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What is a philosophical canon?

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1. Introduction

This paper starts from the assumption that the history of philosophy has a problem. Or rather at least one problem. I will be focusing on the history of the early modern period -- roughly 1580-1780 -- since it is the period I know best, and so when I refer to the philosophical canon, I will mean the early modern philosophical canon. This elision is simply more efficient. Nonetheless, my sense is that the many of the points carry across philosophical history from the Presocratics to the recent past; I am, however, not in a position to defend that larger thesis.

Within the history of early modern philosophy, we are stuck in a bit of a rut in thinking of the central figures in the early modern period as the seven of Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume and, of course, Kant. In recent years, there have been moves to get us out of this rut, whether by turning attention to Malebranche (Nadler, Schmaltz), Gassendi (Lolordo, Fisher), Newton (Downing, Janiak), or Reid (Copenhaver, Lehrer, Van Cleve). While scholarly interest may have increased a bit, there is a gap between it and pedagogical interest. Not many people teach these figures in their undergraduate classes. If these figures do get a grip, both scholarly and pedagogical, it is because they fit easily into the narrative that drives the canonization of the seven central figures. So the early modern canon effectively limits, if not the figures that we take as important, the storylines that we take to define the history of philosophy.

Not unrelated to the rut of the canonical seven is another problem: the homogeneity of the early modern canon.[1] The fact of the matter is that in the early modern period there

[1] A recent (2015) issue of *The Monist* was devoted to this question. Of particular interest with respect to my

were many women actively engaged in philosophy, and yet most of us do not read any women thinkers of the period. One might also imagine that there were Africans, Arabs, Jews and Indians in Europe engaged in philosophy as well, but even fewer of us have been working to rediscover and engage with the work of these figures.[2]

I think that these ruts are problems, and I am not here going to defend that assessment, but if you disagree with me, please try to keep an open mind, because my sense is that many of us do not spend much time reflecting critically on why we focus on the figures we do, and so simply accept a self-justifying story line. What I want to do here is engage in some critical reflection on just what ought to constitute the philosophical canon. It might be that the set of seven standard figures can withstand that critical scrutiny, but it might be that it cannot.

2. The Canonical Story

In criticizing the canon, it is helpful to think -- from a somewhat charitable mindset -- about possible reasons for a canon. First, reading canonical figures in the history of philosophy plays a central role in teaching students what philosophy is: what methods we use, what topics or questions philosophy addresses, and how our philosophical past brings us into the philosophical present. The canon thus has a pedagogical function. Second, as Richard Rorty noted, the canon is also justificatory of contemporary philosophical interests: the canon offers us a *geistesgeschichte*.[3] Contemporary philosophers often want to situate their current work within a long-standing tradition in order to establish the value of those current philosophical projects. However, internal to the canon itself, there is also a justification of

[2] Justin Smith may be the lone exception here in his work on Anton Wilhelm Amo (but no doubt there are others I am unaware of)

[3] R Rorty, "The historiography of philosophy: four genres," in *Philosophy and Its History*, ed Rorty, Schneewind and Skinner, Cambridge, 1984.

who gets included, a justification with a number of different and intertwined strands. I will identify and consider three: the canon depicts a causal account of the intellectual historical development of philosophy; the canon identifies a set of philosophical questions which are centrally constitutive of the discipline of philosophy; and the canon consists of a set of important distinctively philosophical works. Two small points: This justification is clearly connected with the pedagogical function of the canon, though it would take some work to tease out how; second, there need be no appeal to philosophical greatness in marking out canonical figures -- they need only mark important points in efforts to address central philosophical questions.[4]

