The Third Shift: the politics of representation and the psychological turn

Abstract

In the last few years, the situation and experiences of women in academic philosophy – and in academia more broadly – have received unprecedented attention. For feminist philosophers, a growing awareness of the problems facing women in the discipline is something to be welcomed. Nevertheless, this paper raises some serious concerns about the framework within which these problems are analysed and addressed. I suggest that the currently prevalent approach overemphasises issues of representation, and that it has also become preoccupied with psychology at the expense of political and social criticism.

Introduction

This paper begins from a dilemma. The best way to describe this dilemma is perhaps through a personal reflection. My transition from graduate student to junior academic in philosophy coincided with a marked increase in awareness of the problems facing women in the discipline. Women in philosophy have always known that they faced problems, of course; and the Society for Women in Philosophy (SWIP) has existed since 1972 to support women in overcoming those problems and to defend the philosophical credentials of feminist theory. But it is only much more recently that concerns over the situation of women in philosophy have become truly mainstream among academics and students.

From the point of view of a woman beginning a career in philosophy, this belated recognition of what feminist philosophers have been pointing out for decades – and of what women students and staff have long experienced – seemed like an unequivocally good thing. I began to feel slightly more optimistic, and less alone. But this feeling quickly gave way to a growing sense of unease about the shape which the most prominent analyses and initiatives were taking. This produced a political dilemma of a familiar kind. On the one hand, the unease was persistent and seemed to me to have a real basis. On the other hand,

no feminist would want to line up with the defenders of a sexist establishment by attacking long-overdue efforts to combat some very real problems.

This paper is my response to the dilemma. It is intended as a critique of present theoretical and practical approaches to the issue of women in philosophy. The critique is partly, though not purely, a feminist one. As Black feminists, among others, have long pointed out (Crenshaw 1991; Collins 2000; cf. Spelman 1988), there is in any case no such thing as a 'purely feminist' position, simply because women exist in societies that are structured by relations of racial and class domination as well as by gender. Women in philosophy, too, live and work in institutions which are shaped and structured by these and other forces. To a large extent, the criticisms I'll make of the current discussion around the issue of women in philosophy may be understood as criticisms of the attempt to treat that issue as an isolated 'woman problem', to be analysed and resolved independently of a broader critique of academic institutions and of the forces that shape them.

It is worth confessing now to some qualms about the very decision to write about the issue of 'women in philosophy'. It might be simpler if I could share the view that some philosophers hold of their discipline, whereby it is a rare bastion of incisive and critical thinking, providing a valuable (if underappreciated) service to society; but I cannot honestly share that view.[1] In writing about the situation of women in philosophy, I do not mean to imply otherwise: that is, I do not approach this subject with the guiding idea that academic philosophy is a wonderful thing, so that to deny women equal access to or enjoyment of it is to deny them something precious.[2] Nor do I mean to endow the issue of 'women in philosophy' with any special strategic or global importance: wonderful or not, the field of philosophy is – in the grand scheme of things – quite tiny. I write about it – rather than writing about women in sport, for example – as a matter of personal and local interest, as a woman whose field of study and work is philosophy. Feminists outside the field – and even within it – may feel that they have better things to think about than the plight of women in philosophy (or of women in academia, for that matter). That is fair enough.

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[1] I don't pretend to be able to vindicate this negative verdict on my own field here, though I have defended it at length elsewhere (Finlayson 2015). For present purposes, it must suffice to note that I am not alone: many feminists have been highly critical of the discipline of philosophy in its historical and contemporary manifestations (see e.g. Dotson 2012).
[2] On this point, see Le Doeuff (2007).

The themes I'll discuss in what follows, however, do not apply only to the issue of women in philosophy (or women in academia), but seem to me to be of much wider significance. In particular, I'll focus on two tendencies. The first is an attachment to an overly restrictive politics of representation. The second – what I'll call the 'psychological turn' – is an increasing reliance on the findings and conceptual vocabulary of experimental psychology.

I.   The 'Woman Problem'

Women, it has been said, are like oxygen: in shorter supply the higher you climb. Academic philosophy is a case in point.[3] This is sometimes dubbed the 'triangle phenomenon': at the undergraduate level in the UK, for example, men and women are present in a roughly 50:50 ratio;[4] by the graduate level, women have dropped away dramatically; at the top of the professional hierarchy, they are rarer still. It is not difficult to begin to name some of the factors which help to bring about and maintain this state of affairs (although there are significant disagreements – even among feminists and women in philosophy – as to which to recognise and which to regard as most significant): the widespread, semi-explicit perception that women are less adept at the kind of rigorous, logical thinking prized by the 'analytic' tradition in particular; a culture in which sexual harassment is thoroughly normalized (while those who refuse to put up with it are habitually ostracized); a system of informal male patronage and of the belittling of women students and staff; the inadequacy of provisions to make academic life compatible with the care-giving responsibilities that still fall most heavily upon women.[5] Women in philosophy know all about these things. Amongst ourselves, in corners of conference rooms and bars and on cigarette breaks, we talk about them like they were the weather.

Of course, the usual 'innocent explanation theories' abound: women simply have different priorities, have more 'practical' minds, prefer to leave academia when they have children,

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[3] Philosophy, in fact, seems to have more trouble attracting and retaining women than any other humanities discipline (Beebee & Saul 2011).

[4] In the US, the proportions are already uneven at the 'base' of the triangle, with women making up only around 30% of philosophy majors.

