all of this evaluative activity, though interesting and often worth doing (I engage in it routinely myself), is not *necessary* to the history of philosophy as a discipline, any more than it is necessary for historians of the First World War to judge whether Austria-Hungary's decision to declare war on Serbia was justified.

I think that it is important to distinguish the history of philosophy from the history of philosophical ideas. Historians of ideas are primarily interested in tracing the development (whether this involves acceptance, rejection, twisting, or tweaking) of ideas over time, both within the life of a single philosopher, and as they are passed along in oral or written form from one person to another. One might ask, for example, whether the rediscovery of Stoicism by many 17th century philosophers involved a wholesale acceptance, or a judicious reframing, of Stoic ideas within a different metaphysical or normative worldview. One might ask whether Leibniz was influenced by Anne Conway, whether Robert Boyle was influenced by Locke (or vice-versa), whether there is a line of

influence stretching from Wollstonecraft to Harriet Taylor to John Stuart Mill, or whether these are cases of convergent evolution. And so on. To trace the history of ideas is not, in itself, to engage in the history of philosophy. (However, I should add that the history of ideas can often shed light on the history of philosophy. For example, if I know that philosopher A is trying to argue against philosopher B (something that a historian of ideas might be able to ferret out by taking a meticulous look at correspondence among relevant parties), then this might shed light on whether A is using a word in its ordinary sense or as a technical term connected with B's philosophical system. And, of course, good history of ideas often requires engaging in the activity of reconstruction that characterizes the history of philosophy.)

What, then, on this view, is the *value* of engaging in the history of philosophy? And given its nature and value, does it make sense for the history of philosophy to be taught to undergraduates and graduate students in departments of philosophy? Let me start with the question about value, which, as I've claimed, has led to some consternation and disagreement among philosophers and historians of philosophy. I have already argued that it is best not to tie the value of the history of philosophy to antiquarianism, which is supposed to teach us to eschew essentialism about the philosophical enterprise and to recognize the various ways in which philosophical views can be affected by contingent facts that are orthogonal to the project of rational justification; or to collegialism, which focuses on what, if anything, philosophers of the past can teach working philosophers now; or to disruptivism, which sees value in creative disruption of the present-day philosophical enterprise; or to dialecticism, which aims at a metaphilosophical understanding of philosophy by understanding its dialectical history. What, then, is so great about the logical

reconstruction of past philosophical systems and arguments? After all, as some have argued, the value to be extracted from the history of *physics* or *chemistry* or *biology* appears to be largely antiquarian; and few working scientists have (or think it would help them greatly to possess) an understanding of the history of their discipline.

Notice that the kind of value that antiquarianism, collegialism, disruptivism, and dialecticism ascribe to the history of philosophy is primarily *instrumental*. By contrast, I understand the *primary* value of the history of philosophy to be *intrinsic*: past philosophical theories and arguments are worth studying *for their own sake* as intellectual achievements, moments of intellectual excellence in the service of the greatest intellectual value: Truth. In important respects, the history of philosophy, for me, is similar in its nature and value to the history of art: we study, and should study, the artistic achievements of the past (in writings, painting, sculpture, music, film, and so on), primarily because there is intrinsic value in the appreciation and understanding of aesthetic value; similarly, we study, and should study, the philosophical achievements of the past primarily because there is intrinsic value in the appreciation and understanding of philosophical beauty. For past philosophical works of high quality are amazingly, sometimes shockingly, beautiful.

Many are not used to thinking of philosophy as beautiful. But to me, great philosophy has the kind of beauty and elegance that one often finds in great mathematical proofs and scientific theories. Cavendish's vitalist materialism is an elegant solution to a problem that arises from the fact that motion cannot be communicated from one body to another, and it is all the more elegant for how much it is able to explain on the basis of a small number of basic assumptions; Berkeley's idealism is a shockingly simple, and remarkably resilient, solution to the challenge of external world skepticism—all the more

impressive for the fact that it is backed by sophisticated, dialectically persuasive arguments; Spinoza's *Ethics* is a monumentally impressive quasi-mathematical treatise, on the model of Euclid's *Elements*. Philosophical arguments can be breathtaking in their combination of elegance and complexity. We ooh and aah at the various clever tricks that mathematicians use to prove results in number theory; I do the same when I go over Descartes's Third Meditation arguments for the existence of God. The tricky move needed to get from the simple causal principle (that there must be as much formal reality in the cause as there is in the effect) to the sophisticated causal principle (that there must be as much formal reality in the cause of an idea as there is objective reality in the idea), combined with the vision to see that this can get you from the existence of an idea of a perfect being to the existence of a perfect being, is a stroke of genius. This is the kind of appreciation I am talking about.

