Diversity Statement

1. Most non-white, non-male people who stop studying philosophy will do so between declaring it as their major at the beginning of their undergraduate career and receiving their B.A. a few years later.[1] This trend is often called the 'pipeline problem,'[2] since the exit of these students is analogized as a 'leak' in the pipeline towards a profession in philosophy. I object to referring to the problem in this way, not because it inaccurately describes the effect of the exit of students from the philosophy major, but rather because it mislocates the problem of this mass exit in its effect on the future state of the field, and not in the effect on the students leaving. The exit of non-white, non-male students from philosophy is wrong because it is a result of a kind of unfair treatment which unjustly deprives them of a public good to which they have a right.[3]

In my paper, "Microaggressions, Marginalization, and the Academic Riot Grrrl," I argue that one of the major causes of students' exit from philosophy is a lack of recognition of themselves as prototypical philosophy students. If the prototypical philosophy student is understood to be a white man, then there will be little conceptual space for non-white, non-male students to be viewed in such a way by themselves and others. This opens their presence in the philosophy classroom to a wide range of implicit and explicit questioning and criticism, ranging from tokenization of these students ("if she isn't here as a philosophy student, what is she here for?") to marginalization and exclusion ("you don't have the appropriate background to understand what this author is talking about").[4] This prototype is built up from many sources: the kind of authors taught as prototypical philosophers, media representation of philosophy students, and most powerfully, the background beliefs and assumptions of other students and instructors in philosophy classes. Because of this, I take my role in promoting diversity in the field to be disrupting and reshaping undergraduates' conception of who counts as a prototypical philosophy student.

Undergraduate students look to their philosophy instructors as authorities on how philosophy is done at the university. This gives instructors a great deal of control over shaping their students' conception of philosophy and who participates it. The first way the instructor can do this is through their own presence in the classroom. I have consistently taken authority positions in classes on topics which are otherwise male-coded, such as logic (TAing introductory logic, grading for modal logic) and political theory (as the designer and instructor of a course on political liberalism and neoliberalism) My presence in these

[1] According to Schwitzgebel et al., *The Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Diversity of Philosophy Students and Faculty in the United States: Recent Data From Several Sources*, the number of Asian students in philosophy will decrease by 38% in this time, Black students will decrease by 33% in this time, and female students will decrease by 12% in this time. In comparison, white students will increase by 25% in this time, and male students will increase by 8% in this time. See also Paxton, Figdor, and Tiberius, "Quantifying the Gender Gap: An Empirical Study of the Underrepresentation of Women in Philosophy"

[2] Calhoun, "The Undergraduate Pipeline Problem"

[3] I explore the goods of higher education and the rights which students have to them in my papers "Kant on Higher Education" (2015) and "Microaggressions, Marginalization, and the Academic Riot Grrrl" (2016). See also Judy Thomson's paper "Preferential Hiring" in *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (1973).

[4] Judith Thomson has several really excellent examples of how this plays out in "Preferential Hiring", pp. 365–366

classrooms indicates not only that women can be students in these sub-fields, but that they can actually be experts and authority figures in them.[5]

But the second way I can use my authority in the philosophy classroom is to help the students conceive of their *peers* as prototypical philosophy students. I work toward this end explicitly and implicitly: explicitly by including group discussion of the goods of higher education and their historic distribution in all of my syllabi, and implicitly by including non-white, non-male members of the classroom in a way which treats them as *paradigmatic* philosophy students. This includes simple measures like allowing these individuals to speak first and often in group discussion, using their points to direct or ground our conversation, and using their writing (with permission) as examples for the class. I also include non-white, non-male philosophers in my syllabus (when possible) in a way that focuses on their centrality to the dialectic at hand. These measures are grounded in the equal right each of my students has to be treated and conceived of as a philosophy student in the philosophy classroom, a right which some students are fighting against tradition and the preconceptions of their peers to realize.