[5] Of course, we may still want to ask *why* philosophy is like this (both in absolute terms and relative to other disciplines). My point is only that the *proximate* causes of the disaffection and scarcity of women are not – or at least, should not be – hard to fathom.

etc. (or they are simply worse at philosophy, after all). Others have done admirable work dealing with these sorts of arguments (see e.g.: Beebee & Saul 2011; Hutchinson & Jenkins eds. 2013). I want to avoid duplicating their efforts here, not because I think it is never useful to bolster an existing case, but because I resent the expectation that *certain* cases must be presented again and again before we are permitted to proceed to the next point. So: I hereby disown any innocent explanation theory of the underrepresentation of women in philosophy. Let me leave it at that. What interests me here is what comes next.

Once convinced of the problem's existence, it is natural to understand that problem as a problem of underrepresentation. After all, the relative scarcity of women in philosophy, particularly at the higher levels, is a stark and established fact. Assuming against innocent explanation theories, this scarcity is also a *problem* (or indicative of one): the environment is hostile; the playing field is not level.[6] From this, it is a small step to the conclusion that better or equal representation for women is the goal of feminist action.

In order to get closer to our objective, however, we will need to understand what is causing the problem. For some contemporary feminists, the persistence of underrepresentation is prima facie puzzling: the factors mentioned above – sexual harassment, family-unfriendly hours, etc. – though real, and doubtless *part* of the explanation, may not seem widespread or severe enough to drive away so many women; or, perhaps, the persistence of these contributing factors may itself be the object of the puzzlement ("Why is there still so much dismissive treatment of women in philosophy *now, in the 21st century*?").

Unwilling to fall back upon innocent explanation theories (which deny the existence or scale of the problem), and additionally unwilling to doubt the good faith of professedly egalitarian colleagues, many feminists have recently seized upon some findings from experimental psychology: the stubborn persistence of the underrepresentation of women in philosophy, as in other fields too, may be explained – if not solely, then at least to an extent sufficient to help dispel the appearance of mystery – by the joint action of 'implicit bias' and 'stereotype threat' (see Saul 2013; Beebee & Saul 2011). Implicit bias prevents women's merits and achievements from being fully recognised, while stereotype threat inhibits women from

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[6] I'll return to the question of the exact sense in which underrepresentation is held to be problematic (and equal representation desirable) in the next section.

performing at their best.[7]   We don't have to say that women are inherently worse at philosophy (though we can allow that stereotype threat will sometimes impair their 'performance').   We don't have to say that the underrepresentation of women is perpetuated by bad people, since implicit biases are involuntary and often unconscious. And since implicit biases have been found to be present across all demographics (see e.g. Raymond 2013, and cf. Goldberg 1968), we don't have to say that men in particular are the source of the trouble. Thus, it seems, the puzzle is solved – and nobody's feelings get hurt.

With both problem and goal identified, and with the hitherto hidden causes of the problem located, we may be understandably anxious to get to the solutions: the means and measures that promise to bring us closer to the holy grail of equal representation. Before broaching the question of what is to be done, however, I want to take a closer look at the analysis I've just described. That analysis will be familiar, I believe, as it is now pervasive within academia and, to some extent, outside it. I have already identified its main components: (i) an emphasis on representation, in framing the problem and the goal of feminist action; and (ii) a reliance on experimental psychology for a deeper diagnosis that might inform the best course of treatment. We will look at each of these elements in turn.

II.   The Politics of Representation

I've sketched what I take to be a currently prevalent approach to philosophy's 'woman problem'. On this approach, a great deal of emphasis is placed upon representation. This may seem so natural as to be automatic. It is certainly in line with the dominant way in which feminism appears in the mass media – with its focus on the 'glass ceiling', on the percentage of women CEOs and members of parliament, etc. Part of the attraction of this framework is its relative simplicity. Heads can be counted and percentages calculated. This seems to offer a clear measure of progress (or the lack of it).

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[7] As most academics are by now aware, 'implicit bias' is a category which has emerged from the practice of 'implicit association testing' (IAT), the idea of which is to uncover often-unconscious associations between concepts by recording participants' mental 'processing speed' while performing sorting tasks. 'Stereotype threat', on the other hand, refers to the reported tendency for members of stigmatised groups to 'underperform' when placed in a stressful or high-stakes environment in which they are also especially aware of the negative stereotypes that apply to them (see Steele 2010).

While the politics of representation is attractive, it comes with both dangers and limitations. The chief danger, it seems to me, is that the formulation of problem and solution in terms of 'representation' may end up saddling us with a brand of feminism which will strike many as narrow at best, and at worst, unattractively elitist or 'top-down'. There is some logic to the transition here: for if the point is to improve representation, and if the place where there is most room for improvement is at the top, then perhaps the top is where we should be targeting our greatest efforts. In the case of corporations, after all, the call is for more women bosses, not more women interns or secretaries. In the context of philosophy, focusing on the 'top' means focusing on the relatively small set of well-renumerated, permanent academic posts, and the most prestigious professorships above all.