First, the set of canonical figures of the early modern period purports to depict a causal chain of intellectual events. The chain of events begins with a figure depicted as essentially self-caused: Descartes. As the standard story goes, Descartes makes a clean break from the Scholastic tradition, and generates all on his own a new system. This philosophical innovation goes on to impact Spinoza and Leibniz. Each read Descartes, of course, and Leibniz read Spinoza. They each develop their own philosophical systems in response to what they take to be the strengths and weaknesses in Descartes's account. In the canonical story, they preserve the epistemological insight that knowledge is grounded in the nature of the human mind or reason, even while they take issue with the metaphysical dualism of Descartes. Locke too was impacted by Descartes, but, the canonical story goes, he developed a thorough-going alternative to the Cartesian system, one that takes knowledge to be grounded in what experience brings in rather than the nature of the mind, and which remains thoroughly agnostic in its metaphysical commitments, with the possible exception of a fundamental human power to act, or liberty. However, just as Descartes's dualism has

[4] Nonetheless, I do think that many philosophers unwittingly appeal to the greatness of the canonical figures to justify their status as canonical. A principle of charity requires discounting this justification.

its issues, so too does Locke's commitment to the primacy of sense perception. Berkeley and Hume each read Locke carefully (and Hume read Berkeley), and his empiricist commitments impact them. In a way analogous to Spinoza and Leibniz, they develop their own philosophical views by preserving what they take to be the strengths of Locke's system while avoiding the weaknesses. The intellectual causal chain of the canonical story leads inexorably to Kant as its culmination. Much is made of Kant's claim that Hume woke him from his dogmatic slumbers, and so of the causal link between Hume and Kant, but it is also the case that Kant is take to synthesize the insights of those writing in both the Cartesian and the Lockean traditions in such away that the avoids the pitfalls of each tradition.[5]

Some recent efforts to expand the philosophical canon effectively preserve the idea that philosophical intellectual history is best understood as a causal story, though a more complicated one than that presented in the philosophical canon. Malebranche is introduced as the leading figure of Cartesianism -- a school of thought that continues on the momentum of Descartes's metaphysics and epistemology, as it polishes it up. Gassendi offers us an earlier version of the empiricism and atomism championed by Locke, though, as the author of the Fifth Objections to Descartes's *Meditations*, he is not so much causally influenced by Descartes, as in collision with him. Newton is positioned not simply as the founder of modern physics but as developing a framework of absolute space in which to situate the natural world, in direct opposition to Descartes and Leibniz. And Reid is understood as developing his account of the powers of man in direct response to his reading of Hume.

[5] I've left an important nuance out of this summary. I take it that this canon of seven derives from the English language Hegelians of the late 19th century, and so that Kant is situated as the agent of a dialectical synthesis that manages to reconcile the rationalist and the empiricist traditions. Each of the two strands of the dialectic that Kant is taken to synthesis is understood causally, but Kant himself, in synthesizing, makes a logical move that effectively ends the causal process, and thereby brings him outside of time. It is Hegel's achievement to provide the theoretical framework through which this intellectual historical progression is understood, as moving forward towards Reason. Within much (but hardly all) contemporary history of philosophy this Hegelian background is brushed under the rug.

Already, however, in this newly complicated story we can begin to see another strand of the canon's justification. For to introduce new figures into the causal story, one needs to specify the central philosophical topic through which that figure comes to have an effect within the history of philosophy. The philosophical canon highlights a set of central philosophical questions through which one canonical figure causally influences another. The canonical early modern philosophical narrative is structured by three core questions: the metaphysical questions of what sorts of things exist and of the nature of causation, and the epistemological question of the basis for claims to knowledge.

So, for example, Descartes claims that what exists are substances, and, for him, God, or infinite substance, exists, as do two finite substances: mind, or thinking substance, and body, or extended substance. This dualism, of course, poses a problem for understanding the ontology of the human being. How, after all, do these two substances unite to form us, thinking embodied beings? Spinoza takes issue with the consistency of Descartes's ontology, and argues that there is only one substance, infinite substance, which has infinitely many infinite attributes, of which thinking and extension are two – the two, we human beings are capable of understanding. And what we human are is simply a part of the whole of Nature, a part which can be understood as material, or equally as the idea with the object that is the human body. The issue for understanding human nature here is aligned with the issues in understanding the way in which distinct attributes are related, given that each attribute expresses one and the same Nature, but differently. Leibniz, in turn, responds to both Descartes and Spinoza with a metaphysics of his own. In his ultimate view, what exists are monads, the only entities with a complete individual concept, each of which through its perceptions and appetites contains within it the whole universe, only part of which is expressed. The particular entities we encounter are simply aggregates of monads that stand

