

# Power, privilege, and obverse apprenticeship

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## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Feminist theorists have made valuable efforts to open up new lines of inquiry into the disadvantage suffered by women in philosophy in virtue of their sex, race, class, dis/ability, and other markers of social identity. Within this scholarship there is growing recognition that the issue requires new modes of intervention that go deeper than commitments to equal opportunity and diversity training. This recognition has intensified in light of mounting evidence that mainstream reforms have had mixed success, and have been slow on the whole to effect meaningful change.

This inertia can be traced in part to the fact that the discipline of philosophy and the academy more broadly have historically evolved to serve the embodiment of white, cis-gendered, heterosexual, middle-class, non-disabled males.<sup>1</sup> As the following discussion elaborates, my use of “embodiment” in this context refers to how systems of unearned advantage in the profession are not simply tied to biases in favor of the privileged male body, but also to how that body occupies various social and institutional spaces (for instance, the broad-ranging sense of comfort, entitlement, and lack of critical self-awareness that dominant male subjects often evince). This notion of embodiment captures the broader relationality between different kinds of bodies (e.g., raced, sexed, disabled/non-disabled, cis-gendered/transgendered bodies) and privilege, and draws attention to how social and institutional structures have evolved to reflect and serve the needs, values, and interests of some bodies to the exclusion of others.

The values and interests of elite males have played a foundational role in shaping the norms and practices particular to philosophy, and have been influential in determining whose insights and concerns are perceived to have salience, authority, and credibility. In this paper, I explore how the weight of the past manifests in the present; specifically, how the sedimentation of conservative

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masculine imaginaries and knowledge bases in institutional structures serves to breed habits of entitlement and arrogance among privileged philosophers, as well as indifference toward less powerful actors and their particular knowledge bases. These habits tend to be deeply entrenched and largely unconscious—appearing even among actors with explicit egalitarian commitments.

An important question in this context concerns the kinds of concrete interventions that are required to expose and disrupt normative habits that work to preserve the *status quo* in philosophy. Responding to recent investments in strategies of empowerment and mentoring to promote diversity, this paper argues that the principles guiding these strategies do not go far enough to disrupt (and can even serve to reinforce) dominant masculine orders.

In light of these issues, I explore the constructive potential of strategies that incorporate a commitment to what I call the principle of *obverse apprenticeship*. This principle embodies a commitment to positioning those who normally occupy positions of relative privilege as *apprentices* to the insights and perspectives of marginalized actors. An arrangement of this kind seems counterintuitive: being an apprentice to someone is at odds with having power over them. Yet, as Spelman (1988) argues, this type of inversion represents a crucial step in working toward a more equitable relation between members of dominant and subordinated groups, and in challenging hierarchies of power that are rooted in unequal epistemic privilege.

Whereas Spelman treats apprenticeship as a largely individual endeavor, my conception of obverse apprenticeship primarily seeks to extend this account to the level of institutional policy and practice. This is because Spelman's account does not pay sufficient attention to the institutional privileging of white, masculine modes of knowing and being and its implications for the virtuous and volitional practice of obverse apprenticeship. Spelman's conception of an apprentice evokes virtues of curiosity, open-mindedness, and humility that are likely to be lacking among powerful actors in relation to the concerns and insights of marginalized social actors, and especially in contexts where institutional structures continue to embed, normalize, and privilege the knowledge bases of dominant social groups. This paper seeks to supplement and deepen Spelman's account by attending to the nexus between institutions, embodiment, and power, and the bearing of this nexus on the possibility and promise of obverse apprenticeship as a guiding framework for change. My account reflects on how institutions can implement policies that position privileged social subjects as apprentices, and which encourage these subjects to become virtuous apprentices through engaging them in ways that challenge (rather than consolidate) their embodied habits of privilege. I will explore this idea specifically in relation to the academy, and reflect on the new institutional forms it prescribes for the contemporary discipline of Western philosophy, and for universities more broadly.

In the final part of the paper I reflect on the challenge of mobilizing a collective will to commit to deeper normative interventions of the kind proposed here, especially given the increasingly corporatized nature of universities, and the vested interests that corporate universities and powerful actors have in maintaining the *status quo*. In analyzing the significant obstacles for commitments to obverse apprenticeship to be carried through, I tentatively propose that one consequence of the corporatized university may be a ripening of the conditions for such commitments to take root.

## 2 | OBVERSE APPRENTICESHIP

An apprenticeship fundamentally refers to an activity of learning by one who lacks knowledge or skill. “Apprentice” derives from the Latin *apprehendere*, meaning “to take hold of, or grasp,

mentally or physically,” and from the Modern French *apprenti*—a term used to describe a novice who learns from a mentor. An apprenticeship conjures up notions of embodied experience and know-how that the mentor models and transmits to the apprentice. In this sense it represents a practice that extends beyond the mere transfer of information, or abstract knowledge, from the former to the latter.

It is this broader and more expansive concept of apprenticeship as a process of growth through embodied learning that I am primarily interested in.<sup>2</sup> To think through this concept in the context of academic philosophy and power relations therein, I draw on Spelman's invocation of apprenticeship as a normative framework for white feminist engagements with women of color. Spelman notes that racism and other forms of oppression both produce and require a lack of “real knowledge” among oppressors of the oppressed. Acquiring such knowledge, in her view, “requires an apprenticeship; and making oneself an apprentice to someone is at odds with having political, social, and economic power over them” (1988, p. 178). For a more equitable relationship to emerge between white feminists and women of color, Spelman argues that the former must apprentice themselves to the latter, and invert the relation of racial subordination and authority that exists between them.

Spelman says little about what this inversion of social, political, and economic power might entail in concrete, practical terms—a point to which I will presently return. What is striking about her account is that it treats apprenticeship largely as an individual undertaking. Witness, for example, Spelman's prescriptions for white feminists in the academy:

read books, take classes, open your eyes and ears or whatever instruments of awareness you might be blessed with, go to conferences planned and produced by the people about whom you wish to learn and manage not to be intrusive, and so on. [Also] be careful about what books you buy, what classes you take; think about the limits there presently are on what you are prepared to see or hear; examine your own motivations for wanting to understand others' lives. (pp. 178–179)

Spelman's emphasis on white feminists needing to broaden and diversify their knowledge bases confirms that she views the epistemic as entwined with the ethical, political, and material. On this view, redistributing epistemic power and authority may facilitate shifts in existing social, political, and material hierarchies that are supported by collective failures among powerful actors to perceive the contingency and limitations of their perspective, and to open themselves up to alternative perspectives in a self-critical manner.