This outcome is no inevitable consequence of the choice to make representation central, it should be acknowledged. Notice, firstly, that although representation is typically only demanded for positions and institutions regarded as sufficiently desirable to warrant that call, those who make the demand need not be committed to a view whereby representation is *more valuable* the more prestigious or privileged the intra-institutional rank at which that representation occurs. As mentioned above, the reason for prioritising the top might be just that it is where the women aren't: it is where we find the greatest absence. And this absence is unlikely to be the greatest in absolute terms: it may be at the very top that the proportion of women is furthest from the 50:50 ideal; but it seems likely that this top will also be sufficiently small that we will find more spaces to fill – more places where women should be – lower down. Finally, the question of where to direct focus and effort is always a *practical* one. It depends not only on a determination of what is to be done (i.e. how many holes there are to fill), but also on – among other things – a judgement as to what kind of intervention will produce the best return on our labours. Perhaps with these sorts of points in mind, many feminists have sought to direct attention to the 'leaky pipeline' that leads from undergraduate to graduate study, haemorrhaging women along the way (see e.g. Calhoun 2009).

Nevertheless, I contend, an opposite tendency for the gaze to drift upwards, to focus especially on what is seen as most prestigious and desirable, is noticeable both outside and within academic contexts – if not so much among feminist academics themselves, then certainly and markedly among those who interpret and respond to their efforts from

management positions or media platforms.[8] Not all will be troubled to the same degree by this sort of thing, of course; and some self-professed feminists may not be very troubled at all. But it is important to note that those who *do* find it a problem may find it so on partly *feminist* grounds: there is, after all, a substantial and well-established body of feminist critique of 'top-down' (or 'trickle-down') feminisms which holds that these 'feminisms' are not worthy of the label, since they fail to oppose patriarchy or sexism for all but a few, usually already-privileged women (Eisenstein 2013; Jaffe 2013; Penny 2011). It's possible to question the force of the critique of 'top-down' feminism when applied to the case at hand. Though it may not work so well with wealth, it might be argued, some things really do 'trickle down'. It is often held, for example, that the presence of successful women at the top of a profession will inspire others: the 'role model effect'. Some hope that having more successful women in philosophy will boost the confidence of junior women, or even make them philosophize better; it is certainly claimed that such visible high-flyers can help to reduce 'stereotype threat' in women and other stigmatized groups (Saul 2013).[9]

This is not an obviously delusional hope, and it may derive plausibility from introspection: perhaps we can think of times in our lives where one or two 'people like us' gave us strength and inspiration in an otherwise hostile environment. On the other hand, we can probably think of cases where supposed role models and fellow travellers conspicuously did *not* do this. If the alleged beneficial effects of high-level representation worked in every context, well enough to overcome other factors, then we would probably live in a very different world – and the critique of top-down feminism would be harder to make. But we know from bitter experience that the presence of a female Prime Minister does not necessarily enhance the lives or nourish the political aspirations of women in general, just as the impact of sporting heroes – no matter how inspirational – cannot fully survive the closure of local swimming pools or the sale of playing fields and public parkland to private developers. The dull-but-essential interim conclusion on the prospects for any genuine 'trickle-down' effect: *it depends* – on the context and circumstances in which that effect is supposed to play out.

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[8] It is also striking that it seems to be so much easier to get women candidates appointed to prestigious roles than to get institutions to take sexual harassment seriously. This is not for want of attention to the latter issue from prominent feminist philosophers.

[9] It is also thought that exposure to 'counter-stereotypical' exemplars may help to reduce implicit bias in members of all groups. I discuss implicit bias and stereotype threat further in Section III below.

It might be thought that this context-sensitivity is a feature that attaches specifically to *instrumental* justifications: whether or not X will produce a certain effect is likely to depend on the situation in which X occurs. But increased representation of women in high places may also be justified on the grounds that it is self-perpetuating: the presence of women at the top helps to promote the presence of *more* women at (or near) the top. Here, representation sometimes appears to figure as an end-in-itself – and as a means only insofar as it is a means-to-itself. It is also possible to hold that representation is valuable neither 'in itself' nor instrumentally, but rather insofar as it is *indicative* of something else that is valuable – some ideal of substantive equality of opportunity, for example.[10] What about these other ways of valuing representation?

Here too, it seems to me, the value of the latter is crucially context-dependent. Equality of representation can neither be simply identified with 'justice' (or even 'equality'), nor function infallibly as a yardstick thereof. A quick thought experiment makes this clear. A world in which women and men are equally represented in philosophy, but where the sole selection criterion for women philosophers is their perceived physical attractiveness, seems like a world still further from gender equality than our own. Equal representation, in such a scenario, neither constitutes nor indicates equality or justice for women. Of course, it is also true that this kind of scenario corresponds neither to the actual world nor to the vision of any would-be feminist reformer. The point of describing it is just to make vivid two points which, though very simple, can sometimes get lost in the rush for improved representation: it is not representation *as such* that is important to feminists; and whether the latter is a) *productive*, b) *constitutive*, or c) *indicative* of something desirable, depends on the manner and context of its realization.

This last point might seem rather academic (in the pejorative sense). I have admitted that the context described above, in which women are equally represented without being equally treated, is an imaginary one. Let us therefore now imagine another, somewhat less far-fetched scenario: those in positions of power, realising that they must be seen to be promoters of gender equality, duly make efforts to ensure that women are better

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[10] It is also possible, of course, to value representation in more than one of these ways: e.g. we may think that it is both a promoter and a measure of equality of opportunity (which we value).

represented at the higher levels of academic philosophy; they do this by employing, in effect, an unofficial quota system, giving marginal preference to women applicants for certain posts; however, little else – e.g. the epidemic proportions of sexual harassment, everyday belittling and undervaluing of women – changes; the women co-opted into top roles, let us also suppose, are almost without exception white, well-connected women from upper-middle class backgrounds – and, additionally, are consciously or unconsciously selected (even more so than is the case with men) for their subscription to values which are generally affirmative of the academic-institutional status quo.