in pre-established harmonic relations with one another. A human being is simply a particular instance of this account. The British Empiricist tradition is typically cast as anti-metaphysical in this narrative. For Locke, pure substance in general is 'something I know not what' that serves as that substrate in which qualities inhere, and particular substances are simply whatever is picked out by the names that we assign clusters of qualities that come together. While Berkeley and Hume share a criticism of Locke's account of general terms, they share his nominalism about particular substances. These British philosophers are thus understood as shifting the discussion from one concerning what exists in reality to one of what we conceive as existing. Kant, of course, brings the two strands together, distinguishing the phenomenal world from the noumenal world, on the one hand, and equally, through the transcendental deduction of the objective validity of the categories of thought on the other. Kant aims to show that while our access to the world is indeed through our conception of it, the categories through which thought is structured cannot but correspond to the way things in fact are. There might be fine-grained disagreement about the particulars of the story line here, but I presume that there is agreement about both the central question and the overview.

A similar sort of canonical narrative traces the development of the concept of causation. Here the question is perhaps more focused in that it asks how, once one eliminates the final and formal causes central to Aristotelian accounts, to account for one thing's ability to affect change in another solely by efficient causes. Eliminating final causes involves reconceptualizing what it is to be an efficient cause. The problem here is finding a coherent account of the source of power that a proper agent of change must possess. Hume, of course, argues that there is in fact no basis for our ascriptions of causally efficacious powers to things. Rather what we take to be the necessary connection between a cause and its effect is nothing but a custom or habit of thought through which the mind itself is

determined to move from one sort of idea to another, albeit a habit of thought which can be better or worse, in accordance with its being properly tested in experience. Again Kant comes to the rescue, finding a basis for taking our ideas of causes to have objective validity.

The canonical account of epistemology is harder to pin down. On one version, the central question concerns the basis of our claims to knowledge. The history of the early modern period is a struggle between two possible answers, one which grounds knowledge in some intrinsic features of the human mind, whether those intrinsic features be innate ideas, or a structural feature of reason, another which grounds knowledge in experience of the world around us. But another version of the story is centered on the idea of experience itself. On this canonical account, the period is characterized by efforts to address the challenge of skepticism, and so to distinguishing those appearances that are epistemically valuable from those which are not. (But perhaps this second canonical story isn't rightly called canonical yet -- it is a relatively new line that is starting to get a grip.)

Introducing new figures into the canon has involved largely preserving these central questions. For instance, introducing Malebranche into the central narrative of philosophy involves bringing the question of the nature of causation to the fore, for Malebranche's brand of occasionalism is an important development in the efforts to develop an account of causation which both avoids final causes and explains change. For Malebranche, the solution has two basic parts: the first is to insist on the essential powerlessness of finite things to effect change, and so to assign all causal efficacy to God; the second is to acknowledge that observed changes admit of regularities and to explain those regularities by laws of nature, enacted by God to direct his will, whereby particular finite things serve as the occasions (or initial conditions) the action of God in accordance with those laws. Malebranche's denial that finite created things are essentially causally inert in turn prefigures Hume's point that

there is no rational basis for ascribing efficient causal powers to particular things. A similar point can be made about recent efforts to introduce Newton into the philosophical canon. Doing so involves privileging questions of the nature of space, and the relation of conceptions of space to accounts of the natural world.

However, it is worth highlighting a peculiar burden borne by efforts to introduce new figures into the canon. The philosophical canon, indeed any canon, is essentially conservative. Efforts to introduce a new figure stand a better chance, if that figure has a demonstrated authority. Newton, of course, comes with ready-made authority -- not only is he the founder of modern physics, a canonical figure has himself described him as 'incomparable'. At least part of the authority of other newly introduced figures derives from their having written what is deemed a major philosophical work. Malebranche's *The Search After Truth* is a treatise that systematically lays out his metaphysics and epistemology (never mind that a better account of his occasionalism is found in his *Dialogues on Metaphysics*), as well as his ethics. In introducing a new figure into the canon, we appeal to their having written a philosophical treatise, a work of a particular genre, for that legitimizes them as a philosopher.[6] This rationale for legitimizing new canonical figures then quickly becomes a criteria for marking out any proper philosopher: if you are a legitimate philosopher, you must have written a proper philosophical work, where a proper philosophical work is taken to be a work of a particular genre, a treatise.