Spelman describes apprenticeship as a demanding, embodied activity of listening and inquiry that draws upon and develops an individual's affective and perceptual capacities. As an apprentice, Spelman notes, one “must be prepared to receive new information all the time, to adapt [one's] actions accordingly, and to have [one's] feelings develop in response to what the person is doing, whether one like[s] what she is doing or not” (p. 181). On this view, apprenticeship involves a continual receptiveness and responsiveness on the part of the apprentice to new and challenging experiences. More specifically, it calls upon the apprentice to exercise a responsible and disciplined mode of perception in which they do not succumb to the temptation of imaginatively turning the other “into someone or something ... who poses no difficulties” for the apprentice's present reality (p. 181). An apprentice forfeits entitlement to dictate the manner in which the interaction with their mentor unfolds, and to render it amenable to their personal interests, values, desires, and capacities.

For dominant subjects to engage in the epistemic labour of seeking out and opening themselves up to marginalized voices and destabilizing encounters is to engage in a process of transformation that is not simply intellectual but also visceral and embodied. This process of growth exceeds a mere willingness to tolerate difference. As Spelman writes, tolerance does little to challenge hierarchies of power: “to tolerate someone is simply to let her have her say; I needn’t listen to her, I needn’t respond to her, I needn’t engage with her in any way at all. All I have to do is not interfere with her” (p. 182). Echoing Lorde’s (1984) call for white women to move beyond silence, passivity, and toleration in their engagements with women of color, Spelman’s notion of an apprentice is one who is actively engaged with, and open to learning from, what is new, different, and potentially discomfiting.

Moreover, the education of the apprentice is not temporary and finite but lifelong. Since, as Spelman notes, “there is an infinite amount to learn from a real object or a real person,” (p. 180) apprenticeship involves the continual refiguration of one’s standpoint through ongoing dialogical and embodied engagements with those who enjoy less authority in virtue of their gender, race, and other forms of embodied difference. This practice is supported by virtues of “curiosity” and “openness to learning”—especially an openness to learning “what may be disadvantageous to one’s closely guarded position of privilege” (p. 184). It also draws, I would add, upon a capacity for forbearance and courage. The need for these virtues are implied by Spelman’s own account as well as those of her contemporaries: as Lugones (2003) and Ortega (2006) highlight, there is a need for privileged white subjects—including well-meaning white feminists—to move away from where they feel at home, or from what feels “homely”, and to engage with worlds of experience and meaning that are unfamiliar, challenging, and destabilizing for one’s sense of self.

For Spelman, as we have seen, the activity of learning that marks an obverse apprenticeship is an individual endeavor; one that places the burden of exploration and change on privileged subjects. However, a capacity for apprenticeship and the virtues it calls upon is unlikely to prevail among individuals who, in virtue of their power and privilege, reliably encounter validations of their particular perspectives in prevailing symbolic and institutional orders. As Section 3 elaborates, the metaphorical construction of reason and knowledge in opposition to emotion and the body, and the elevation of abstract theorizing over scholarly concerns with power, context, and situatedness, comprises a key masculine “imaginary” (Gatens, 1996) that is reflected in and reinforced by standards and practices that are normative in philosophy (for example, the relative lack of visibility and recognition accorded to feminist scholarship, including at the level of curricula and research).<sup>3</sup> Dominant masculine imaginaries appeal directly to the imagination, shaping affective (dis)investments in particular bodies and knowledge bases that may be in tension with one’s explicit beliefs and egalitarian commitments, and which may not be readily available to one’s conscious awareness (see *ibid.*). Unequal and uncritical investments of esteem, respect, and concern in the voices and insights of different social actors can give way to habits of arrogance, close-mindedness, and obtuseness among those whose perspectives are supported and privileged by dominant imaginaries, and by material structures that embed these imaginaries (Medina, 2012. Also Ortega, 2006).

The imbrication of authoritative imaginaries with affective, habitual postures and with wider institutional structures assists to sustain a deep epistemic asymmetry between subjects who are unequally situated in terms of their social, economic, and political standing, and helps to ensure that their ignorance of one another is not reciprocal. Moreover, lacking reliable knowledge of one’s wider social context and acting out of (culpable) ignorance does not tend to incur significant social costs or institutional penalties for dominant actors, and may often be rewarded.

Spelman remarks that “the end of privilege means the end of institutional support for one’s concerns above those of others, the end of being able to discount, however unintentionally, the experiences and perspectives of others” (p. 172). Yet she does not elaborate on this point in relation to her account of apprenticeship, which remains focused on how privileged actors can work to voluntarily position themselves as apprentices. No insight is given into the kinds of institutional forms prescribed by a commitment to apprenticeship—as Spelman’s readers have pointed out (see Nedelsky, 1991; Young, 1990). Addressing this point is vital: as noted above, dominant imaginaries, institutional structures, and embodied habits interlock in ways that can inhibit the kinds of virtuous postures and volitional practices that apprenticeship calls upon. Missing from Spelman’s account is an acknowledgment that even highly conscientious and committed actors are unlikely to recognize of their own accord when they are being “intrusive” or arrogant as opposed to appropriately engaged—especially in contexts where such vices are structurally supported.