In my view, we are edging towards something more like this imagined scenario than one that would constitute a genuine advance for women (even if we have not yet edged terribly far towards either). *If and to the extent that this is correct*, I suggest, what we are seeing is little more than a kind of hyperactive tokenism. Increased representation, in this context, is not best interpreted as an indicator that casual sexism is on the decline, does not necessarily mean that women are included *on equal terms* with men, and while it increases (numerical) equality along one axis (i.e. gender), it may – if we are not vigilant – actually increase *inequality* along other axes: e.g. the inequality of treatment and representation that exists between different racial groups, people of different class backgrounds, and people of different philosophical and political persuasions.[11]

Far from being pertinent only to the issue of *top-level* representation, these last points – about inclusion on unequal terms, and about the replacement of one kind of inequality with another – could apply even to the imagined scenario in which exactly 50:50 representation of men and women is achieved 'all the way down' the institutional hierarchy. But I doubt that this latter scenario will be realised any time soon – not until the underlying causes of underrepresentation are addressed, at least.[12] What seems to me more likely is that, over the next few years, we will see numerically modest but disproportionately visible further increases in the representation of women in philosophy at the higher levels, and moderate increases elsewhere, leaving the overall ratio considerably short of the elusive 50:50 mark. But neither I nor anyone else can make such predictions with certainty.

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[11] Cf. Marx's point, in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, about the inherently abstract and relative nature of 'equality' as a value (in Marx 2010).

[12] To say this, of course, is to acknowledge that representation retains some value as an indicator – even if this consists mainly in the negative indicative value of *under*representation.

Where does all this leave us? The intended upshot is not that we should give up on talking about and valuing representation altogether. All that I have said here is compatible with continuing to place *some* value on representation, in all three senses: productive, constitutive and indicative. Moreover, by beginning from an observation and critique of the fact of underrepresentation, we may be led to other critical insights. *Where*, exactly, we are led will depend on our particular impressions of academic philosophy, and on our politics more broadly. Most who call for better representation also identify and criticise some of the alleged barriers to this goal, such as sexual harassment, or carer-unfriendly scheduling of events. Thus, they make criticisms of academic philosophy which go beyond the bare complaint that there are too few women in it. A consciousness of the fact of underrepresentation might even lead us to deeper, 'structural' criticisms. For example, one could come to the conclusion that in traditionally patriarchal societies like our own, women will gravitate towards the bottom of *any* hierarchy; the answer, in that case, will be a feminist overcoming of hierarchy itself (see e.g. Ehrlich 1977).[13]

Once we make these further criticisms, however, we already begin to dilute or move away from what I have called the 'politics of representation': we begin to talk less about representation, and more about other things. And it is crucial that we do so, for only then can we be appropriately critical of the institutional status quo. A break with the politics of representation is especially needed if we are to make what I have called 'structural' criticisms. Working within a politics of representation, after all, means thinking about some group's presence within, or access to, *a pre-given structure which is held fixed for the purposes of the exercise*; and unless otherwise specified – which would mean stopping talking about representation long enough to say something about the structure within which representation is to be realized – it may be assumed that the structure in question is the one that already exists.

We may make this last point more vivid by invoking again the image of a triangle – only, this time, let us think of the triangle as standing for the institution of academic philosophy itself, rather than the tapering portion of women within it. Academic philosophy, like academia

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[13] Of course, part of the task of elaborating and defending such a view – which may be seen as belonging to the tradition of 'anarcho-' (or 'anarcha-') feminism – must be to explain what does and does not count as 'hierarchy' of the kind deemed unacceptable.

more generally, is an elite and internally hierarchical institution; so a triangle (or pyramid) is a fitting shape to use to represent it. We may now mentally draw some horizontal lines, to indicate the various levels of the professional hierarchy: Master's, PhD, temporary academic, permanent lecturer, professor. We may then look at the distribution of members of different groups within and across the strata – for example, we may shade in a small sliver at the top of the triangle to indicate the proportion of women in professorial positions in philosophy. Perfect equality of representation would be depicted by a straight line drawn down the middle. The basic shape and internal structure, however, are not altered: the strata, the compartments, remain exactly the same; only (some of) their inhabitants have changed.

If some feminists have tended to over-emphasize representation, it may be that the mistake is encouraged by a sensitivity to (one horn of) the dilemma I mentioned at the start of this paper. Because we do not want to accept innocent explanation theories, which effectively dismiss concerns which our experience tells us are well grounded, we are drawn towards the politics of representation, which offers the most prominent articulation of those concerns. Yet this is not the only available feminist response. Another possibility, given a commitment to women in philosophy, is to look at where the women are, not where they aren't: where is the relevant constituency, and what are its concerns? Since women in philosophy (even more so than the men) are mostly to be found in temporary and casual jobs, it might make better sense for feminists to begin with the fights against marketization, funding cuts and precarity – issues which affect us all,[14] and women especially (see Johnson, Kavanagh & Mattson 2003: 73). It would be unfair to suggest that advocates for women in philosophy never acknowledge these issues at all. There are signs that more are beginning to do so,[15] and this is only to be welcomed. In general, however, they still get nothing like the amount of attention that is given to representation. One reason for that, I suspect, is that such issues are perceived as 'too political': they are bound up with more general and controversial phenomena and concepts such as 'neoliberalism', and they threaten to bring feminists into conflict with university management.

