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Philosophical virtues

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Abstract
It has been suggested that philosophers should adopt a methodology largely inspired by mathematics and that the "mathematical" virtues of rigor, clarity, and precision are also fundamental philosophical virtues. In reply, this paper argues that some excellent philosophy lacks these virtues and that too much emphasis on the mathematical virtues excludes potentially valuable forms of philosophical discourse and makes the profession less diverse than it should be. Unduly restrictive conceptions of philosophical argumentation should be avoided. On a contributory conception, philosophy should try to make a positive contribution to human emancipation where possible. The paper argues that it is possible and desirable for epistemology to contribute in this way and that the mathematical virtues are less significant in this context than the emancipatory virtues of what one might call "liberation philosophy." These include irony, reflectiveness, imagination, contrarianism, and worldliness.

KEYWORDS
diversity, emancipation, imagination, irony, liberation philosophy, mathematical, naturalized epistemology, rigor, virtues

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In the Aristotelian tradition, virtues are excellences. They are personal qualities that make one an excellent person.[1] By analogy, *philosophical* virtues can be thought of as personal or intellectual qualities that make one an excellent philosopher. Since philosophical excellence can take several different forms, there are potentially different and conflicting conceptions of philosophical virtue, just as there are potentially different and conflicting conceptions of an "excellent person." For example, analytical philosophers might regard it as uncontentious that rigor and

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[1]See Battaly 2015 for a defense of this conception of a virtue.

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precision are fundamental philosophical virtues, but there are other conceptions of philosophy on which these are not virtues at all, at least if virtues are *necessary* for excellence. Arguably, there is excellent philosophy that is neither rigorous nor precise.

To talk about excellent *philosophy* that is neither rigorous nor precise is to imply that the philosophical virtues are virtues not just of philosophers but also of works in philosophy. In the jargon of the United Kingdom's Research Excellence Framework (REF), such works are "outputs."[2] One might therefore distinguish *personal* virtues of philosophers from *output* virtues, virtues of works in philosophy. The REF regards rigor, originality, and significance as output virtues, since these are taken to be the attributes of "world leading" research. To this list one might add two virtues identified by Timothy Williamson: clarity and precision.[3] Philosophers and their outputs can both be clear or precise. One might also distinguish highly relational from relatively non-relational virtues. To describe an output as original or significant is, implicitly, to compare it with other outputs. Whether an output is original, for example, depends on whether others have previously made the same point. In contrast, to describe an output as clear is not directly to compare it with other outputs, though an output that is clear to one reader might be unclear to another.

According to Williamson, philosophers should adopt a methodology largely inspired by mathematics: "[P]hilosophy can never be reduced to mathematics. But we can often produce mathematical models of fragments of philosophy and, when we can, we should" (2006, 186). Rigor matters because "[t]o reach philosophical conclusions, one must reason, usually in areas where it is very hard to distinguish valid from invalid reasoning. To make that distinction reliably, one must often attend carefully to the semantic form of the premises, the conclusion and the intermediate steps. That requires implicit semantic beliefs about the crucial words and constructions" (2006, 181–82). This not only explains why rigor matters but also what Williamson thinks rigor is: the rigor he regards as a philosophical virtue is mathematical rigor. Precision matters because "to be precise is to make it as easy as possible for others to prove one wrong" (2006, 185). Clarity is a virtue because where the level of obscurity is high, "wishful thinking may be more powerful than the ability to distinguish good arguments from bad" (2006, 184). Taken together, clarity, rigor, and precision might be described as *mathematical virtues*.

From this perspective, it might be difficult to accept that there is excellent philosophy that lacks such virtues. Yet it is easy to think of examples. Kant's Transcendental Deduction is staggeringly obscure and imprecise. It is not rigorous in Williamson's sense but is still excellent philosophy.[4] A natural reaction to this would be to allow that philosophical virtue is not monolithic and that there are many ways for a philosophical output to be excellent. Williamson identifies one set of philosophical virtues, but there are others. What the Deduction lacks in clarity, precision, and rigor it more than makes up for in its depth, originality, significance, insight, and imagination. It might even be suggested that Kant's obscurity is partly explained by his philosophical radicalism, by the extent to which he was a philosophical revolutionary.[5] It is not easy to be clear when one is trying to rewrite the rules of the game.

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[2]For more on this, and the workings of the Research Excellence Framework, see the *REF 2021 Panel Criteria and Working Methods* (Panel criteria and working methods (2019/02) - REF 2021).

[3]See Williamson 2006. Williamson also identifies patience as a philosophical virtue, but only philosophers, rather than their outputs, can be patient in a literal sense.