Exploring obverse apprenticeship as a guiding framework for the institutional reformation of philosophy is presented here as a pragmatic strategy for change. As the following discussion elaborates, a structural commitment to obverse apprenticeship would involve the institution positioning powerful identities as apprentices to ways of knowing and being that are unfamiliar, and which they may have previously had the privilege to overlook. This moderate regime of change would be partly realized through working to centre and embed marginalized imaginaries and epistemologies within institutional norms and procedures, as opposed to having them represented in supplementary initiatives that are external to the everyday operations of the institution (for example, bias and diversity trainings). By actively working to redistribute the patterns of value, meaning, and salience that are shaped by white, masculine imaginaries and their institutional supports, I suggest that institutionalized forms of obverse apprenticeship can assist to reshape normative attitudes and practices that reflect and sustain unearned forms of privilege in philosophy. Underlying this discussion is an emphasis on harnessing the power and legitimacy enjoyed by established institutions and existing structures to galvanize change (Tzanakou & Pearce, 2019). My account recognizes the academy and university as playing an important role in distributing but also *redistributing* relations of power (including epistemic, social, and material power) between groups, and ties this role to their capacity to embed alternative imaginaries and knowledge bases in their normative practices. On my view, it is this capacity that enables these institutions to function as important sites for encouraging collective re-imaginings of who, and what, is valuable, significant, and worthwhile, and for cultivating new modes of embodiment in support of obverse apprenticeship.<sup>4</sup>

### 3 | PHILOSOPHICAL IMAGINARIES, EMBODIMENT, AND PRIVILEGE

The symbolic, institutional, and embodied aspects of power and privilege in the academy interlock in ways that present a formidable barrier to the volitional practice of obverse apprenticeship. As Lloyd (1984) and Le Doeuff (1977) have explored at length, Western philosophy’s “woman problem” can be traced in part to philosophical imaginaries that tend to symbolically associate philosophy with the exercise of disembodied, “pure” reason, and which imbue reason and rationality with normatively masculine traits to the exclusion of the feminine. An explicit example of an imaginary that casts women as incapable of higher-order reasoning, and as apprentices

to male ingenuity rather than sources of insight in their own right, can be found in Rousseau's *Émile*:

The search for abstract and speculative truths, for principles and axioms in the sciences, for all that tends to wide generalisation, is beyond a woman's grasp ... it is their business to apply the principles discovered by men, it is their place to make the observations which lead men to discover those principles ... Woman has more wit, man more genius; woman observes, man reasons. (1974 [1762], p. 350)

Conservative imaginaries of this kind may be explicitly repudiated and dismissed by contemporary philosophers as sexist prejudices of a bygone era; nevertheless, there is much evidence to suggest that uncritical and unacknowledged attachments to traditional, gendered dichotomies governing the history of Western thought (e.g., mind/body; reason/emotion; abstract/particular; objective/subjective) continue to produce skewed perceptions of scholarly excellence and authority in the discipline. Against the backdrop of entrenched masculine imaginaries that cast credible knowers as rational, dispassionate, and impartial, and which frame philosophical knowledge as abstract and universal as opposed to embodied, concrete, and particular, feminist concerns with power relations, social positioning, and social context come to be perceived as peripheral to the core concerns of philosophy, and as lacking epistemic significance (Dodds & Goddard, 2013, p. 154). Resonant with the tendency that Ortega observes among dominant actors to “simplify” certain realities, and to ignore or discount those that do not fit readily within their conceptual framework (Ortega, 2006, p. 60), a collective lack of regard for feminist scholarship is reflected in frequent reports from feminist scholars of being routinely subject to demands from conservative gatekeepers that they “translate” their research in order to demonstrate its relevance to “malestream” philosophy projects, in the absence of reciprocal efforts of recognition and translation (Meagher, 2012, p. 205). Those who work outside of normatively masculine areas of philosophy have even been required to defend their research *as philosophy*, as opposed to, say, history or sociology (Dotson, 2012). Susan Brison's below reflections on her experience as an early career researcher speak directly to this kind of policing in the discipline. Moreover, her testimony is striking for what it reveals about the embodied postures of arrogance, entitlement, and incuriosity that are common among privileged male actors in the profession; postures that are entirely at odds with the virtues of an apprentice:

Fast-forward three years, to 1993, just after I published my first scholarly article on sexual violence, when, still an assistant professor, I had my annual evaluation meeting with my senior colleagues. They informed me that this article didn't count as philosophy and that, if I wanted to get tenure, I should stop writing about rape. The nice one said, “I'm sure writing it was very therapeutic, but now you can put that behind you and go back to doing philosophy”. (Brison, 2017, p. 4)

A more recent anecdote from a female professor sheds further light on the form that conservative masculine postures take on in philosophy. The professor recounts an experience of a male faculty member whom she had not yet met having entered her office to discuss an organizational matter, only to automatically assume she was an administrative assistant:



He stuck his head in, saw me at my computer, surrounded by papers and said “I don't suppose Professor xxxxxxx (me) is in, is he?” I looked at him and said, “yes, I am. Can I help you?” *He had the nerve to act surprised, but not embarrassed at his mistake.* (Emphasis mine)<sup>5</sup>

Embodied habits of masculine arrogance and obtuseness are not simply a matter of individuals being stuck in old prejudices, for which they require remedial education. Rather, such habits are preserved and strengthened by institutional norms and trends that are particular to the profession, and which reflect and reinforce conservative masculine perceptions of authority, relevance, and excellence in philosophy. For example, markedly lower acceptance rates from elite journals of papers by female authors and works in feminist philosophy, in comparison with papers by male authors and works in analytic philosophy feed back into gendered patterns of (non-) recognition (Haslanger, 2008; Healy, 2015; Wilhelm et al., 2018). So too do hiring, promotion, and funding decisions that rely heavily upon quantitative publication data (e.g., altmetric scores, journal weightings) without critically attending to gendered citation patterns and acceptance rates. The unequal value that is invested in feminist theory and its cognate areas (critical race theory, history of philosophy, disability studies, and so on) is further compounded by neoliberal trends of research quantification and accountability. Such trends tend to encourage greater investment in highly conceptual approaches to philosophy like logic and metaphysics that can more readily posit “objective truths” by assuming the neutrality of knowledge and the knowing subject, and whose authors avoid having to acknowledge the constraints that social situatedness impose on the truth value of their conclusions (Jenkins, 2014). In addition, the increasing casualisation of the university workforce coupled with the rollback of social support services (like affordable childcare) has seen caretakers and economically disadvantaged identities (who are often women, and women of color especially) become concentrated in precarious, low-wage, teaching-intensive jobs, with privileged white male bodies being concentrated in secure, well-paid and research-intensive jobs (see Navarro, 2017). A consequence of this skewed distribution of labour is the reinforcement of conservative imaginaries that position elite white men as originators of inquiry and insight and women as those who absorb and teach male insights.