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[14] This is part of a wider pattern in academia (and, of course, beyond it). At the time of writing, 54 per cent of all academic staff and 49 per cent of teaching staff at UK universities are employed on 'insecure contracts' (UCU 2016).

[15] For example, in May 2015, a call for papers was issued for a SWIP UK panel focusing on women and casualization. However, the call failed to attract enough submissions, and no panel was formed.

The same discomfort with politics, I believe, also underlies the second tendency I wanted to discuss here: the enthusiasm for an approach which draws heavily on the findings and conceptual framework of experimental psychology.

III.   The Psychological Turn

We have already encountered the concepts of implicit bias and stereotype threat, and sketched their place in a currently popular analysis of the problem of the underrepresentation of women in philosophy.   It remains to describe the remedies proposed on the back of this analysis.

One of the main recommendations of a 2011 report by the British Philosophical Association and SWIP UK is that all academics be made aware of the prevalence of both implicit bias and stereotype threat. Since the phenomena in question are thought to be largely unconscious and involuntary, however, it is no surprise that simply telling people about them is not enough to make them disappear. Those influenced by research on these phenomena duly recommend a number of further steps: training sessions (often 'delivered' by private companies) which aim to counteract or eliminate problematic biases; anonymization of marking and evaluation processes where possible (to 'block' implicit bias); the promotion of positive images of women as philosophers, e.g. by putting pictures of successful female philosophers on the walls of departments (to 'break down' stereotype threat and also to reduce implicit bias); encouraging victims of stereotype threat to concentrate, if possible, on their membership of 'social groups that are not negatively stigmatized in philosophy' — e.g. people with good 'A' level grades or who are getting high marks for their coursework, people who have been accepted onto a good postgraduate programme, or people who have won funding for their PhDs (Steele 2010: 170).[16]

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[16] Some of these suggestions might raise a few eyebrows. The last one, for example – focusing on membership of non-stigmatized groups – might seem to imply that a white woman, in order to combat stereotype threat, should be advised to think to herself: "Well, at least I'm white." A reply here might be that not all ways of implementing a piece of advice – not even all effective ways – are acceptable, for any number of reasons. Nevertheless, that this account implies even a defeasible reason to draw strength from whiteness seems troubling.

A number of organisations and initiatives now exist to make sure that the necessary action is being taken and progress being made. The British Philosophical Association (BPA) and SWIP UK have produced a 'Good Practice Scheme', for example, to which institutions may sign up: it is up to institutions to monitor their own progress in implementing the Scheme (which features education and action on 'gender bias' very prominently), but the BPA keeps a central list of participating institutions, and allows them to display the Scheme's 'Good Practice' logo. In a roughly contemporaneous pilot scheme by the 'Equality Challenge Unit' (ECU) – the organisation which also 'owns' the more long-standing Athena SWAN programme, which promotes women in the sciences – Gender Equality Charter Marks ('GEMs') were awarded to humanities departments perceived to be creating better environments for women. Mercifully (given the difficulty in keeping up with the acronyms), the ECU's gender equality charter mark has recently merged with its Athena SWAN Charter.

A first thing to notice about all this is that the recommendations listed above could not easily be classified as proposals for what I've called 'structural change'.[17] In fact, many of them seem positively to *affirm* and *reinforce* existing structures and practices – such as current funding priorities, the hierarchies of esteem that dictate what does and does not count as a 'good postgraduate programme', the idea of 'top journals', or the practice of 'networking'. A large part of what it would mean for the remedies to 'work', we may infer, is that they ease the upward passage of women into those hard-to-reach places that are often the focus of calls for better representation.[18]

It is understandable, of course, that women should want to be able to compete on equal terms with men for the benefits on offer within the system that we have – even while we may also have criticisms of that system (who doesn't want funding, after all?). But as we have seen, there can also be feminist grounds for wanting to change the system itself (in academia as elsewhere). At the very least, it seems problematic if our feminism is *in conflict*

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[17] My usage of this term is vague and relative, but I see this as inescapable. There can be no strict formula for determining what does and does not count as 'structural', and thus for telling us where the reform of conditions within a set structure ends and the alteration of the structure itself begins. Nevertheless, the distinction is intuitively accessible: we have no difficulty in knowing that placing pictures on a departmental wall is a reform less 'structural' than, say, democratizing the internal governance procedures of the university.

[18] This, however, does not mean that we may measure the effectiveness of these remedies simply by monitoring the numbers of women. As argued above (see Section II), progress toward the goal of equal representation could equally well be explained by a concern for 'image-management' among those in positions of power within academia – a factor which could also account for the enthusiasm, within the same quarters, for some currently fashionable means to the realization of that goal.

with well-founded demands (whether of feminist or other origin) for structural transformation. Hence we may – again, at the least – want the advocacy of the set of measures described above to be coupled with a deeper critique which counter-balances the affirmative slant of that advocacy.

All this is on the assumption that the measures will, in fact, work (on their own narrow terms). But we have some reason to question that assumption. In the case of implicit bias, the biggest problem with the main recommendation – anonymizing hiring and assessment procedures – is that the scope for implementing it, in small academic worlds, is fairly minute. People often know each other and each other's work sufficiently well that they will know whom they are assessing, name or no name. And even when this is not the case, only a fraction of the process by which someone comes to be graded or hired (or not hired) is such that it is possible or desirable to anonymize it. As soon as the veil is lifted, any good work can easily be undone, by biases implicit and explicit.