[4]Cassam 1987 is an account of the Transcendental Deduction that brings out its lack of rigor at key points. Williamson is scathing about the idea that lack of rigor is the price of depth: "No doubt, if we aim to be rigorous, we cannot expect to sound like Heraclitus, or even Kant: we have to sacrifice the stereotype of depth. Still, it is rigor, not its absence, that prevents one from sliding over the deepest difficulties, in an agonized rhetoric of profundity" (2006, 185).

[5]According to Herbert James Paton, the main explanation of Kant's obscurity "lies in the fact that the *Kritik* is opening up a world of altogether new ideas. . . . Kant had a new vision of reality, and in such a vision there must always be difficulty for those to whom it is imparted, and an element of struggle for the seer himself" (1936, 47–48).

More recently, attempts have been made to reorient philosophy in other ways that call into question the importance of the mathematical virtues and any suggestion that philosophical virtue is monolithic. Some feminist philosophers have noted how, as Elena Ruíz puts it, narrow conceptions of philosophical rigor "function as gatekeepers to disciplinary legitimacy" (2020, 698) in academic philosophy. If rigor is an essential virtue, then work that lacks it is unlikely to be published. Arguably, and for reasons that need spelling out, this kind of gatekeeping makes philosophy more exclusionary and less diverse than it ought to be. On this account, if we want to understand why, as Kristie Dotson claims, professional philosophy provides "poor conditions for diverse peoples and perspectives" (2012, 5), then this is the place to start.

There is also a point here about the function of philosophy and what we can learn about the philosophical virtues from reflection on what philosophy is for. One view is that philosophy simply exists to satisfy the intellectual curiosity of philosophers. From this standpoint, it does not matter that "most philosophical questions lack direct practical applications" (Williamson 2011, 537). On a *contributory* conception, philosophy should try, where possible, to make what Louise Antony describes as a "positive contribution to the construction of a more just, humane, and nurturing world than the one we currently inhabit" (2003, 145).[6] This is clearly easier for some branches of philosophy than others.[7] The main, though not exclusive, focus below is on the extent to which *epistemology* can and should contribute to human emancipation and on the qualities of philosophers and their philosophical outputs that enable them to make such a contribution. These might include the mathematical virtues, but there are also many examples of excellent emancipatory philosophy that lacks the mathematical virtues or whose excellence is not accounted for by them. In these cases, the relevant philosophical virtues are nonmathematical *emancipatory virtues*. It remains to be seen what these might be.

Before getting to that, there are several other issues to consider. The first challenge, which is taken up in section 2, is to consider whether philosophy *can* be emancipatory in the way that the contributory conception thinks that it should be. If philosophy in general and epistemology in particular cannot contribute to the construction of a more just, humane, and nurturing world, or if it is not their job to do so, then the search for the virtues of excellent emancipatory philosophy is futile. Section 3 highlights the extent to which emancipatory excellence can be detached from the mathematical virtues. It argues, further, that an excessive emphasis on the mathematical virtues stultifies philosophy by closing the door to valuable forms of philosophical discourse and making the profession less diverse than it should be. The mathematical virtues should not be allowed to act as gatekeepers to disciplinary legitimacy or to limit types of philosophical theorizing and innovation that are essential for the health of the subject. Finally, section 4 identifies several of the emancipatory virtues that philosophers who have an interest in the emancipatory project should cultivate. Emancipation needs to be philosophical as well as political. It includes emancipation from some of the norms of professional philosophy, especially analytic philosophy, and from its master narrative.

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The idea that philosophy can and should contribute to human emancipation will be familiar to philosophers who recall Marx's famous aphorism in his "Theses on Feuerbach": "[T]he philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it" (1962, 405) Analytic philosophers might find this idea more surprising, but Antony argues that there is an approach to epistemology in particular that promises "enormous aid and comfort" to feminist

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[6]What I am calling a "contributory" conception of philosophy is also at the heart of Kitcher 2011 and Dotson 2012, to both of which I am indebted.

[7]It would plainly be unreasonable to expect the philosophy of physics or mathematics to be emancipatory.

and other philosophers who wish to "expose and dismantle the oppressive intellectual ideology of a patriarchal, racist, class-stratified society" (2003, 112). The approach which Antony has in mind, and which she believes lies squarely within the analytic tradition, is Quine's naturalized epistemology, understood as "the view that the study of knowledge should be treated as an empirical investigation of knowers" (2003, 113).[8]

An epistemology that is truly capable of exposing and dismantling the ideology of a patriarchal, racist, class-stratified society would have a reasonable claim to be regarded as emancipatory. *Exposing* an oppressive ideology is not the same as *dismantling* it, but oppressive ideologies must be understood before they can be dismantled or undermined. It also remains to be seen how dismantling an intellectual *ideology* helps with the construction of a more just and humane society. A natural thought, however, is that if the ideology of a patriarchal, racist, class-stratified society is one that seeks to rationalize its oppressive or unjust social arrangements, then exposing and undermining such an ideology is a way of undermining these arrangements and thereby contributing, albeit indirectly, to social change.