Institutional structures that encourage and reproduce collective perceptions of white, male excellence assist to sustain a warm and hospitable climate for white, masculine identities in philosophy that can reinforce a shared sense of belonging and confidence, and a strong sense of entitlement to dictate what is appropriate, credible, important, and worthwhile in professional settings (Ahmed, 2012; Meagher, 2012). This sense of entitlement, and the (largely unconscious) manner in which it is exercised and reproduced, is socially supported: networks of sociability and allegiance among privileged actors work in concert with inhospitable climates for less privileged actors to ensure that collective habits of overlooking or discounting the latter's insights and concerns go largely unchallenged.

#### 4 | REFORMING THE DISCIPLINE: NOT BY “MALE CHAMPIONS” ALONE

I have argued that part of what makes white, masculine privilege in philosophy so difficult to address is its grounding in affective postures and embodied habits of behavior that are imbricated

with conservative perceptions of what counts as philosophy proper; what counts as excellence in philosophy; and who is best placed to achieve such excellence. Such postures and habits are at odds with those that are implied by a capacity for obverse apprenticeship, and are supported by institutional norms that embed dominant masculine imaginaries and epistemologies.

Framed in this way, the problem seems so entrenched and intractable as to warrant a turning away from the discipline and the norms of the academy altogether. Refusals to publish in or review for top journals that exclude diverse voices, and withdrawals from conferences that feature homogenous groups of presenters, offer ways of circumventing the conservative culture of philosophy, as do commitments to interdisciplinarity. Carving out more inclusive spaces of research and pedagogy, including spaces that exist outside of (and in large part against) the university and academy (see, for example, Carlson & Walker's, 2018 discussion of "free education projects" in the Australasian context), also presents an opportunity for subverting and resisting institutionalized structures of dominance. Vital as efforts to bypass damaging academic cultures are, they may require resources, capacities, and opportunities that are not readily available to some actors, especially to those in junior, precarious positions. In some cases, such efforts may work against one's ability to advance professionally. The challenge this paper takes up is one of locating avenues for change within the academy and within the discipline of philosophy—particularly for those who cannot, at least for the time being, afford to reject and work outside of established structures.

In recognition of the limited success enjoyed by systems of disincentives and compulsory education modules for addressing discrimination and inequality in academia, there has been a recent push toward initiatives that work to actively engage elite actors in solving the problem of a homogenous workforce. This push has emerged in part from studies of successful reforms in corporate workplaces (e.g., Dobbin & Kalev, 2018). In the space of the academy, the establishment of "diversity taskforces," "Male Champions of Change" initiatives, and formal mentoring programs reflect a move toward empowering those in positions of seniority and leadership to devise ways of increasing the number of underrepresented identities in their ranks.

Whilst an important step forward, these strategies are limited in their capacity to shift dysfunctional academic cultures; and in particular, the white, masculine culture of philosophy. This is partly because academic and corporate cultures are guided by distinct imaginaries and institutional structures, with the consequence that reforms which prove effective in the latter context may have limited success in the former. Take, for example, formal mentoring initiatives between senior male mentors and junior female mentees in philosophy. Such initiatives have the capacity to foster bonds of concern, trust, and friendship that can push back against some of the disrespectful postures that are encouraged by institutionalized forms of privilege. At the same time, such programs risk implicitly reinforcing masculine imaginaries that cast women as beneficiaries of male talent and know-how rather than as rich sources of insight and guidance; as apprentices to masters. Senior male mentors in philosophy are known to have a habit of fashioning their mentees in their own image (Le Doeuff, 1977, p. 9). As a consequence, encouraging mentoring initiatives may come at the cost of fostering more diverse ways of inhabiting and being-in philosophy, and may further displace knowledge bases that are already marginalized within the discipline. Not least, the relatively intimate, private, and sociable forms that mentoring practices take on in the space of the academy can work in concert with debasing sexual imaginaries to render women more vulnerable to sexual harassment, and susceptible to problematic feelings of indebtedness (Rich, 1980). They can also risk being deeply taxing for women who may have to contend with the strategic ignorance and "default skepticism" (Berenstein, 2016) of those who benefit from, and who are (knowingly or unknowingly) invested in preserving, the *status quo*.



Implicit expectations of civility and gratitude that are imposed upon beneficiaries of mentorship programs in the academy—programs that are commonly unpaid and sustained by the largesse of senior mentors—also risk coercing female mentees into silence when they experience such initiatives as fatiguing and upsetting. Such risks and vulnerabilities may be mitigated when junior women are paired with senior female mentors who occupy a similar social location.<sup>6</sup> However, women in the profession—especially women of color—already tend to be overburdened with equity work, thanks in part to their underrepresentation in philosophy departments (Antony, 2012).

Of further concern is that empowering and positioning elite actors as “diversity champions” risks engendering diminished critical awareness and vigilance among these actors with respect to the full spectrum of their behavior. For example, if a senior male ‘champion’ succeeds in boosting the number of women in his department, this success may generate a sense of self-accomplishment and pride that can readily lend itself to complacency or heightened defensiveness with respect to other aspects of his conduct. In short, the worry here is that “comfort can foreclose learning and obstruct change” (Applebaum, 2017, p. 863). The evocative image of “male champions” directly appeals to (and reinforces) dominant masculine imaginaries, along with the affective investments of self-pride and self-esteem these imaginaries attract. This is troubling to the extent that developing and maintaining habits of ethical behavior across multiple contexts and varied social encounters relies, as Spelman suggests, upon a healthy dose of humility, and a commitment to ongoing learning, self-discipline, and reflective self-critique. This continuous process of reflection and learning is supported by a willingness to tarry with uncertainty and discomfort; by resisting the urge to retreat to thoughts, convictions, and self-consolations that engender comfort, undermine self-vigilance, and which encourage complacency, so as to ensure that one remains open and receptive to ongoing critique.