I hasten to add that studying the history of philosophy is also instrumentally valuable, though I do deny that it is *always* instrumentally valuable in the ways that antiquarians, collegialists, disruptivists, and dialecticists have identified. One of the natural benefits of studying the history of philosophy is that it hones the skills that all working philosophers need to make progress in the discipline, and does so in ways that cannot be matched by studying the works of contemporary philosophers. First, the works of the past are more difficult to read and to interpret: the language is often unfamiliar, the wording repetitive and sometimes inconsistent. There is no better way to learn how to understand our contemporaries than by learning to understand our philosophical forbears. Second, the works of the past are animated by conceptual schemes that are often alien to ours. If you can master Cavendish's vitalist materialism, then you have a better chance of mastering

Kamm's intricate ethics; if you can navigate your way through the conversation between Hylas and Philonous (in Berkeley's *Three Dialogues*), then you have increased your chances of navigating successfully through the conversation between Argle and Bargle (in David and Stephanie Lewis 1970). Just as artists study the history of art as a way of honing their *artistic* skills, so undergraduates and graduate students should study the history of philosophy as a way of honing their *philosophical* skills.

Having explained what I take to be the nature and value of the history of philosophy as a discipline, I am now able to address the pedagogical questions: What texts should historians of philosophy study? And how should they study them?

The answer to the first question, surprisingly enough, is, at least in large part, that it doesn't much matter! The most important consideration when one is picking among texts for a history of philosophy course is whether a candidate text embodies the virtues of philosophical exemplars that are worth studying for their own sake: breadth and importance of the questions that are asked and answered; elegance of the theories or arguments that justify the answers; imperviousness to objections (at least, to objections that were permitted by the conceptual schemes of the day); internal coherence; explanatory fruitfulness; and sophistication. Any candidate text that exemplifies more of these virtues, and to a greater degree, than the alternatives has a stronger claim to be added to the syllabus.

However, there are other values at stake when it comes to effective pedagogy. A syllabus that consists in a disconnected grab-bag of theories and arguments won't engage students because it doesn't tell a story. Experience (as well as learning theory) suggests that courses are more successful when they have a narrative structure. Of course, the structure should be responsive to the facts, and not created out of whole cloth simply to

make the learning experience more satisfying. So texts that exemplify the philosophical virtues should be chosen with an eye to whether they fit *naturally* into a narrative. The basis of the narrative could be dialectical (Descartes is responding to the Scholastics, Cavendish and Locke are responding to Descartes, and so on) or thematic ("Here are six positions in the space of logical possibilities, and we are going to look at paradigms that exemplify all six—mechanistic materialism, vitalist materialism, dualism, occasionalism, dual aspect theory, idealism"). (I should say that I am thinking about how to build a survey course, rather than about how to build a course that focuses on the work of a single author. But even in the latter case, structure can be found in the way in which a single author's views on a variety of different philosophical issues are interrelated (witness, for example, the way in which Locke's theory of ideas and his account of demonstrative knowledge interact with his ethical theory and political philosophy.]

The second major value at stake in gauging the effectiveness of philosophical pedagogy is diversity. Much as the traditional canon is philosophically rewarding, its appeal is limited. At this point, there is more than merely anecdotal evidence to suggest that students at all levels are more intellectually engaged when they can identify, at least in some way, with the authors of the texts they are reading. And this is particularly true, I think, for undergraduates: When there is an author similar to student S in relevant respects whose work is valued and recognized by intellectual authorities, S is likely to be more interested in that author than S would otherwise be. This is particularly true in the case of philosophers belonging to groups that are traditionally underrepresented (or simply not represented at all) on history of philosophy syllabi: women and non-Europeans.

The bottom line is that courses in the history of philosophy should be built on texts that exemplify the philosophical virtues, and should be both structured and inclusive. Beyond these requirements, a thousand flowers should be permitted, indeed encouraged, to bloom. It's worth highlighting several advantages of this pedagogical proposal, beyond the fact that it is directly responsive to the nature of the history of philosophy and the value of studying it.

The first advantage of this proposal is that it is *inclusive*. As I see it, it's not that the canon should be reformed or reimagined, with works by women, say, being inserted as replacements for works by men: it's almost as problematic, from my point of view, that Conway or Cavendish should have canonical status as it is for Berkeley or Hume to have the same status. *It's that there should be no canon at all*. Instead, there should be constraints: exemplars, structure, diversity. I think of this proposal as liberating: what it means is that different historians of philosophy, all of them with different interests, can teach what interests them (you almost always get a better course that way—it can be mind-deadening to teach material that doesn't resonate with you, especially if you do this year after year). And as more modern editions and translations of philosophical works by women and non-Europeans get published, there is even more material to choose from and the possibilities for creating structured courses around these works (among others) multiply.

Suppose I am teaching a survey course in early modern philosophy, and I want to build it around metaphysical and epistemological themes. Instead of settling on the traditional canon, which would be the easy way to go for many a professor, I have a professional responsibility to find out about, and read the work of, previously marginalized

figures. Many of these works are now accessible, either through modern editions or through Early English Books Online (and similar sources). If I do this, I will find and read works authored by women, recognizing that they have many or all of the philosophical virtues that matter. If I am responsive to the desideratum of inclusiveness, I will diversify the syllabus. If I do this, both the women and men in my courses will view early modern women (both privileged and not-so-privileged) as philosophers whose work deserves respect and admiration.