What does this have to do with naturalized epistemology? A naturalized epistemology investigates the mechanisms that underpin the production and retention of knowledge or beliefs. As Hilary Kornblith notes, "[T]he mechanisms of belief production and retention extend far beyond the perceptual and inferential equipment located in individual heads, and include social structures and institutions that are equally appropriate objects of investigation" (2014, 92). In other words, a naturalized epistemology must also be a socialized epistemology. Social factors play a role in determining both our concepts and our knowledge. What individuals know and do not know, and the concepts they have and the concepts they lack, are partly a function of their social location. The social locations of cognitive agents matter for epistemology because they confer epistemological advantages and disadvantages. Thus, a naturalized epistemology should offer structural as well as psychological explanations of knowledge and ignorance.

An example of a structural explanation of ignorance is Charles Mills's account of what he calls "white ignorance." The idea of white ignorance is that of "an ignorance, a non-knowing, that is not contingent, but in which race—white racism and/or domination and their ramifications—plays a crucial causal role" (2007, 20). An example is the widespread ignorance in Europe regarding the worst horrors of colonialism, such as the extermination of ten million Africans in the Belgian Congo in the late nineteenth century.[9] The racialized causality that Mills invokes to explain ignorance about such matters includes "both straightforward racist motivation and more impersonal social-structural causation" (21). White ignorance is not confined to white people and is "not the only kind of privileged, group-based ignorance" (22). Male ignorance "could be analyzed similarly and clearly has a far more ancient history" (22).

Like Antony, Mills sees the need for knowers to be conceived of as socially located as flowing from Quine's naturalized epistemology. It is in this sense that "whatever Quine's own sympathies (or lack thereof), his work . . . opened Pandora's box" (2007, 14).[10] Once its various implications are drawn out, naturalized epistemology can easily be seen to have radical import, both politically and philosophically. White ignorance is integral to the cognitive architecture of white supremacy. Anything that exposes and challenges white ignorance also exposes and challenges white supremacy. A philosophy that does that can reasonably claim to be politically radical. Its philosophical radicalism, Mills continues, consists in the way that, unlike mainstream epistemology, a socialized naturalized epistemology is not "blithely indifferent to the possible cognitive consequences of class, racial, or gender situatedness" (Mills 2007, 13). In traditional "S knows that *p*" epistemologies, with their peculiar obsession with skepticism and perceptual illusions,

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[8]The classic paper on why epistemology can and should be naturalized is Quine 1994.

[9]See Hochschild 1999 for a vivid account of this shameful episode. Despite Hochschild's efforts, this aspect of Europe's colonial history is still not well known.

[10]Quine himself was politically conservative.

knowers are fungible; one S is as good as any other for the purposes of philosophical analysis.[11] In a socialized epistemology, in contrast, subjects are interchangeable only across what Lorraine Code describes as a "narrow range of implicit group membership" (1993, 23).

Questions can of course be raised about each of these claims. For example, one might ask whether the transition from a naturalized to a socialized to a radicalized epistemology is a necessary transition or simply one way of developing Quine's original insight. Questions can also be raised about the suggestion that a willingness to provide socio-structural explanations of knowledge and ignorance calls for a radical transformation of mainstream epistemology. Mills and Code think that it does, but Antony and Kornblith dispute this.[12] There is much to be said about this issue, but not here. For present purposes, the important question is whether enough has been said to justify the hope that philosophy, and even analytic philosophy, can be emancipatory. What if it is an illusion that radical philosophers can change the world, or make any practical difference to curing injustice, inequality, or other social ills?

Consider the following worry. By and large, philosophers talk to each other. Who reads philosophical books and journal articles other than other professional philosophers? Even if one ignores the vast number of philosophical outputs that have no conceivable practical upshot, one might wonder how the nonphilosophical, nonacademic world is supposed to be improved by learned discussions of "structural group-based miscognition" (Mills 2007, 13). Is there any evidence that Mills's philosophically impressive work on white ignorance has made a difference to levels of white ignorance or dismantled the ideology of white supremacy? It was suggested above that exposing and undermining an oppressive intellectual ideology can make a positive contribution to human emancipation, but is this just wishful thinking?