Occupying this embodied subject position draws upon self-critical dispositions that are largely at odds with those dispositions that are harnessed (and further encouraged) by strategies of empowerment. An obverse apprenticeship, on the other hand, is bound up with one’s recognition of one’s blind spots and limitations rather than a recognition of one’s competencies and strengths. The learning and growth of an apprentice is facilitated through exposing them to new experiences and challenges. As noted in Section 3, there is a need for elite philosophers to apprentice themselves to, and learn from, the imaginaries and knowledge bases that have been developed by marginalized actors. Inhabiting this role encourages privileged actors to become (more acutely) aware of the specificity and contingency of their perspective, and of the gaps embedded in their understanding. By contrast, strategies of mentoring and empowerment risk positioning marginalized and powerful actors in ways that, to borrow Spelman’s language, do not “pose any difficulties” for the latter’s “present reality.”

An emphasis on regimes of surveillance and accountability comes closer to a strategy that can encourage self-vigilance and humility through the mobilization of discomforting affects (e.g., fear, anticipatory shame, embarrassment). In higher education contexts, these regimes are reflected in Athena SWAN initiatives that require organizations to be accountable for their success in advancing goals of equity, and more informally, in grassroots initiatives such as the “Gendered Conference Campaign,” which is dedicated to calling out all-male conference programs. Whilst such strategies present a forceful challenge to conservative masculine imaginaries that encourage an indifference toward women’s participation in particular academic disciplines, they may entail no more than “basic lip service” among powerful actors to a “new social order” (Braithwaite, 1998, p. 110). Without concomitant attempts to invest greater value in women’s epistemic agency and to bring powerful actors to an awareness of what they lack in terms of knowledge, understanding, and expertise, such mechanisms will remain limited in their capacity to

maintain ethical conduct in the discipline, and may risk producing backlash and disengagement (see Braithwaite, 1998; Fricker, 2013). As the following discussion explains, institutional commitments to obverse apprenticeship can function alongside, and in support of, regimes of accountability by working to redistribute existing patterns of epistemic credibility and authority, and by exposing the unspoken and uncritical attachments of dominant actors to reflective scrutiny.

## 5 | INSTITUTIONALIZED APPRENTICESHIP

I have framed an obverse apprenticeship as one in which powerful actors become apprentices to those over whom they wield power. Being an apprentice in this special sense involves a process of embodied learning and transformation, which is partly enabled through forfeiting entitlement to dictate how one's interactions with others unfold; that is, what or who is seen, heard, engaged with and given priority. The apprentice must co-ordinate their actions around such encounters whether they like what is happening or not, and open themselves up to new experiences that are potentially discomfiting and destabilizing. This requires not simply tolerance but courage, openness, humility, and curiosity from the apprentice.

In the space of the academy, Spelman counsels privileged actors to act as apprentices by engaging with marginalized academics and their research in a manner that is “non-intrusive,” and by reflecting on “the limits there presently are on what [they] are prepared to see or hear” (Section 2). Spelman's recommendations rely heavily, then, on individual good-will and a capacity to reliably self-regulate. Yet the affective and unconscious aspects of dominant masculine imaginaries (Section 2) and the institutional reinforcement of these imaginaries (Section 3) work to hinder individual efforts of the kind to which she appeals. The virtues that mark Spelman's apprentice are precisely those that tend to be in short supply among privileged philosophers, and especially among elite male philosophers, whose sense of comfort, belonging, and entitlement is socially and institutionally supported.

Recognizing the limits of even the most well-intentioned and committed individuals to change their behavior through mere volition invites consideration of what obverse apprenticeship might call for in terms of institutional policies and practices. On my account, established institutions like the academy and the university have the capacity to implement policies that can work to embed more inclusive and pluralistic imaginaries in normative institutional practices, and which can expose sedimented imaginaries to reflective critique. This process of institutional reformation can help to ensure that any well-meaning impulses that may be driving mainstream interventions (e.g., “Male Champions of Change”) are channeled in more constructive ways. Broadly speaking, a structural commitment to obverse apprenticeship translates into a commitment to positioning those who occupy positions of relative privilege as apprentices to marginalized social actors. This inverted relation can be enacted through research, teaching, and publication practices that redistribute the value and meaning accorded to non-normative philosophers and their particular knowledge bases. (As the following discussion outlines, such practices may involve modest interventions, such as introducing an institutional requirement to diversify curricula, as well as more thoroughgoing reforms that involve transforming the research agendas of universities.) Among other things, such practices would endow underprivileged actors in the profession with the authority to set the terms of engagement within institutional settings, including whose voices are heard and which matters are prioritized. This regime of change would also involve centering these actors and the epistemologies they have developed in a manner that requires elite apprentices not simply to exercise tolerance but to actively engage with these perspectives.

The fundamental power relation to be inverted through obverse apprenticeship is the power that arbitrarily attaches to embodied difference (sexual difference, racial difference, dis/abilities, and so on); however, this relation cannot be reduced to a mere form of role-reversal (i.e., “how does it feel to be subordinate?”). The structurally warranted inversion of power that marks an institutional commitment to obverse apprenticeship works to promote an alternative imaginary of less dominant subjects and epistemologies as credible, significant, and authoritative, and does so in a manner that disrupts rather than supplements normative institutional arrangements. In this way, it can work to redistribute existing patterns of salience, meaning, and value that are institutionally embedded, and which sustain a lack of openness, humility, and curiosity among privileged actors. Through working to embed marginalized concerns, values, and insights in institutional routines and normative procedures, an institutional commitment to obverse apprenticeship instantiates a commitment to alleviate some of the burden placed upon marginalized actors to engage in volitional (and oftentimes taxing) efforts to educate those with whom they stand in an unequal relation of power and privilege.