3. What is a philosophical work?

[6] There are, of course, complications. Gassendi's *Syntagma philosophiae Epicuri* is a comprehensive six-volume treatise-- covering logic, physics and ethics, that is, the whole of philosophy. It might well be claimed that the sheer size of his masterwork while granting him legitimacy also undercuts any efforts to canonize him: there is simply too much there to him neatly into the storyline.

Perhaps because they are already canonized, the works of canonical figures are taken to be properly philosophical. And of course they are, but I want to suggest that their status is not a straightforward function of their genre. A little reflection on philosophical classics, if not canonical texts, makes it is clear that a philosophical genre has little to do with what counts as a properly philosophical work.

The works of Plato are dialogues, and moreover, dialogues that involve some literary craft. Socrates, after all, has a distinctive character, as do his interlocutors, after who most dialogues are titled. And moreover, these dialogues are not simply representations of discussions of philosophical problems; more often than not, those discussions are undertaken in a particular context, and that context serves to bracket the asking of philosophical questions and the attempts to answer them. Philosophers often ignore that context in developing their interpretations, but it is far from clear that they ought to do so.

Notably, many early modern thinkers adopt the genre of dialogue for presenting their own philosophical views. Within the canon, Berkeley's *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous* provides a clear defense of his idealism and is taken to be just as central a text as the *Principles of Philosophy*. Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* is important for understanding his skepticism and his naturalism. They are hardly alone. I've already mentioned that Malebranche's *Dialogues on Metaphysics and Religion* provides a much more developed account of his occasionalism than *The Search After Truth*.

Dialogues are not the only literary genre adapted to philosophical ends. Let me just highlight a few well-known ones. Augustine's *Confessions* are a philosophical classic, and Rousseau's *Confessions* plays off that work in many ways. Lucretius's philosophical work, *De Rerum Naturum,* is an epic poem that just so happens to convey Epicurean atomism into the early modern period. Whole worlds are imagined in fictions such as Thomas More's *Utopia*

and Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* to lay out the view of an ideal society, and in particular one in which a new scientific programme can flourish bringing forth knowledge that further contributes to the good of society.

Perhaps even more compellingly well-known if not canonical philosophers invent and appropriate genres in efforts to promote what they take to be their philosophical innovations. Montaigne is perhaps the most clear cut example of this, as he introduces a neologism -- *essai* -- to describe the style in which he writes, extraordinarily, about himself. That the word for an effort or test should be used as a title for a series of extended thoughts about himself itself raises a whole slew of philosophical issues about self-knowledge. And Montaigne is using 'essai' in a new way, effectively creates a genre. Locke titles his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* with Montaigne's sense of the word in mind. As Montaigne's effort at self-knowledge involves tests and experience, so does Locke's effort to describe the way human understanding works in empirical science. While it is not so clear whether most of us are aware that in writing essays we are true to that genre, the practices that characterize article writing do seem to cede that we are testing out our thesis, leaving it open to the objections of others, the subject of discussion, and even revision.

There is no shortage of philosophical works in the Early Modern period that are playing with genre. Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* presents a substantive moral and political philosophy that is an array of genres: a poem, an essay-like argument, a set of remarks. Bayle's *Dictionary* purports to be a series of expository entries about particular figures and views, but also is a typesetter's nightmare of footnotes and marginal notation in which some of the most substantive philosophical points are made. Spinoza appropriates the genre of geometry to present his *Ethics*, and while the propositions are certainly central to

understanding Spinoza's views, it is hardly controversial to say that the scholia provide more substantive insight into his positions than the demonstrations.