These questions deserve answers, but there can be no *general* concern about the capacity of ideas, including philosophical ideas, to have "impact."[13] There are countless examples of philosophical ideas changing the lives of human beings, for better or worse. Marx is an example of a philosopher whose work did precisely what he thought philosophers should do: change the world. He demonstrated that ideas matter. Sometimes their influence is slow and indirect. By gradually permeating our intellectual culture, they begin to shape our thinking and thereby lead to changes in the way we live. Philosophical ideas affect the conduct of people who have never heard of them and could not understand their philosophical formulations. There is also a more direct way for philosophical ideas to be impactful. They can make a difference to the world by influencing political leaders. For example, Margaret Thatcher was influenced by Friedrich Hayek's *Road to Serfdom* (2007; first published in 1944), which she read at university. For better or worse, Hayek's ideas shaped her policies as prime minister.[14]

The political influence of naturalized epistemologists is less obvious than that of right-wing ideologues like Hayek but still discernible. It is true that the idea of white ignorance has not penetrated the intellectual culture of most Western societies. White ignorance, however, is one manifestation of white privilege, and the idea of white privilege is widely known and discussed. Perhaps philosophy, along with other academic disciplines, can take some credit for this, and for practical measures to counteract various biases from which white people benefit. Bias is another topic that is better understood today than it was fifty years ago. As with the idea of white privilege, philosophers can take some credit for this. Indeed, coming to grips with the role of various cognitive biases in belief acquisition is just the kind of thing one would expect naturalistic episte-

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[11]See Code 1993 for a detailed critique of what she calls "S knows that *p*" epistemologies. It is not obvious that S-knows-that-*p* epistemologies *cannot* accommodate Code's insights about the importance of the social location of the knower. What cannot be disputed is that mainstream epistemology has for the most part been indifferent to such considerations. See Mills 2007, 13.

[12]See Code 1993 and Mills 2007 on one side and Antony 2003 and Kornblith 2014 on the other.

[13]I am using "impact" here is the sense of the Research Excellence Framework, where it refers to the nonacademic impact of academic research.

[14]Hayek's impact on Thatcher is described here: Thatcher, Hayek & Friedman | Margaret Thatcher Foundation.

mologists to do, and it is no coincidence that bias is the focus of Antony's account of the radical import of naturalized epistemology.[15]

The political impact of social epistemology is also evident in other ways. Consider the extent to which the ideas of epistemic injustice and gaslighting have become familiar outside academia. In her seminal book on the subject, Miranda Fricker (2007) defines epistemic injustice as a wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower. There is now an extensive literature on the impact of epistemic injustice on social work and health care, and it is reasonable to suppose that heightened sensitivity outside philosophy to a phenomenon first described and theorized by a social epistemologist has had at least *some* impact on social work and health care practice. As for gaslighting, philosophers cannot claim to have come up with this idea, but they can claim to have improved our understanding of what the *OED* helpfully defines as "the action or process of manipulating a person by psychological means into questioning his or her own sanity." What radical social epistemologists have added to this characterization of gaslighting in psychological terms is an understanding of it as a "structural phenomenon" that "produces asymmetric harms for different populations" (Ruíz 2020, 688). Indeed, white ignorance can be seen as a structural gaslighting mechanism.

For many victims of gaslighting, acquiring the *concept* of gaslighting can make a major difference to their lives. It is harder to gaslight a person who understands what gaslighting is and able to work out that they are being gaslighted. This is a case in which self-understanding is itself liberating. In Fricker's terminology, people who lack the conceptual resources to make sense of their experiences are *hermeneutically marginalized* (2007, chap. 7). Disadvantaged groups that are hermeneutically marginalized are victims of hermeneutical injustice. Philosophy in the form of social epistemology can combat hermeneutical injustice by offering a better understanding of the mechanics of gaslighting. Even if the primary audience for philosophical accounts of gaslighting is other philosophers, philosophical and psychological thinking about gaslighting has seeped into public discourse to the extent that talk of gaslighting is now part of popular culture.

In a fuller account of how epistemology can be emancipatory one would need to provide a theory of change. In social and human services, a theory of change is "in essence no more than a planned route to outcomes" (Ghate 2018, 3). It specifies pathways from an intervention to an intended result. In philosophy, it is less obvious that social change is the *intended* outcome of the efforts of social epistemologists, as distinct from a byproduct. Still, if there is a link between cause and effect, between philosophical theorizing and social change, then it ought to be possible to reconstruct the causal pathway. In some cases, such as the link between Hayek's philosophy and Thatcher's policies, no great ingenuity is required. In other cases, matters are much murkier, and talk of the impact of philosophical thinking on intellectual culture needs to be made more precise. All that matters for present purposes, however, is that talk of the potential radical import of social epistemology and of philosophy contributing to the construction of a more just, humane, and nurturing world than the one we currently inhabit is not just pie in the sky. It is possible in theory and in practice for philosophy to make such a contribution, just as the contributory conception of philosophy requires.