There are also (different) reasons to be pessimistic about the power of interventions designed to combat stereotype threat. Those sceptical about the potential of a few pictures on a wall to 'break down' stereotypes formed over many centuries are likely to find themselves met with examples of various studies, such as those in which subjects' performance is reportedly enhanced after exposure to positive 'role models' (e.g. Blanton, Crocker, & Miller 2000). But even assuming in favour of the replicability of these and other experiments, to move from this sort of finding to a conclusion about long- or even medium-term solutions outside of the laboratory context is a leap, to put it mildly. If you give someone a piece of toast, they may be pleased. If you hand them a hundred pieces of toast over the course of a day, they may start running away from you. If you send someone an unexpected greetings card, it might improve their mood, but it probably won't have this effect if you do it every morning. It is possible that, the first time a woman walks into a department and sees a picture of a successful woman philosopher, this may reduce the effects of stereotype threat or otherwise give her a boost, a product of this vivid illustration that women can succeed in philosophy. But when every department adds a token woman or two to their walls – along with a few gender equality rosettes and awards – some women are more likely to get just the bland feeling of depression and alienation that comes from encountering yet another self-congratulatory advertisement of how much is being done and

how much those in charge care about underrepresented groups, when in actuality, nothing much seems to have changed. From the point of view of those women in philosophy who belong to more than one underrepresented group, or stand at the intersection of more than one system of oppression, it will also not help matters if the celebrated 'role models' tend to be overwhelmingly white, otherwise privileged women whose work is largely in line with dominant conceptions of what counts as (good) philosophy.

On the other hand, perhaps I am guilty of being unduly gloomy and of underestimating the power of small changes. It doesn't matter much if I am, however, because I actually have no wish to argue with colleagues who want to promote anonymization where possible, or to put pictures of women on the walls. It is not as if these measures are particularly onerous. In terms of time and effort, they are trivial – or rather, they should be;[19] and I do not need convincing that the concepts of implicit bias and stereotype threat correspond (roughly, anyway) to real and troublesome phenomena. In particular, it is not a new discovery that the same work tends to be graded more highly when presented as the work of a man than when presented as the work of a woman – and that this still occurs when the graders are politically progressive, or when they are women themselves. As early as 1968, a study by Philip Goldberg found that female college students consistently rated the same work more highly when a male name was attached than where a female name was given (a finding echoed by more recent experiments in which participants are asked to evaluate CVs; Steinpreis et al 1999; Moss-Racusin et al 2012). In this context, to anonymize where possible seems like basic hygiene. In any case, some measure of anonymization has already been standard academic practice for years, mostly to avoid unfairly privileging of favourites or those perceived in advance as 'good students'.

So, we should put pictures of women on the walls (if we are going to put pictures of people on the walls at all), and we should anonymize when we can (which probably means: slightly

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[19] Even these modest demands have often met with a great deal of resistance in practice – at least when raised as part of a strategy to promote gender equality (anonymization for non-political or non-feminist reasons may be another matter). However modest and low-cost the proposal, there is always some reason why it would create too much work, be somehow counter-productive, or destroy something precious. Reasons are found why feedback should not be anonymised ('feedback should be personalised'), why more women philosophers cannot be put on reading lists ('quality would be sacrificed'), and the organisation of seminars cannot be altered even slightly ('philosophy is all about the cut-and-thrust'). The philosophy journal *Analysis*, for example, held out against calls for anonymization for many years, and anonymity is still not the norm in science journals. This does not mean, however, that anonymization (of marking and reviewing procedures etc.) is an inherently difficult thing to achieve.

more than we currently do). This should be neither difficult to do nor interesting to say. But I want to say it with a number of caveats. We should be vigilant against that danger which besets all attempts at reform, and minor reforms in particular: the danger that these attempts, even or especially if they are successful, may come to serve as decoys, breeding complacency and protecting the status quo from meaningful challenge. We should not expect too much to come of these labours. We should also be wary of throwing too much of our time and energy into them: although not much time and energy should really be necessary, it is striking how much administrative work has already been generated – with much of the burden falling, as usual, upon women. In this way, women in philosophy are in danger of being saddled with a 'third shift' (cf. Hochschild 1989): on top of doing their academic jobs – which, for many women, already involves a large portion of 'invisible' and unrecognised work (e.g. pastoral or informal affective labour) – and then going home to undertake the bulk of traditionally female tasks such as cleaning, cooking and childcare, we may find ourselves sitting up long into the night filling in Athena SWAN Bronze Award application forms and drafting 'action plans'.[20]

In sum, my practical worry is a) that the measures proposed to combat implicit bias and stereotype threat are unlikely to have much positive effect, and b) that, if we make a fetish of those measures, encircle them in superfluous bureaucracy, and fail to supplement them with appropriate structural critique and corresponding action, they will also be counter-productive, distracting us from more urgent struggles – chief of which, I believe, is the need to resist the neoliberal forces currently reshaping the university[21] – and adding to the existing burdens borne by women in academia. Underlying this worry is a sense that the vocabulary of experimental psychology is an inadequate replacement for traditional political and social criticism, and that feminists are therefore in danger of being drawn into a position that is both theoretically and practically impoverished.