Perhaps most significantly, Descartes quite intentionally presents his novel philosophical program in an array of genres. There are but fine-grained differences between the philosophical positions laid out in each of the *Discourse on Method*, the *Meditations* and the *Principles of Philosophy*. These works, and especially the *Meditations*, are held to be canonical philosophical texts, but they are all highly stylized. In the *Discourse,* Descartes presents a whitewashed account of his own life, offering it as a fable for others to take from it what they will, and then proceeds to present an accessible version of his metaphysics, moral philosophy, epistemology, account of human nature, and concludes with a glimpse into the impact of his philosophical program for science, and a thinly veiled petition for financial support. To provide further evidence of the impact of his program, he appends three works (essays!) on geometry, meteorology and optics. The *Principles* takes on the genre of a textbook in an effort to claim mainstream status for the new brand of philosophy he has been pushing against the Aristotelians. But of course it is just as notable for what aspects of a standard textbook it leaves out -- logic, rhetoric, morals -- as what it recasts. But of all his works, perhaps the *Meditations* is the most stylized, and the one that quite self-consciously appropriates an existing genre -- the meditation -- towards its philosophical end: transforming first philosophy or metaphysics and thereby transforming claims to knowledge and human self-conception. Many philosophers have been so busy reconstructing the arguments to be found in that work, that they have overlooked the fact that the arguments that are there are embedded in a story of self-discovery and understanding told by a first person narrator whose status as a reliable reporter of his (or her!) reasoning turns on the outcome of the very process he aims to present to us. There are exceptions, of course. Some

interpreters have considered just how to understand the philosophical significance of the choice of the meditation genre for understanding Descartes's views.[7] In some of my own work, I have explored the significance of some seemingly innocuous stylistic details for interpretations of Descartes on the relation of emotion and reason, free will, and the role of memory in thinking.[8] While there is absolutely no doubt that the *Meditations* is a philosophical work, and even a masterpiece, it is not a philosophical work because it is written in a particular philosophical genre.[9]

Realizing that the work of philosophy can been undertaken in a wide variety of genres opens up an array of possibilities. For one, we can look to plays, novels, poems, polemics, short stories, novellas, pamphlets, journals and indeed almost any written record of intellectual activity for philosophical content. And there are vast stores of philosophical content to be found: Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is influenced by Montaigne's essay *On Cannibals* ('Caliban' is an anagram of 'cannibal') and in the same vein it is an exploration of our justification in circumscribing the human species in the way we do. Corneille's *Cinna* is a study not only of justice and clemency, but also of the free will that allows for the possibility of genuine justice. Cervantes' *Don Quixote* is arguably an extended treatment of the relation between skepticism and knowledge. Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man* is an extended moral treatise in poetry. Voltaire's *Candide* provides a rebuttal of Leibniz in novella form. His *Micromegas* is a short story that raises epistemic issues that arise from the development of the microscope. Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* can be read as doing something similar. This is already a long list, and I have just barely scratched the surface of the possibilities that are available.

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[7] See A Rorty 1986, Kosman 1986, and Hatfield 1986.
[8] See Shapiro 2005, 2008, 2015.
[9] Indeed, I would suggest that part of what does make it such a compelling philosophical work is the craftsmanship of its writing. Because it is such a richly textured piece of writing, we are invited back for re-readings from which we continue to glean more and more insight into the philosophical issues being raised.