Obverse apprenticeship may be modeled at various different structural levels, and may be instituted in different ways (for example, through formal institutional policies or an informal agreement among members of a department). At the level of departmental policy and procedure, it could comprise a commitment from Heads and Chairs of Department to integrate collective discussions of issues such as child care, sexual harassment, transphobia, and disability support services into the normal meeting agenda, including discussions of what more the department could be doing to support and improve the representation of minorities across the board. Establishing a requirement that those in precarious, junior positions—who are more likely to be women, and particularly women who do not occupy a white, middle-class, non-disabled subject position—are represented in departmental meetings, and are given a more central role in shaping meeting agendas, presents an alternative imaginary that invests greater visibility and normative weight in the perspectives and concerns of less privileged women in the profession, and which challenges tacit assumptions about who has the right to speak and be heard in such settings. Obverse apprenticeship could also prescribe a commitment from conference organizers to treating Minorities and Philosophy (MAP) talks and diversity roundtables as keynote events, as opposed to separate and ancillary events occurring in break times between presentations. These efforts offer a challenge to institutionalized imaginaries that render concerns about unequal representation and unearned privilege in philosophy peripheral to philosophy’s “core business.”

In relation to publication procedures and journal policies, a commitment to obverse apprenticeship could be realized through a formal expectation that contributors cite the work of diverse authors in their field, and an explicit requirement that reviewers hold submissions to account for any failure to do so (a standard that is already being adopted to some degree).<sup>7</sup> At the level of teaching, an institutional requirement that *all* educators implement inclusive curricula and train their students in diverse epistemic traditions, as opposed to this responsibility falling squarely on those already working across these traditions, may be read as a form of apprenticeship that promotes a collective reimagining of marginalized epistemologies as worthy of serious scholarly attention, and which disrupts the implicit assumption that the study of diverse topics is for diverse practitioners alone.<sup>8</sup> The need for this regime of change is pressing: as Crouch notes, it is still the case that “feminist philosophy, critical race philosophy, disability philosophy, and many other ‘new’ fields ... can be completely ignored by many who study the same general field,” as evidenced by the fact that students can currently study classical epistemology without needing to study feminist epistemology (2012, pp. 220–221). Having not only the curricula but also classroom pedagogies shaped by feminist and decolonial praxis as opposed to Anglo-European norms

of knowledge creation, sharing, and acquisition represents a further move toward institutionalizing obverse forms of apprenticeship.<sup>9</sup> By requiring privileged students and their educators to step outside of what may be their usual comfort zones, and to spend time, effort, and resources apprenticing themselves to traditions and voices that they may previously had overlooked, such measures can assist to facilitate a more challenging mode of learning and growth; one that distinguishes an obverse apprenticeship from alternative institutional strategies that do not require elite actors to meaningfully engage with the new and unfamiliar, and to confront the gaps embedded in their understanding.

At the level of the academy and the university, a commitment to obverse apprenticeship could comprise a commitment to allowing minority actors to set research agendas, and to supporting agendas that focus on local, contextual, and applied research. As Rich reflects, a move away from the androcentric university would be signaled in part by a commitment to ensuring that the university functions to “serve the needs of the human, visible community in which it sits—the neighbourhood, the city, the rural county, its true environment” (Rich, 1980, p. 152). This broader institutional shift is capable of performing powerful work in unsettling philosophical imaginaries that privilege the abstract and conceptual over the concrete and particular, and which prevent philosophers who work outside of mainstream analytic traditions from accruing due recognition and credibility (Section 3). Moreover, Rich suggests that in pursuing this regime of change, the university should position itself as an apprentice. The university, she argues,

should address itself to the microcosms of national problems and issues that exist locally ... with the greatest possible sense that *it will not simply be giving, but be receiving, because academe has a great deal to learn from women and from other unprivileged people.* (p. 152. Emphasis added)

Not only would this arrangement serve to challenge conservative imaginaries in the academy that promote an indifference to issues of application, power, and context, and which ground overinvestments in the perspectives of white, male professionals; it also promises to have various practical benefits for women and other underrepresented groups in philosophy, who, like marginalized groups in non-academic communities, need childcare, harassment prevention, disability assistance, and other issues to be investigated at a local level if they are to advance in the profession. Moreover, positioning the university as an apprentice to the insights of local communities may assist to encourage a “more active stance” (Ortega, 2006, p. 68) among privileged men and women in the academy, required as they are by this arrangement to learn more about—and from—those who may lack power and privilege, and to orient their scholarly research toward praxis—especially toward dismantling material inequalities from which they benefit.

Modeling obverse apprenticeship at various different structural levels can have transformative effects. By subverting expectations about *who* and *what* universities ought to prioritize as part of their research agendas, or how a typical department meeting, conference, and seminar ought to proceed, this regime of change challenges the patterns of value and significance informing such expectations. Positioning dominant actors in philosophy as apprentices to voices that they might otherwise fail to recognize as authoritative, and to issues that fall outside of those they consider to have salience and relevance for the discipline, has the potential to provoke dissonance and discomfort. This discomfort might comprise general anxiety or unease in response to feeling out of one's depth, or impatience and irritation that comes from failing to perceive the importance of what is being prioritized. By challenging and redistributing existing patterns of value and meaning, an institutional

commitment to obverse apprenticeship brings to the fore the cluster of images and affective investments that usually form the inarticulate background of one's judgments, and can draw attention to one's unconscious and uncritical investments in traditional practices and arrangements. Unsettling the sense of entitlement and being "at home" in the profession that stems from a power to colonize institutional norms, and drawing attention to the unspoken, unreflective investments that one may have in the *status quo*, enables institutionalized forms of obverse apprenticeship to lay the ground for the development of humility, openness and other virtues that can emerge from enhanced critical self-awareness.

Of course, a resentful retreat into old habits is always a possibility among privileged actors. One cannot assume that those who are positioned by the institution as apprentices will automatically conduct themselves accordingly. Efforts to set aside the "normal" may generate pushback among those who benefit from it, which can engender fear and inhibition among less powerful actors. The challenges of intervening in these dynamics are significant.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, it is plausible to assume that at least for some committed actors, a resentful retreat is not the way in which they will resolve the discomfort that an obverse apprenticeship may elicit. Furthermore, powerful subjects who tarry with their experience of being an apprentice (as opposed to a "champion"), and who are ethically transformed by this experience, represent influential figures around whose behavior others may come to orient and coordinate themselves—as noted by Braithwaite in her empirical studies of workplace change (Braithwaite, 1998, p. 123). Thus, just as networks of sociability among privileged actors can work to reinforce exclusions in the profession, they may also play a role in ensuring that responsible and responsive habits of behavior reverberate throughout communities of privilege.