2. A natural question, then, is how teaching Kant to undergraduates can be made consistent with or further the aim of changing who gets counted as a prototypical philosophy student. Kant, at first blush, seems to have a lot going against him in this regard. It is true that, for example, Kant made racist and sexist claims in his anthropological writings.[6] It is also true that Kant engaged in kinds of race science that we find objectionable today, and which his contemporaries used to justify the concurrent global slave trade.[7]

The question at hand is therefore: how to teach Kant (or really, almost any figure in the Western 'canon') in a way that preserves the value of his work but avoids participating in the unjust erasure of students in the classroom? I think the answer to this lies in open discussion of the context in which he wrote. By paying attention to this, the class can make the (worthwhile) effort to understand his views, without mistakenly and unfairly placing *too much* weight on him in constructing our prototype of philosophers. For example, my students and I recently read the third section of Kant's essay "On the common saying: 'That may be correct in theory, but it is of no use in practice;" the upshot of which is that humans are constantly progressing toward the moral end of their existence— towards goodness and justice. This article was written in 1793: slavery hadn't been banned in a single European country, Native American land dispossession was the zeitgeist, and the punishment for homosexuality in Prussia was death. How can we read Kant's argument here in light of these realities? One route to go would be to ignore these facts: to pretend that Kant was describing the whole world, and assert that he could

[5]This point is bolstered by Paxton, et al.'s findings of a significant positive correlation between the proportion of female philosophy majors and the proportion of female faculty members.

[6]Helga Varden, however, makes persuasive points about the degree of sexism actually present in Kant's work; see Varden, "Kant and Women"

[7]Kant's racism has arisen to the level of public discussion in part as a response to the police murder of George Floyd and associated outcry in May 2020. For example, see "Ein Kind seiner Zeit/ A child of his time" (June 24, 2020) and "Kant war sehr wohl ein Rassist/ Kant really was a racist" (July 15, 2020) both by Marcus Willaschek, published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.

somehow be an objective judge of how things were *really* going. However, instead of pretending that these historical facts don't pertain, I think it is better to contextualize Kant's statements; to see why he thought that they were true, and as a group try to determine whether or not Kant's point can withstand the historical counterarguments against him.

Kant was writing at the end of the Enlightenment in Western and Central Europe, a time when public discussion about religion was beginning to be eclipsed by that of reason and science. Frederick the Great, who came into power in 1740, was a comparatively tolerant monarch who was himself greatly influenced by the philosophy of the Enlightenment; he was the first absolute leader to assert that a ruler should be a servant to the citizens of the state. We can perhaps understand why Kant saw his most immediate surroundings as consistent with the claim that state of humanity was improving, even if, looking back on other concurrent historical events, we might disagree.[8] And we can therefore evaluate the truth of Kant's claims, not in light of their accuracy in describing the entire world, but instead on the quality of the philosophical argument that humans have the innate moral duty to work toward the betterment of the species.

I find that this contextualization of Western writers allows me to be more transparent with my students about the backgrounds and flaws of the figures we read, and also more transparent with myself about the actual themes of my classes and my own writing. When constructing an ethics class, for example, I might wonder how to fit in Taoist ethicists among Mill and Moore on the syllabus. Part of the difficulty here lies in the erasure of context for those *other* writers: a class led by the dialectic of figures like Mill and Moore is not an 'ethics' class writ large, but rather a class on Western, analytic discussions of ethics from the Early Modern period to present. It is not surprising that work from outside that description wouldn't fit into that syllabus. What erases non-Western thinkers in this case is not their lack of inclusion in the course, but rather the treatment of a very specific discussion as paradigmatic of the field of ethics.

I think that Kant's ideas are applicable outside of his own use of them. I think his views are worth learning and that students benefit from inclusion of his writings on the syllabus. Based on my own experience, I think Kant's philosophy can be an essential tool for identifying injustice and imagining ways to correct it. That same experience shows that undergraduate students also feel this way, that they value learning Kant in part because of the means his arguments give them to express their own dissatisfaction with an unjust status quo. I think it is dangerous, mistaken, and unjust, however, to present him and the dialogue he participates in to the students as prototypical examples of what it is to be a philosopher. To receive the benefits of Kant's philosophy, then, we must see it in the way that he himself saw it: one voice in one part of one discussion among many.

[8] Actually, the students didn't disagree with Kant's argument: one student compared his statements to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s 1968 claim that "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."