The only remaining issue is whether it is the business of philosophy and philosophers to do such a thing. One can imagine a certain type of purist who says that philosophy has its own agenda and that while it should not be opposed to doing what Antony says it should do, it should not go out of its way to be emancipatory. If, however, philosophers *can* make a positive contribution of the sort that Antony envisages, it is difficult to see why they should not actually do so where possible. The claim is not that *every* philosopher should work with an eye to the social benefits of their research but that at least *some* philosophers should concern themselves

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[15]Thanks to Hilary Kornblith for helping me to see this.

with such matters. And then we can set about identifying the specific virtues that enable socially conscious philosophers to do their emancipatory work. This would therefore be a good point to take a close look at the role, if any, of the mathematical virtues in relation to the emancipatory project of philosophy.

3

Imagine reading Mills with the thought that, wherever possible, we should produce mathematical models of fragments of his philosophy.[16] Or reading someone like Frantz Fanon with the idea that it is difficult to tell whether his reasoning is valid or invalid and that to make that distinction, one must attend carefully to the semantic form of his premises, his conclusion, and the intermediate steps. One question about the considerations put forward by such philosophers is whether they are *arguments*. If not, what are they? If an argument is something with premises and a conclusion, there is plenty of excellent philosophy that does not consist of arguments in this sense.[17] There is philosophy that deepens our understanding of a puzzling phenomenon, that makes surprising connections between different concepts or topics, or that paints a new and illuminating picture of something familiar. Instead of trying to force all such philosophical enterprises into an argumentative straitjacket, one should simply accept that not all philosophy belongs to what P. F. Strawson describes as "the species *strictly argumentative* or *systematic-analytical*" (1974, 45).[18]

To the extent that a philosopher like Mills paints a compelling picture of something like white ignorance, it is not because he produces a rigorous argument from first principles. Instead he describes something that his readers—most of them, at any rate—will easily recognize as a genuine phenomenon, gives a plausible characterization of this phenomenon, relates it to other such phenomena (such as male ignorance), and offers an explanation of both the (structural) causes of white ignorance and its epistemological consequences. He explores the impact of white ignorance and other varieties of structural group-based miscognition on perception, conception, and other cognitive processes. He gives historical examples of white ignorance and uses the concept of white ignorance to illuminate literary texts. He ends with a call to action, an account of what needs to be done to achieve "an enlightenment that is genuinely multiracial" (2007, 35).

To ask whether Mills's conclusions follow logically from his premises is to ask the wrong question. A picture, which is what Mills paints, is not the conclusion of an inference and is neither rigorous nor unrigorous. A more pertinent question is whether his account rings true. This is partly a question of whether things are as Mills represents them as being and whether it is plausible that white ignorance has the causes and effects that he posits. Although Mills's paper is not devoid of theory, it is not just an exercise in abstract theorizing. It makes a contribution to tackling the problem of white ignorance by conceptualizing it, and there is no reason to deny that his contribution is philosophical. Philip Kitcher points out that philosophers "are people whose broad engagement with the condition of their age enables them to facilitate individual reflection and social conversation" (2011, 254). Mills not only facilitates individual reflection and social conversation but also *illuminates* an aspect of the condition of our age. Illumination is what we expect from the best work in philosophy, and illumination is what Mills provides, regardless of

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[16]To be fair to Williamson, he only says that we can *often* produce mathematical models of fragments of philosophy and that we should do so when we can. He is not, at least officially, an enemy of methodological diversity in philosophy (see 2006, 182). The general tenor of his discussion, however, is hostile to philosophy that lacks rigor as he understands it.

[17]For a useful account of "arguments" in this sense, see Dutilh Novaes 2021.

[18]In the same passage, Strawson describes his own paper (on imagination and perception) as "*loosely ruminative* and *comparative-historical*" (1974, 45).

whether his account of white ignorance can plausibly be reconstructed to look like what a mathematically minded philosopher would call an "argument."

In response, it might be argued that arguments can be inductive and abductive as well as deductive. To talk about the various causes and effects of white ignorance is to imply that white ignorance is an explanatory notion whose theoretical value is a function of its explanatory power. In effect, Mills's justification for positing white ignorance is an example of inference to the best explanation: positing white ignorance best explains patterns of ignorance in conditions of white supremacy. Abductive inferences vary in cogency, and the question for any serious reader of Mills is not whether his argument is valid but whether it is cogent or rigorous in the way that compelling abductive arguments are cogent and rigorous. On this interpretation, the fact that Mills paints a convincing picture of white ignorance reflects the merits of his abductive argument. The picture is convincing because the argument is compelling.