Note, however, that in devising this list, I have appealed to well-known texts -- texts that, if they have not achieved canonical status, are at least included in discussions. There is (at least) another possibility worth our attention. Recognizing the breadth of the kinds of forms philosophical writing -- that a philosophical work need not be a treatise -- provides for the inclusion of a range of thinkers who have not typically been included in our philosophical discussions, and in particular, women thinkers. While there are early modern women who wrote proper treatises -- for instance, Margaret Cavendish, Anne Conway and Gabrielle Suchon -- a majority of the philosophical writing by women is in other genres. Margaret[10] Cavendish's *The Blazing World* is clearly inspired by Bacon's *New Atlantis* and like it is a piece of utopian fiction; her *Philosophical Letters* is an epistolary fiction, a set of imagined exchanges with thinkers long since dead of what she thinks of their views. Cavendish, however, was also prolific, writing plays and poems, many of which reflect her philosophical interests in other ways. Marie de Gournay follows her adopted father, Montaigne, in writing essays, some of which are quite polemical. Lucrezia Marinella, in her *The Nobility and Excellence of Women and the Defects and Vices of Men,* and Mary Astell, in her *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (especially Part 1), and *Of Marriage*, are quite self-consciously polemical. Madame de Sévigné's philosophical thought, ranging from natural philosophy to moral psychology, is contained her letters, which, though written to her daughter, were circulated. Madeleine de Scudéry's *Les Femmes Illustres* is a feminist defense of women's education; and her *Conversations* not only present a dialogic method of doing philosophy (as opposed to through argument) but also contain that method at work to take up positions in epistemology and moral psychology. Madame de la Fayette's groundbreaking novel, *The Princess of Cleves*, can be read as a work of moral psychology, and its pioneering attention to the inner thoughts of the

[10] See Santana 2015.

central characters can lend insight to how we think of the development of philosophical thought about consciousness in the period. Again, I am here only barely scratching the surface, and there are many works by women of philosophical interest that I am not even mentioning here.

Once we recognize that philosophical work can take on many and diverse forms, that philosophical writing is not a genre unto itself, we are then faced with a question: what *does* make a work philosophical? It is tempting to hear this question as one asking for a distinction to be drawn: What distinguishes a philosophical work from a literary one? From a political one? From a scientific one? I could go on. However, I do not think that this is the proper way to approach this question, quite simply because I do not think that being a philosophical work is exclusive of being a work of some other kind -- a novel can be both literary and philosophical; some physics (think Newton's *Principia*) can be both a scientific and a philosophical work; a political tract can aim to shape society and be philosophical. If (almost) any kind work can be philosophical, what is it that distinguishes it as a work of philosophy, then?

The answer I have to offer is somewhat simple-minded, from the view of other humanities disciplines: What makes a work philosophical is how we read it. That is, a work becomes philosophical if we approach it philosophically. What is it to approach a work philosophically?[11] Perhaps the reason that philosophy is done in so many genres is because deep down (if we are being honest, and not being defensive or aggressively dismissive) most of us think that not only is there is no one method of doing philosophy, there ought not to

[11] For a discipline that in many ways is centrally concerned with specifying a proper method, whether it be a method which secures our knowledge claims or a method which ensures our decisions are properly thought through, we spend very little time articulating just what distinguishes philosophy from other disciplines. Proper historians -- that is, not historians of philosophy -- as part of their training typically devote some time to historiography -- to articulating different conceptions of what it is to do history.

be one preferred method of doing philosophy. Philosophy, more than any other area of study, is distinguished not by the conclusion of its investigations, nor by the methods by which it arrives at those conclusions, but rather by how the investigation begins -- by the questions that drive the philosophical investigation.[12] What makes a work philosophical, then, is that we approach it with philosophical questions, and are able to find within that work substantive help in addressing those questions. But what is a philosophical question?

4. Anomalous Questions

As already noted, the causal dimension of the canonical story is constrained by a set of canonical philosophical questions through which we connect up the answers as responding to one another. Within early modern philosophy these have been questions in basic metaphysics and epistemology. I can rattle off a list of more specific but nonetheless familiar questions that are subsumed in these general ones: questions of the existence and nature of God, of what constitutes the natural world, and of cosmology, as well as questions emerging from initial answers to these, questions that form the heart of contemporary philosophy of science, about the nature of body, of space, of causation, and of how we are in a position to arrive at knowledge of these matters; questions of the nature of the human capacity for understanding and whether, given those cognitive capacities, it can arrive at knowledge, and of course, of what knowledge is at all; questions about what is it to have a thought at all; questions about our own perceived capacities to act independently, our freedom, given the world is causally necessitated.