The second advantage of this proposal is that it permits and encourages a veritable explosion of philosophical diversity. For many years now, the traditional canon of early modern philosophy has been driven by a relatively narrow set of metaphysical and epistemological questions (What is the nature of mind? What is the nature of body? How do body and mind interact, if they do? Can we know of the existence of things outside our minds? If so, can we know what these things are like? And so on.). But on my proposal, there is no canon. And this means that historians of early modern philosophy should be free (and indeed, encouraged) to develop and teach courses that do not hew to this procrustean model. Lisa Shapiro 2004, for example, has proposed a history course focused on the philosophy of education, in which writings by such figures as Lucrezia Marinella, Marie de Gournay, Mary Astell, Anna Maria van Schurman, and Bathsua Makin play a prominent role. I say, "more power to Shapiro". Taking a page from her book, one might consider a course that traces the ideas of liberty and equality (as universal, or as applying to a select few, and on what grounds) in the works of philosophers from a particular historical period: here one could look at whether women and men, Europeans and non-Europeans, theists and atheists, Christians/Jews/Muslims, Protestants and Catholics, and

so on were taken to be moral and political equals, and if so, why, and if not, why not. Such a course would very naturally include works by feminists or quasi-feminists (both men and women). One could construct a course focused on early modern conceptions of virtue, one theme of which could be the question whether the virtues of men differ from the virtues of women. The more courses of this kind there are, the merrier.

One of the major advantages of diversifying history courses in this way is that it has the potential to breathe new life into scholarship in the history of philosophy. Even if you are not an expert on Cavendish or Conway, if you discuss the works of these figures in your early modern course or if you teach their works at the graduate level, you can bet that some enterprising students will get hooked and pursue in-depth and long-term projects on their philosophical output. This is all to the good.

Some will object that the absence of a canon will have undesirable results. It is true, of course, that a canon translates into a common knowledge base, one shared by many or most philosophy graduate students. If I start talking about the *cogito* or the *master argument* or *monads* at a colloquium or in a philosophical discussion, most professional philosophers will know what I am talking about, even if they have spent their whole lives working on Bayesian epistemology, scalar consequentialism, or modal fictionalism. There is definitely something desirable about this. So if we get rid of the canon, then we get rid of this desirable feature of it. But, as I see it, this unwelcome consequence is more than overridden by the desirable consequences of being liberated from canonical constraints: greater engagement with a greater diversity of historical figures, and the invigoration of the discipline.

Others will object that courses in the history of philosophy should not focus on issues in value theory (such as liberty, equality, and virtue). History courses, they say, should focus on issues in metaphysics and epistemology: students, at least at the undergraduate level, can learn the history of value theory in ethics courses, where figures such as Aristotle, Kant, and Mill can be used to introduce virtue ethics, deontology, and consequentialism. But there is really no reason for this, apart from prejudice, tradition and inertia. Many important historical figures contributed to philosophy by contributing to value theory. Why should their voices be heard only as way-stations to contemporary debates?

Some might object that we need ancient philosophy to prepare us for medieval philosophy, that we need medieval philosophy to prepare us for early modern philosophy, that we need early modern philosophy to prepare us for Kant, that we need Kant to prepare us for 19th century German idealism, and so on. But again, why? Yes, Kant and Hegel are important and influential historical figures. But there is no reason to think of the history of philosophy as somehow leading inexorably to Kant and Hegel. Sure, there is a ready narrative, facilitated by Kant himself, that leads directly to, well, Kant. But this is only one of many, and there is no reason to privilege Kant's own self-serving narrative over the alternatives.

Before closing, let me briefly address the issue of whether the works of philosophy studied by undergraduates or graduate students in history of philosophy courses should be limited by *genre*. My answer to this, driven by the proposal I have already defended, is: no. Plato, Berkeley, Hume, and others wrote *dialogues*, and no one complains about *that*. Lucretius wrote a long philosophical *poem*, and no one complains about *that*. Malebranche

and Arnauld exchanged *letters*, and no one complains about *that*. The reason, I suggest, is that philosophy is not defined by *genre*, but by content and method. This means that, in principle, philosophical works can take many forms: we can find philosophical arguments and theories in novels, poems, short stories, dialogues, plays, pamphlets and letters, in addition to essays and treatises. However, I also think that some genres are better suited to the philosophical enterprise than others. Because, as I have argued, philosophy involves the rational justification of answers to philosophical questions, the mere fact that a work of art is inspired or animated by philosophical ideas is not, by itself, sufficient to add it to a syllabus for a course in the history of philosophy.

This, then, is my proposal. The history of philosophy is the history of rationally justified, systematic answers to philosophical questions; studying this subject is both intrinsically and instrumentally valuable; these benefits do not derive from the imposition of a canon, and indeed, there should be no canon; the absence of a canon leaves room for a thousand courses on a thousand different topics with a thousand different narrative structures; but a good syllabus should be relevantly diverse in a way that fits the thematic arc of the course; and this prescription for the discipline is inclusive, in ways that can only strengthen and enliven it for future generations.

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