Even if Mills's picture could be represented as the conclusion of an inference, however, this does not support the idea that philosophers generally should adopt a methodology inspired by mathematics. This is certainly not the methodology of other notable emancipatory philosophers, such as Fanon. Consider this passage from *Black Skin, White Masks*: "There is in fact a 'being for other,' as described by Hegel, but any ontology is impossible in a colonized and acculturated society. Apparently, those who have written on the subject have not taken this sufficiently into consideration. In the weltanschaaung of a colonized people, there is an impurity or flaw that prohibits any ontological explanation. . . . Ontology does not allow us to understand the being of the black man, since it ignores the lived experience" (2021, 89–90). Here Fanon provides an experiential or phenomenological argument for a philosophical thesis ("ontology does not allow us to understand the being of the black man") rather than an inferential justification. Even on the doubtful assumption that Fanon's argument can be viewed as implicitly abductive, there is no rationale for insisting on such a reading. There is no single recipe for providing philosophical illumination.

Fanon describes his analysis as psychological, and the issues with which he engages, such as the psychological impact of colonialism, are very different from those that preoccupy analytic philosophers. The illumination his work offers, however, is philosophical as well as psychological, political, and sociological. Philosophy is the activity of reflecting in a general way on problems that "emerge from situations in which people—many people, not just an elite class—find themselves" (Kitcher 2011, 250). There is no reason to suppose either that there is one uniquely correct way of engaging in this type of reflection or that there is a sharp distinction between philosophical reflection and the types of reflection that are common in other fields. Williamson reflects in one way on one set of problems, while Fanon reflects in a different way on a different set of problems. If philosophical problems emerge from the situations in which people find themselves, then the variety of philosophical problems and questions reflects the fact that the situations in which people find themselves are so different. For subaltern social groups engaged in a daily struggle with racism or colonialism, it is hardly surprising that questions of race and subjugation are the focus of their philosophical reflection.[19] For other communities, other questions will be more pressing. That is why philosophy is not monolithic, in terms either of its methodology or of its subject matter.

At the opposite end of the philosophical spectrum from Fanon and Mills is the type of philosopher who spends time and mental energy trying to figure out, for example, whether people are events or whether Jaffa Cakes are cakes or biscuits.[20] Williamson asks, "What is wrong with simply wanting to know whether people are events?" (2011, 537). He does concede, however, that

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[19]The phrase "subaltern social groups" is from Gramsci 2021, where it refers to subordinate or subordinated social groups. It is hard for members of such groups to have a voice in the world of professional philosophy, especially analytic philosophy. This is one sense in which the subaltern cannot speak.

[20]See, for example: Jaffa Cakes (timcrane.com).

"in any discipline, some theoretical questions are not worth asking" (537). In that case, why is the question whether people are events worth asking? What is the community for which reflection on this question could be a worthwhile exercise? The only relevant community is that of professional philosophers. Outside this community, people do not worry about whether they are events.

This points to a distinction between internally and externally generated questions. Internally generated questions are generated by academic philosophy or academic philosophers working on a specific issue. Externally generated questions are generated by the situations in which people find themselves or by other disciplines. Questions about the meaning of life or freedom of will are partly externally generated, since wondering about such matters is part of the human condition. The questions addressed by Fanon are externally generated in a stronger sense. They are generated by the situation in which specific communities—for example, the colonized or the racially oppressed—find themselves. For people facing discrimination or oppression daily, the idea that it is worth spending time figuring out whether people are events will seem bizarre. Only the privileged have the luxury of thinking about such matters.

This raises an important question about the conception of a "contribution" that figures in the contributory conception of philosophy. Just as philosophy is not monolithic in terms of its methodology, there are many ways for philosophy to "make a contribution." There is the kind of philosophy that contributes to human emancipation but there is also the kind of philosophy that contributes to answering internally generated philosophical questions. Even if the questions are only of interest to a small group of professional philosophers, it is still possible to contribute to a branch of philosophy by providing a clear, rigorous, and precise answer to them. The *significance* of such a contribution, however, is not independent of the significance of the question. A question that is significant in one context might not be so in another, and even the notion of a "context" is not straightforward. The philosophical context of a question is one thing, while its political context is another. The emancipatory ideal should be to make a significant contribution to answering questions with significance for nonphilosophers as well as for professional philosophers.

On a contributory conception of philosophy, it is easy to see why an excessive emphasis on the mathematical virtues closes the door to valuable forms of philosophical discourse and makes the profession less diverse than it should be. The types of philosophical discourse that are marginalized by demands for clarity, precision, and rigor are ones that make a significant contribution despite lacking these virtues or having them only to a limited extent. If the notion of a contribution is understood as suggested here, there is no clear *a priori* or empirical basis for supposing that only philosophers who are rigorous, clear, or precise are capable of making a significant contribution. No doubt there are areas of philosophy, such as philosophical logic and the philosophy of mathematics, to which a philosopher without all three mathematical virtues is *unlikely* to make a significant contribution. There is, however, a broader conception of what counts as a significant contribution on which many philosophers who lack one or more of the mathematical virtues have made, and continue to make, highly significant contributions. Kant is one example, Fanon another. To argue about whether they, or their outputs, display the mathematical virtues is to miss the point that the huge significance of their contributions has little to do with whether they are, or are not, clear, rigorous, or precise.