[12] There is perhaps a point to be made here about how a philosophical investigation turns into another kind of investigation -- one that then does presuppose a particular method or circumscribe a set of possible conclusions. It does seem that philosophy has spawned other disciplines -- natural philosophy becomes a set of special sciences: physics, biology, chemistry; philosophical psychology, or the study of human understanding, becomes the science of psychology

These questions have the status of canonical questions. And as such they set out what we take to constitute the discipline -- they chart a path for novices to follow. And in virtue of their canonical status, they do not demand justification. Maybe they do not demand justification -- after all, what *is* more philosophical than questions about metaphysics and epistemology.

The problem is that in focusing on these questions we exclude others that have been just as central to the history of philosophy. Why, for instance, do we separate the history of modern philosophy from the history of ethics? Questions about the nature of justice and the basis of political community were particularly poignant in the early modern period, and, moreover, were addressed by the very same canonical figures that we take to define the history of philosophy. Spinoza and Locke and Hume all take their answers to these questions to be intimately connected to their metaphysical and epistemic commitments. Yet within the early modern canon these topics are syphoned off. If we were to include questions of justice, and political community, we would be drawn to a different set of readings. For instance, if we were interested in how these questions are related to questions about knowledge, we might be drawn to the utopian visions of Francis Bacon and Margaret Cavendish, for instance, which connect up the pursuit of scientific truths to an ideal political structure. Or alternatively, we might read Descartes's *Discourse* alongside Mary Astell's *Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, for both works take as fundamental our self-awareness as rational agents. For Descartes this is largely apolitical -- self-awareness is an individual matter -- and necessary for the growth of scientific knowledge. Astell sees this self-awareness as requiring a proper education and upbringing, one that, for women, requires a separation from society so that rational faculties can be properly cultivated. There is, thus, a political dimension to the most basic epistemic concerns.

This consideration brings me to the issue that, to my mind, stands as the most significant omission from the set of philosophical canonical questions: education, which I take to include questions of both cognitive and moral development. There is perhaps no set of questions that has been more enduring in the history of philosophy: Plato's *Meno* stakes out a view of cognitive development, his *Republic* lays out a program of moral development; for Aristotle, the cultivation of virtue is front and center. What is Augustine's *Confessions* but a narrative a both cognitive and moral development? The early modern period is rife with philosophical works concerning education, some of which are written by canonical figures. Questions concerning education have at least two distinct elements: they must include a normative dimension, for an education presumes an end towards which that education aims -- be it a norm of rationality or a norm of moral evaluation -- how one conceives of that end will impact the framework of the educational program; but it also includes some metaphysics and epistemology, for it also must make assumptions about the nature of the being to be educated: how one thinks about the human mind will impact how one ensures its capacity for understanding and knowledge is activated and cultivated. Moreover, a look at works specifically focused on education in the early modern period, such as Anna Maria van Schurman's *Why a Christian Woman Should be Educated*, Astell's *Serious Proposal*, or Poullain de la Barre or Cavendish, brings out interesting political issues in education including not only the question of who is entitled to an education, and the basis of that entitlement, but also the more subtle issue of the role of social structures in shaping the subject to be educated, and equally of the role of education in shaping social structures.

Focusing on education along these lines is particularly interesting because it stands to include many figures we currently take as central to the history of modern philosophy: Descartes, Locke and Hume stand out, as do Voltaire and Rousseau. For education *is* a

canonical philosophical question if we look to questions that have been consistently part of the history of philosophy.

But focusing on education also stands to get us out of the ruts the discipline seems to have fallen into. For one, it demands that we look to other writers -- and in particular women writers, who are centrally concerned with education -- and other kinds of texts -- for one can easily explore the metaphysical and moral presuppositions of human development by looking at fictionalized narratives of moral upbringing, such as Madeleine de Scudéry's *The Princess of Cleves*, or a story by Aphra Behn, a play by Margaret Cavendish, not to mention *Candide* or *Emile*.