The "bottom-up" processes of change noted above can work to support an alignment between the attitudes of institutional actors and revised institutional agendas. Where this alignment occurs, an "institutional ethos" is created (Fricker, 2013). This ethos is pivotal for regulating behaviors that institutions cannot readily monitor and for rendering assertions of dominance by powerful actors more costly. For particularly stubborn and self-serving actors whose ignorance of, and lack of openness to, alternative knowledge bases is wilfully and consciously maintained, mechanisms of accountability and other disincentive measures remain crucial resources for advancing and maintaining ethical and inclusive standards of practice in the profession.

## 6 | APPRENTICESHIP IN THE CORPORATE UNIVERSITY: OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The shifts in existing power relations that may be galvanized through commitments to obverse apprenticeship are difficult to quantify. Like Spelman, I assume that requiring powerful actors to forfeit their unearned epistemic privilege can assist to unsettle the social, material, and political hierarchies that are built upon it. This process of change is likely to be slow and incremental: in response to the demands of individuals or a collective, the institution is remodeled in ways that intervene on dominant imaginaries and the disrespectful postures they encourage, resulting in changed attitudes and more respectful postures that can furnish support for initiatives that give over further power to marginalized actors.

Disrupting the institutional reinforcement of power relations in philosophy that cut across multiple vectors of privilege and oppression (e.g., race, gender, class, dis/ability) would require thoroughgoing structural changes that include, but also exceed, an institutional commitment to obverse apprenticeship. Mobilizing a collective will to commit to these changes is likely to prove



challenging. Heightened competition and performance pressures in contemporary academia, and the ever-present threat of institutional backlash, can undermine courageous efforts to unsettle the *status quo*, and to push back against networks of allegiance from which one benefits. In this context, cultures of fear and anxiety can act as powerful bulwarks against institutional change. In the corporatized university, collective decision-making is replaced by managerialism, a commitment to community needs and social justice is eclipsed by economic rationalism, and diverse research agendas are narrowed by the dictates of publication metrics and competitive grant funding. Thus part of carrying through a structural commitment to obverse apprenticeship will require deeper challenges to the norms and structures of contemporary universities so that the conditions for collective deliberation, community accountability, genuine diversity, and a less conservative academy can emerge.

As challenging as this task seems, there is reason for modest optimism. Thinking about the university as an entity with a specific set of values and commitments, and as being embedded in relationships with other institutions (e.g., the state, industry and media partners), is helpful for understanding this optimism. Corporate trends, including increased competition for education services, have ushered in strengthened public relations agendas and campaigns promoting equity and diversity. This has occurred alongside and in response to decades of grassroots campaigning by staff and student activists. Whilst many tertiary reforms have drawn criticism for serving a “virtue-signaling” function that leaves the *status quo* intact, the marketing trends that are particular to the corporate university nevertheless open up opportunities for rendering the latter more accountable to its formal commitments and mission statements, and for mobilizing charges of culpable ignorance (Ahmed, 2006).<sup>11</sup> Moreover, as Tzanakou and Pearce (2019) point out, institutional recognition of equity initiatives that complement rather than unsettle neoliberal structures provides an opportunity for feminists to use such initiatives as leverage for more radical, anti-neoliberal agendas. Working within and through existing structures in this way may also lessen the risk of attracting strong institutional backlash. Lastly, the close ties that universities have with partnering institutions create avenues for exploiting cross-institutional accountability: just as allegiances and networks of support among elite actors can be harnessed for change (Section 5), so too can allegiances and networks between different institutions (universities, corporations, the media, the state, and so on). Shifts in one institutional agenda (e.g., corporate and media responses to #MeToo) can exert pressure on the agendas of universities, and on the attitudes and commitments of those actors who populate them. (The widely publicized release of the “Red Zone Report”<sup>12</sup> in the wake of #MeToo represents one example of efforts by student activists to draw media attention to the failures of Australian universities to meaningfully address campus sexual assault.)<sup>13</sup> Thus, just as the rise of the corporate university may be at odds with an institutional commitment to obverse apprenticeship, it may also offer an opportunity for ensuring this commitment is carried through.

In sketching this possibility, I do not mean to understate the obstacles of circumventing the deep-seated investments that corporate universities and powerful actors have in deliberately and wilfully shying away from reforms that would upend capitalist, neoliberal modes of governance from which they benefit, and which exclusively serve their values and perceived interests. To tentatively suggest that some aspects of the corporate university model may (unwittingly) offer opportunities for advancing more progressive agendas, including thoroughgoing commitments to obverse apprenticeship, is not to deny that this model remains fundamentally in tension with the project of dismantling entrenched inequalities of power and privilege both within and outside of the academy. This is why concurrent attempts to circumvent the corporate-capitalist model of higher education—examples of which can be seen



in the rise of “free education projects” in the Australasian context and elsewhere (Section 3)—remain vital, as do more radical forms of praxis that push for swifter and more sweeping changes to this model. My defense of obverse apprenticeship as a guiding framework for social and institutional reform centres on the immediate reality of working within the parameters of existing and imperfect structures to facilitate change.

## 7 | CONCLUSION

The effects of historical exclusions from the academy linger long after formal barriers to participation have been removed. The imaginaries and knowledge bases of powerful social actors in philosophy remain embedded in and privileged by institutional norms, and continue to undermine a genuine sense of curiosity and openness vis à vis the perspectives and concerns of marginalized actors. In this context I have revealed the importance of attending to the potential for well-meaning institutional reforms and initiatives to unwittingly reinforce normative imaginaries and embodied postures that disadvantage women and other underrepresented groups in philosophy. Extending Spelman’s account of apprenticeship as a framework for addressing asymmetries of knowledge, power, and privilege in the academy, this paper has explored the value of pursuing an institutional commitment to obverse apprenticeship. This commitment involves leveraging institutional power to expose and challenge sedimented patterns of value and meaning that undermine the virtuous practice of apprenticeship among dominant actors in the profession. Through working to embed the imaginaries and knowledge bases of less privileged communities in normative institutional arrangements, and positioning powerful actors as apprentices to voices and perspectives they may have otherwise overlooked, I have suggested that a regime of institutional reformation guided by obverse apprenticeship can play an important role alongside other initiatives in challenging and disrupting unearned privilege in philosophy.