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[20] Sara Ahmed (Ahmed 2004) draws attention to a further danger that seems pertinent here: that 'admissions' of 'bad practice' can come to be counted as signs of 'good practice' (i.e. that the mere process of documenting and acknowledging problems such as racism, sexism, underrepresentation and sexual harassment is taken as evidence that these problems are being dealt with).

[21] The profile of 'the neoliberal university' varies according to time and place. In the UK at the time of writing, it means, among other things: a relatively new model – but one which is being very quickly normalized – of students as 'clients' or 'customers'; funding cuts, rising student fees and stagnating or diminishing workers' pay; and the rise of precarious and 'zero hour' contracts, for both academic and non-academic staff.

To see this, it helps to first outline what I mean by 'traditional political and social criticism' – although what I mean by it is probably just what readers would expect. I have in mind here the exposition, analysis and critique of the relations of power which structure society. For feminists, this must primarily include the partly hidden relations of power and domination that characterise the social reality of 'gender'. I also have in mind the analysis and critique of *ideas*. This latter task often involves tracing those ideas, and the hold they have in the society in question, back to relations of power and domination, of advantage and disadvantage – the project sometimes known as 'ideology-critique'. For feminists, the project is to unmask the 'ideology' of patriarchy.

How does the concept of implicit bias stand in relation to the set of traditional tasks and objects of enquiry just outlined?[22] To talk about implicit bias is not obviously to try to analyse society and its constitutive power relations. Of course, many would argue that implicit bias and stereotype threat are two of the 'micro-mechanisms' through which the oppression of women is maintained. But that does not mean that, in floating this hypothesis, they are thereby engaged in the analysis of society and relations of power – any more than we would say this of a geneticist who isolates and studies a gene, and then suggests that this can explain the fall of successive empires. To talk about implicit bias is also not to analyse or critique ideas, or systems of ideas: to detect an implicit bias is not to give any information as to what does and does not count as sexist; nor does it trace ideas to interests, or to the distribution of power in society.

Implicit bias is implicit bias: it names an 'implicit association' between two or more things. The question, then, is what significance implicit associations have, relative to the set of things that feminists characteristically care about. If we think of this set of things – systems of unequal power, domination, discriminatory and oppressive practices and the ideology that surrounds and legitimises them – as forming a cluster, then perhaps implicit bias may be seen as one element or node within it. It seems obvious enough that this set of things cannot be simply *reduced* to implicit bias. Propagating a 'rape myth',[23] for example, is not

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[22] For the remainder of this discussion, I'll consign stereotype threat to the background and concentrate on implicit bias.

[23] 'Rape myths' denote a set of beliefs and explanatory habits which effectively blame women for their subjection to sexual assault. For example, it is often suggested that a rape has occurred due to a woman's inebriation or choice of clothing, or that she 'really' wanted it (although she did not consent).

the same thing as harbouring or propagating an implicit bias – even granted that an implicit bias is likely to lurk in the more or less distant vicinity. Nor is there any obvious reason why we should treat this particular element as *primary*, in a causal or explanatory sense: implicit bias seems like something that would be likely to contribute to the underrepresentation of women, but so do a lot of other things belonging to the cluster – including relatively explicit sexism, and including the deep-seated interest that members of a dominant group invariably have in maintaining their dominance. Equally, implicit biases must surely be seen as effects as well as causes – effects, at least in part, of various other elements within the cluster we call 'sexism' or 'patriarchy'.

Notice that all this can be said even without questioning the quality (e.g. the replicability) of studies adduced in justification of the feminist focus on implicit bias. For the sake of argument, we may also accept that, contrary to one of the most common objections to implicit bias research, the associations detected by computer testing really do indicate a *prejudice*, as opposed to an innocent *awareness* of the existence of some negative stereotype.[24] Even with this concession, implicit bias can only be one element of the much larger object that feminists call 'patriarchy'. And if we want to understand and overcome the latter, it will not be adequate to think about it in terms of a series of cognitive biases in the heads of individuals; phenomena like sexism and racism must be understood as self-perpetuating social structures.[25]

So why the heavy emphasis on implicit bias? One factor, I suspect, is the allure of the thought that we can 'objectively' *measure* sexism. What we are really measuring, however,

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[24] The usual rejoinder to this objection cites a reported correlation between high IAT scores and 'discriminatory behaviour', which is thought to add plausibility to the inference from those scores to the conclusion that the subject 'endorses', in some sense, the association that he or she harbours. The existence of this correlation is disputed – a recent meta-study found that IATs were 'poor predictors of every criterion category other than brain activity, and [that] the IATs performed no better than simple explicit measures' (Oswald et al 2013). Even assuming a correlation, however, it's not clear that IAT scores are best treated as straightforwardly revelatory of sexist or other bias: e.g. suppose that not only those prone to 'discriminatory behaviour' but many others, too, have implicit biases which result in high IAT scores (perhaps they have these associations because they read or think a lot about misogyny, or because they have experienced a lot of sexism). In that case, using IAT scores as a measure of propensity to sexism or to 'discriminatory behaviour' will be a bit like using a thermometer to gauge UV levels: since the sun produces heat, there is some correlation; but it will be very imperfect, and while the information given by the thermometer might be better than nothing, it would be unwise for us to fixate on it too much in deciding when to apply the sun cream.