What about the impact of fetishizing the mathematical virtues on philosophy's ability to provide attractive working conditions for diverse practitioners as well as diverse approaches? Diverse practitioners of philosophy are, writes Dotson, "notoriously under-represented populations within western, academic philosophy" (2012, 5). Why is professional philosophy "simply not an attractive setting for many diverse practitioners"? (6). The answer is not that diverse practitioners are less likely to have the mathematical virtues than anyone else. A better answer is suggested by Kitcher's insight: to the extent that philosophical problems emerge from situations in which people find themselves, diverse practitioners may find that the problems that dominate

professional philosophy are not ones that strike them either as the most pressing or as the most interesting.

This is just another way of saying that many diverse practitioners of philosophy may not see the concerns of professional philosophy as ones that resonate with their lived experience or that emerge from the situations in which *they* find themselves. A standard response to the question why anyone should care about some of the highly technical and abstruse issues that dominate the world of professional philosophy is that some questions are just interesting for their own sake, regardless of whether they have any practical application. Even if this is right, however, there is still a question of priorities, and whether philosophy has got its priorities right. To the extent that the priorities of much professional philosophy are essentially those of people who do not face the daily challenges of subaltern social groups, it is not surprising if the latter have difficulty seeing the world of professional philosophy as having much to do with them.

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None of this is to say that the mathematical virtues are not virtues or to deny that outputs that lack these virtues might have been improved by greater clarity, rigor, or precision. Which reader of Kant has not been frustrated by his obscurity and wished that he had expressed himself more clearly in certain key texts? If, however, one is serious about the emancipatory potential of philosophy and the range of different ways in which philosophy can make a contribution, then it is important to cultivate certain other virtues. These alternative virtues make it easier for diverse and nondiverse practitioners to liberate themselves from the restrictive norms and narratives of professional philosophy as it is practiced in most Western countries. By doing that, these virtues make it easier for philosophers who have them to widen the range of their contributions, including their contributions to human emancipation. They are, in two senses, emancipatory: they facilitate *philosophical* emancipation, that is, emancipation from unduly narrow, restrictive conceptions of philosophy, and encourage philosophers to contribute to *political* emancipation. They are, in sum, some of the virtues of what might be called *liberation philosophy*.

Virtues generally are corrective, with "each one standing at a point at which there is some temptation to be resisted or some deficiency of motivation to be made good" (Foot 1978, 8). Among the philosophical temptations to be resisted is the temptation to suppose that the way that philosophy is done at a particular time or in a particular tradition is the only proper way and that a person who rejects the dominant conception of the appropriate concerns and methods of professional philosophy cannot be philosophically serious. It is far too easy for professional philosophers, especially those employed by elite universities, to suppose that what counts as good or worthwhile philosophy is the kind of philosophy that they do, and that other approaches to the subject are marginal or frivolous. An antidote to this way of thinking is a form of what Richard Rorty calls "irony."

An "ironist" in Rorty's sense is "the sort of person who faces up to the contingency of his or her own most central beliefs and desires—someone sufficiently historicist and nominalist to have abandoned the idea that those central beliefs and desires refer back to something beyond the reach of time and chance" (1989, 15). By analogy, a *philosophical* ironist is someone who faces up to the contingency of prevailing conceptions of what counts as philosophy or as good philosophy. One way to think about irony in this sense is to turn to the idea of a *meta*narrative. In its most general sense, a narrative is a story that renders events intelligible. A philosophical metanarrative, which might also be described as a *philosophical ideology*, is a story about what philosophy is and what it is for that attempts to render intelligible its characteristic concerns and preoccupations. A metanarrative sets the agenda for the field, prescribes the appropriate methodology for tackling the issues on the agenda, and stipulates what practitioners can and cannot take for granted in their inquiries. When a specific metanarrative dominates philosophy in a particular

tradition, region, or institution, it is the *master* metanarrative for that tradition, region, or institution. Aspiring practitioners, such as graduate students, are well advised to absorb the prevailing master narrative; they may find professional employment hard to attain if they fail to do so.