But perhaps more critically, it allows us to ask some of the old canonical questions in new ways. Rather than treating the nature of the human mind and rationality in the abstract and fully matured, focusing on education forces us to situate our conception of human nature, and the human mind, in a context in which we care about what that nature is, how it develops and matures. And similarly, we are led to consider not simply the norms of moral evaluation, but of how those norms figure in moral development and the ways in which our conceptions of moral development inform the structures of ordinary life. It strikes me that in contemporary philosophy our investigation of these central philosophical questions of metaphysics, epistemology and ethics have become somewhat removed from why the answers to them matters. Early modern philosophers --even canonical philosophers -- seem to me especially attuned to the significance of philosophical positions to shaping the forms of human life. Opening up the philosophical canon -- to new figures, to new ways of asking old questions -- can help us to rediscover why philosophy matters and to retell the *geistesgeschichte*.

5. Relation of scholarship and pedagogy

In thinking about the philosophical canon, it is important not to undervalue the role it plays in teaching. The canon provides students at different institutions with a set of common texts through which they can interact meaningfully with one another. It provides similar continuity to students as they move through the curriculum in their home institution. It thus might be tempting to suggest that there be a break between scholarship and pedagogy. Disrupting the canon might be fine for research, but the curriculum should remain intact.

While I do respect this impulse, I want to push back on it. First, nothing in what I have argued requires dismissing or failing to take up currently canonical texts. Very few instructors cover all seven figures in a course anyway; we make choices of which to highlight. Moreover, it is interesting to compare the ways in which canonical figures often are taught with the conception of reading they themselves put forward. In many cases, in both early modern survey courses and other survey courses in, for instance, epistemology, and even in more advanced courses, these figures are taught as if the philosophical issues they shed light upon are fixed, and their views settled. While scholars may recognize otherwise, instructors present a dogmatic reading of Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume and so on (perhaps because their views are so idiosyncratic it is hard to present a dogmatic reading of Spinoza and Leibniz). But this is not the way in which these figures conceived of their own writing. Descartes, in the *Discourse*, asks his readers to treat his account of his method as a fable, taking what they themselves find helpful. Locke presents his work as an essay -- a trial or test to be further refined. A particularly compelling text in this regard is Rousseau's *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*, a puzzling work that aims to argue that the arts and sciences have corrupted morals, even while it seems to undermine its own claim by challenging its readers to take exception to the bad arguments that defend the thesis. The work, it seems to me,

wants to get its readers to begin to read actively once again, rather than take what they are presented with as fact. We may be in a similar situation today than that Rousseau seems to have been facing.

In philosophy, I do not think we need to separate research interests from what we teach. Philosophy in this respect is disanalogous to a natural science; in order to train our students we do not need to present them with simplified and in fact false theories so they develop the skills that can be refined and built upon as they learn more and more.[13] Philosophy does share a kind of systematicity with the sciences, but it's goal is less constructive. If philosophy is anything it is an art of exposing and articulating those assumptions that frame almost everything we do as we go about our lives. We assume certain kinds of things exist, that they stand in causal relations to one another; we assume that some of our beliefs are true and other false, or at least some are better than others; we assume that some actions are good, others bad. These may not be bad assumptions, nor even unwarranted, but they demand articulation. This is what we teach when we teach philosophy.

The rut I take the history of philosophy to be in right now is a matter of the entrenchment of the canon, and that entrenchment can, and often does, result in a taking for granted of the very exposure and articulation of those basic assumptions that philosophy is supposed to reveal. I have been, I suppose, trying to expose and articulate that taking for granted, my bringing out just how much in the history of philosophy we ignore. That we ignore it in our research entails we ignore it in our teaching, and our efforts to excite students about philosophy can suffer as a result. Disrupting the canon need not entail giving up the figures we were trained in, nor giving up the precision of articulation that has been

[13] See Walsh and Currie, forthcoming, for a different point of view.

the hallmark of the philosophical enterprise since Socrates. Rather, in directing attention to new figures and new texts, not only can we gain insight into the logical space of answers to what are central philosophical issues but also we can rethink how we frame the questions around those issues. Asking questions in new ways enriches how we think about our discipline and equally how we share those thoughts with students, and so can help us reinvigorate philosophy, getting it out of a rut and back on the road.

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