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Statement on Teaching Diversity and Inclusion of Marginalized and Underrepresented Groups

Minority groups are disproportionately underrepresented in professional philosophy. This is confirmed in research showing a decline in the diversity of race, gender, and class with each step towards professionalization.<sup>1</sup> But the same research shows that students from marginalized groups are well represented in introductory philosophy courses. We therefore see that while the practice of philosophy is open to all, professional disciplinary standards are exclusionary. This is morally wrong and reduces the quality of philosophical inquiry. To achieve equity, we must diversify the canon and support the marginalized. In doing so, we improve our understanding of the truths that are our objects of study.

The reasons that members of underrepresented groups do not continue in philosophy are numerous. Many are subtle, like the alienating effects of the White-male canon in the history of philosophy and the privileging of particular models of ‘legitimate’ knowledge in the classroom, which can lead instructors to delegitimize approaches not grounded in that tradition. Less subtly, philosophy developed in an imperialistic world. Genocides against non-Western societies such as Precolumbian and African civilizations have obliterated entire traditions of thinking, while White-male and Eurocentric epistemologies flourished unchallenged. We must work to correct for the harmful effects of these historical trends by ensuring that our teaching is diverse in terms of race, gender (including non-binary identities), sexual orientation, class, and culture. This creates a setting in which all students are afforded the opportunity to seek truth that is less encumbered by the historical exclusion in our field.

Inclusivity begins with course design and syllabi that include non-White, non-male, and non-Western authors. This is a first step, if only a first step, in broadening the horizon of our discipline. More immediately, it offers all students the opportunity to see the defining aspects of their identities reflected back to them through the texts. Research suggests that students are more willing to contribute when they believe that their voice belongs in a given discussion, and diverse syllabi encourage this.

Moreover, inclusivity is only possible on a safe campus and in a community that actively supports marginalized groups. To this end, we have founded the Coalition for a Just University (CJU) at Penn State, on the Organizing Committee of which I sit. CJU’s goal is to support equity and justice, particularly by focusing on serving our most vulnerable community members. Our initiatives have included advocating for a Center for Racial Justice and greater COVID transparency. In the past, I have organized LGBTQI\* advocacy workshops, becoming a certified ally for those from marginalized genders and sexualities. I helped bring philosophy to underrepresented populations in Kentucky through our free Philosophy Summer Day Camp for students from racially diverse, low-income high schools. These experiences have helped me teach philosophy more inclusively and show that it is indeed for everyone.

Given that philosophy is an inquiry into truth and the meaning of things like subjectivity and freedom, our discipline will only improve as its scope expands. Past attempts to understand “universal” truth have been tacitly limited to the realm of White men. Freed from this limitation, we stand to learn quite a bit about (e.g) human subjectivity from those whose personhood has been covered over, and about freedom from those to whom it has been denied. Our discipline has much to gain from such a turn.

We see in this way that exclusionary practices are bad for everyone, including not only those who are excluded, but also members of majority groups who miss out on the significant philosophical value that diversity has to offer. Philosophers have only recently begun to challenge our discipline’s long history of exclusion, but challenge it *we must*. Thus I remain firmly committed to developing inclusionary practices as a philosopher, educator, and member of the global community.

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<sup>1</sup> Concerning research cited throughout, see, e.g., M. Winkelmans et al., “A Teaching Intervention that Increases Underserved College Students’ Success,” *Peer Review* 18:1/2 (2016), 31-6; E. Schwitzgebel & C. Jennings, “Women in Philosophy,” *Public Affairs Quarterly* 31 (2017), 83-105.