In these terms, Williamson's homilies about what excellence in philosophy consists in is a philosophical metanarrative. It can be read as giving expression to the master narrative of a particular philosophical tradition. Philosophical ironists are unimpressed by such homilies. As well as pointing to the contingency of metanarratives, they have a counternarrative that challenges the metaphysical and epistemological preoccupations of mainstream philosophy by questioning their significance. Liberation philosophy has a different set of preoccupations, but these are contingent too. There would be no need for philosophy to be emancipatory in a society that is emancipated. On this account, philosophical irony is a philosophical virtue because it corrects the complacent narratives of currently dominant ways of doing philosophy. In response to those who "take the paradigm of philosophy to be logical argument" (Rorty 1989, 77), the ironist insists that this is *a* paradigm, not *the* paradigm. There is no such thing as *the* paradigm.

Irony is related to two more emancipatory virtues: reflectiveness and imagination. The reflectiveness that underpins philosophical emancipation is the reflectiveness required to take a step back and see that it is not necessary for philosophers to proceed in the way that they do. The ironist sees other ways of doing philosophy and responds to established ways of doing things by pointing out that things do not *have* to be the way they are. This takes imagination. The ultimate goal of philosophy should be to tackle *worthwhile* questions using appropriate philosophical methods, but what counts as a worthwhile question or an appropriate method is not, or should not be, taken as given or immune to revision.

The philosophical ironist is a contrarian, and contrarianism is another key emancipatory virtue. The contrarian has the intellectual courage and bloody-mindedness to question the philosophical status quo. The most important emancipatory virtue, however, is *worldliness*. To have this philosophical virtue is to see philosophy or philosophizing as natural human activity that is embedded in a wider social and political context by which the discipline is bound to be influenced and with which it ought to engage. The worldly philosopher does not regard the idea that philosophy should try to have an impact outside academia as pernicious or unfair. To be a worldly philosopher is to be uncomfortable with the fact, if it is a fact, that most philosophical questions lack practical applications. The worldly philosopher is exercised by the need for the discipline to contribute and sees genuine a contribution to human emancipation as the finest contribution that philosophy can make.

Irony, reflectiveness, imagination, contrarianism, and worldliness are easy to detect in the work of emancipatory philosophers. Are they also virtues that any aspiring professional philosophers should try to cultivate? The virtues of a given profession are those personal qualities that enable its members to fulfill their professional role, achieve their professional goals, and respond effectively to their professional challenges.[21] Once emancipatory philosophers are thought of as professionals, there is the possibility of a bifurcation between their virtues qua philosophers who want to make a positive contribution to the construction of a more just world and their virtues qua professionals, that is, their professional virtues. Many of the goals and challenges of professional philosophers flow from their professional status rather than their status as philosophers. Examples include promotion, publication, and being a good teacher and colleague. Personal attributes like contrarianism and irony are emancipatory virtues, but their subversiveness may be bad for one's career. If, as is far from inconceivable, such virtues are obstacles to promotion or publication in "top" journals, then they would have to be described as professional vices despite being philosophical virtues. The tension between what it takes for philosophers to succeed in

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[21]For an exposition and defense of this conception of a professional virtue, see the following: What is a Professional Virtue | Medical Virtues.

narrow professional terms and what it takes for them to succeed as liberation philosophers can be destabilizing for philosophers who seek both kinds of success.

The cure is for the profession to develop in a way that does not incentivize philosophers always to concentrate on answering internally generated philosophical questions at the expense of contributing to the well-being of their fellow citizens. In the United Kingdom, the introduction of an "impact" component in the Research Excellence Framework altered the incentive structures within the profession. Impact is defined as "an effect on, or change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia."[22] Departments of philosophy in the United Kingdom did not welcome the requirement for them to demonstrate the nonacademic impact of their research, but this requirement has compelled them to broaden their conception of a "contribution" in a way that makes them more hospitable to philosophers with emancipatory ambitions. The Research Excellence Framework is not concerned with emancipation per se; however, to make a positive contribution to the construction of a more just and humane society is a type of impact. It is a welcome development if "contributing" in this sense becomes a marker of *professional* success.

To repeat what was said above, the point of these reflections is not to suggest that every philosopher should be a liberation philosopher. It is important not to be reductive about these things and to acknowledge that some philosophers will always be exercised by questions that lack any practical application. They should be free to pursue their theoretical interests, given that at least some of their colleagues have broader interests. It remains the case, however, that there is marked difference in status between theoretical and applied philosophy. The prestige of the former far outstrips that of the latter, with applied philosophers continuing to be viewed as the poor relations of the superstars of theoretical philosophy. So long as the most senior and most influential positions in the professional discipline are occupied almost exclusively by theoretical philosophers whose work makes little or no contribution to emancipatory projects, professional philosophy is not yet emancipated. If the point of philosophy is to change the world rather than interpret it, it is philosophy itself that needs changing.

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