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### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The discussion I present here focuses mainly on the distinctive issues arising from gender non-parity in the profession. However, as Crenshaw (1989), Spelman (1988) and others have so ably demonstrated, gender is not able to be separated, except analytically, from other identity markers like race and class. In appealing to “obverse apprenticeship” as a guiding framework for institutional change, this paper recognizes the importance of apprenticeships that cut across various axes of privilege and oppression (gender, race, class, dis/ability, sexuality, and so on). With Spelman, I acknowledge the need for women who occupy positions of relative privilege in the academy to apprentice themselves to less privileged communities of women. Given the limited

scope of this paper, however, I am not able to offer a full account of the particular forms that different apprenticeships may take on in academic contexts, nor am I able to do justice to the distinctive issues and power dynamics that are at play between differently embodied actors in the profession.

<sup>2</sup> As the following discussion will make clear, I am not thinking about apprenticeship in its common association with trade guild and union contexts. In those contexts, an individual becomes an apprentice to an experienced tradesperson for a set period of time in order to acquire relevant professional skills and knowledge.

<sup>3</sup> Within any given context, different imaginaries and epistemologies compete for visibility, authority and legitimacy. In this paper I consider how normative practices in philosophy are shaped in part by the privileging of white, masculine imaginaries and knowledge bases, and by the concomitant subordination of imaginaries and epistemologies developed by marginalized social groups.

<sup>4</sup> Concentrating on institutional power as a vehicle for change does not intend to detract from the necessity of creating and supporting zones of pedagogy and research that are external to, and which exert pressure on, established institutions and their particular power structures. As Section 6 elaborates, the proposals for reform presented in this paper aim to exist alongside (and in support of) more radical forms of praxis.

<sup>5</sup> See <https://beingawomaninphilosophy.wordpress.com/2015/05/09/wheres-the-professor/>.

<sup>6</sup> Female mentors are not necessarily immune to the influence of dominant institutional imaginaries. For complex reasons (including concerns with professional self-advancement), women in the profession may come to strongly identify with traditional approaches to philosophy and white, masculine modes of being-in the academy. They may then (wittingly or unwittingly) reproduce these same investments in their female mentees. See Rich (1980) and Welch (2011) for further discussion.

<sup>7</sup> See Wilhelm et al. (2018, p. 1461) for further discussion.

<sup>8</sup> In promoting this institutional requirement, we must be wary of its potential to risk a recentering and reconsolidation of white, male epistemic authority in relation to marginalized epistemic traditions, and to undermine a perceived need for hiring diverse educators if sufficiently diverse curricula is in place. My appeal to obvise apprenticeship does not imply that privileged subjects, *qua* apprentices, eventually become “masters” of what marginalized subjects teach them, and therefore sufficiently competent to speak on the latter’s behalf. To avoid cultivating a sense of potential “mastery” among apprentices, it is critical that such an arrangement is pursued in tandem with teaching and research practices that, among other things, challenge authoritative imaginings of knowers as generic and interchangeable, and perceptions of knowledge as disembodied and universally accessible.

<sup>9</sup> See Hooks (1994) and Paris and Alim (2017) for examples of the concrete forms that non-androcentric and non-Eurocentric pedagogies may take on in institutions of education.

A commitment to these pedagogies in philosophy would include the uptake of texts that are traditionally considered to be non-philosophical yet which often have deeply philosophical dimensions (e.g., poetry, literature, rap songs), as well as co-learning environments that allow students substantive input into what materials are taught and how they are taught, in order to ensure that teaching is responsive to diverse social realities and learning styles. It would also encourage a decreased emphasis on traditional (read: unimpassioned, adversarial) modes of communicative engagement in favor of practices that open up space for diverse expressive styles and collaborative knowledge-building practices.

<sup>10</sup> With Meagher (2012), this paper recognizes that confrontational refusals among marginalized actors to engage in rituals of polite appeasement and acquiescence with powerful, recalcitrant actors can encourage normative change through “breaking frame.” However, it also recognizes the potential for such performances to carry high costs, especially for those who do not occupy positions of influence and seniority. On my view, harnessing the force of institutional power to galvanize normative shifts can assist to mitigate pushback, and can partly alleviate the need for underprivileged actors to engage in confrontations that may ultimately prove to be more foolhardy than courageous in the absence of wider social and institutional support.

<sup>11</sup> Various strategies may be employed by activists to expose the tension between the progressive narratives embedded in university mission statements and advertising, and the everyday practices of the corporate

university that belie a commitment to these narratives. In the Australasian context, student activists have drawn attention to this tension through creating counter-advertisements and protest posters that tactically employ the iconography used by university marketing campaigns. For two recent examples see the National Tertiary Education Union's "Unlearn Managerialism" campaign (<https://www.nteu.org.au/library/view/id/9542>) and the University of Sydney Casuals' Network wage theft campaign (<https://twitter.com/CasualsUsyd/status/1303238601027665925/photo/1>). These protest materials aim to disrupt the carefully crafted, egalitarian image of the modern university through revealing institutional patterns of wilful ignorance vis à vis exploitative workplace practices.

<sup>12</sup> This report was jointly authored by Walkley award-winning journalist Nina Funnell and PhD candidate Anna Hush (see Funnell & Hush, 2018).

<sup>13</sup> Generally speaking, whether and to what extent progressive social agendas gain uptake in other institutional spheres and exert influence over how universities choose to operate will depend in part on the wider public culture. In the Australian context, for example, progressives may have more limited grounds for optimism than in other national contexts. This is because of a strong culture of public resistance—fuelled by conservative Australian governments—toward treating universities as anything other than sites for producing "job-ready" applicants, as opposed to entities with social responsibilities for addressing issues of discrimination and harassment within their ranks (Hush, 2019). A different picture arguably emerges in the Portuguese context, where there exists broad-ranging support at the national level for universities to implement increasingly progressive agendas. This support is partly linked to the successful framing of such agendas as symbols of "modern Europeanness" and thereby worthy of emulation (do Mar Pereira, 2017).

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