[25] See Haslanger (2015) for a fuller development of this point.

is not sexism or patriarchy, but (at most)[26] one element within it. A further factor is the idea that implicit bias offers us a practical way forward which a long history of more overtly 'political' argument and critique has so far failed to provide. I have already expressed my scepticism as to the practical promise of the approach based on research into implicit bias and stereotype threat. That approach, I want to add now, has a key feature which, according to its adherents, offers an advantage of practicality, but which may in fact be counter-productive from the point of view of feminist politics. That feature is an apparent freedom from what is perceived as inflammatory content, a freedom which promises to deliver us from confrontation.[27] To talk about implicit bias is not to talk about, and expose, what I've called the ideology of patriarchy. It is not to confront a colleague about why what they have said or done is sexist. Implicit biases, according to the dominant conception, are a bit like sexually transmitted infections (or 'STIs'): they are very common and nothing to be ashamed of; sufferers are only deserving of condemnation if they refuse to get themselves checked and to take the necessary steps to protect those around them. The question of where implicit biases come from is rarely, if ever, posed. Perhaps, as with sexually transmitted diseases, it is thought better not to enquire. The tacit assumption, I suspect, is that biases are most likely a legacy from bad old days past.[28] In that case, it may not matter much how they got there: the point, for feminists, is that they are perpetuating inequality *now*; and we can put a stop to that by removing or blocking them.

For those who believe, on the other hand, that sexism is more than a hangover, that it is something systematically produced and renewed by societies which oppress women (and in which men inevitably benefit, at least in a narrow sense, from this oppression), this 'block and remove' strategy may seem about as adequate as trying to bail out a leaking ship with a teaspoon (cf. Haslanger 2015). Moreover, an unfortunate side-effect of this framework can be to take the heat off perpetrators of casual sexism and to re-direct it onto those who dare

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[26] More likely, in my view, is that what is measured is something *loosely correlated* to sexism (cf. fn.28 above).

[27] The idea that non-confrontational approaches are more effective is also often justified by reference to the results of experiments in psychology. I will not discuss the relevant research (and the role of appeals to it) here, for reasons of space. I only note the stark difference between this approach to questions of practicality, on the one hand, and on the other hand, treatments of these questions issuing from those involved in social movements and in explicitly political criticism (one famous instance of the latter being Frederick Douglass's observation that 'Power concedes nothing without a demand' (Douglass 1857)).

[28] This would certainly be in keeping with my reconstructed narrative in Section I, where the continuing underrepresentation of women appears as a puzzle only thanks to a perception that Reason has by now all but clinched its embrace of egalitarianism.

question the wisdom of the 'War on Bias' and its preferred strategies. For while casual sexism is not the same thing as implicit bias, it is rarely fully *explicit* either; and insofar as the category of sexism-that-is-not-explicit has come to be slickly identified with notion of implicit bias, it is – we are repeatedly reassured – pervasive but blameless.[29] Anger is therefore inappropriate – except, of course, in the case of those who 'refuse treatment'. That includes not only the legions of reluctant or scornful men – who most often get away more or less scot free – but also those women who reject the role that it is most often assigned to them: organising the training courses, reading and propagating the literature, drawing up the applications and the action plans. Those, that is to say, who refuse to take on the third shift.

Conclusion

I've argued that prominent treatments of philosophy's 'woman problem' display two regrettable tendencies: an attachment to a politics of representation; and an equally limiting attachment to an analysis and programme of remedies based on research in experimental psychology. Neither tendency is wholly without merit. It can be useful to notice and think about patterns of representation. The concepts of implicit bias and stereotype threat, too, are almost certainly related to real and legitimate objects of feminist concern. But I have argued, in the first case, that we should avoid making a fetish of representation, especially insofar as this commits us to a top-down form of feminism; and that we would do better to focus our attention on the context and circumstances of contemporary academia, beginning from an analysis and critique of the worsening conditions faced by the majority of women (and men, for that matter) who work there. Second, against the psychological turn, I have argued that we should hold onto an understanding of sexism and patriarchy as structural phenomena far broader than implicit bias; that we should not be seduced by the illusory advantages of 'practicality' attaching to

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[29] For an exception, see Holroyd (2012). As someone persuaded of the indispensability of structural accounts of phenomena such as sexism and racism, I am actually sympathetic to the general point that these phenomena are *not* best analysed in terms of the blameworthy behaviour of individuals. I would object only at the point where the renunciation of individualistic blame-attribution shades into the idea that oppressive structures can be effectively resisted through winning the hearts and minds of those invested in keeping these same structures in place.

the psychologistic framework, and that we cannot afford to shy away from critique and confrontation. In short, I have argued that feminists cannot afford to dispense with politics.

What I've argued might still be accused of being unduly defeatist, or of promoting inaction. A gesture in the direction of critical social theory – 'structural' explanations, 'ideology-critique' and the like – is little consolation for feminists who want to see change, and to see it soon. I have not advocated inaction, however. I have not even argued against the adoption of the remedies most commonly proposed. I have only urged that, alongside the implementation of common-sense measures such as anonymization, we should unapologetically continue the characteristic feminist projects of the critique of patriarchal societies and their supporting ideologies, and that we should not allow ourselves to be side-tracked by the twin preoccupations with representation and with psychology.

The willing undertaking of some kind of 'third shift' is, I believe, an inevitable consequence of a commitment to a principle of feminist self-emancipation: if we do not want or expect to be liberated by men, then women must be the agents of their own liberation – and that means work. But it is up to us to decide what kind of work the shift should entail. And if I have my way, feminist revolution will not involve filling in forms.

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