RISKY INQUIRY: DEVELOPING AN ETHICS FOR PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE

Rima Basu

Claremont McKenna College

Abstract: Philosophical inquiry strives to be the unencumbered exploration of ideas. That is, unlike scientific research which is subject to ethical oversight, it is commonly thought that it would either be inappropriate, or that it would undermine what philosophy fundamentally is, if philosophical research were subject to similar ethical oversight. Against this, I argue that philosophy is in need of a reckoning. Philosophical inquiry is a morally hazardous practice with its own risks. There are risks present in the methods we employ, risks inherent in the content of the views under consideration, and risks to the subjects of our inquiry. Likely, there are more risks still. However, by starting with the identification of these three risks we can demonstrate not only why an ethics of practice is needed but also which avenues are the most promising for developing an ethics for philosophical practice. Although we might be in the business of asking questions, we do not absolve ourselves of responsibility for the risks that inquiry incurs.

Scientific research often directly involves experimenting on human subjects or it indirectly affects people in other ways. Given this, it is not an open question whether we need ethical guidelines for scientific research. With regard to whether we should develop ethical guidelines for philosophical research, however, there are serious doubts. For example, when Yannik Thiem et al. (2019) spoke with editors of philosophy journals as part of a white paper on publication ethics, the authors noted that there was little agreement on any ethical guidelines for philosophical inquiry that go beyond sanctions for verbatim plagiarism. They note:

> Those who had concerns about developing shared principles and best practices of publication ethics often pointed to the fact that verbatim plagiarism is already agreed upon as unethical and sanctioned when discovered, and imposing any further norms on philosophical scholarship and publishing in philosophy should be avoided so that the free exploration of ideas and circulation of research remain unencumbered. (Thiem et al. 2019)

Here we see the commonly held idea that an ethics for philosophical practice is out of place or even improper given the kind of thing that philosophical inquiry strives to be. Philosophical inquiry, *unlike scientific inquiry*, is the unencumbered exploration of ideas.

That is, whereas scientific inquiry is rightly subject to ethical oversight, it would be inappropriate to subject philosophical inquiry to similar ethical oversight. Against this, i.e., that it would be inappropriate to subject philosophical inquiry to similar ethical oversight, in this paper I argue that philosophical inquiry is a morally hazardous practice. That is, philosophical inquiry has its own set of ethical and epistemological challenges that suggest we need to develop an ethics for philosophical practice.

To make this argument the paper will proceed as follows. I start by demonstrating how we can develop an ethics for philosophical practice by looking at the debate about values in science and how an ethics of practice was developed for scientific inquiry. That is, we already have a good model for understanding how practices of inquiry could be constrained by moral considerations. Thus, rather than risk reinventing the wheel, we should see whether lessons from scientific inquiry can be applied to the more general practice of philosophical inquiry itself. However, in order to use the ethics of scientific practice as a model for developing an ethics of philosophical practice we face two problems that must be addressed. First, our research doesn't seem as consequential as research in the sciences and social sciences. That is, our work doesn't pipeline into policy in quite the ways that scientific research does. Second, our research methods don't look much like those of the sciences. That is, the kinds of risks that eventuate in the course of scientific inquiry might not arise in the case of philosophical inquiry.

I argue against these objections across Sections 1 and 2, and I demonstrate that several practical and moral risks do arise in the course of philosophical inquiry. There are risks present in the methods we employ, risks inherent in the content of the views under consideration, and risks to the subjects of our inquiry. I confess that there are likely further risks still. However, in identifying these three risks we can begin the work of demonstrating both how philosophical inquiry is a morally hazardous practice and why an ethics of practice is needed.

In Section 3 I turn to a second set of challenges that seek to undermine both the strength and the relevance of the analogy between scientific inquiry and philosophical inquiry. Both challenges turn on whether philosophical inquiry is fundamentally different in kind from scientific inquiry, and both concern the question of whether developing an ethics of practice undermines the goal of philosophical inquiry itself. That is, as we saw in the opening quote, an ethics of philosophical practice seems at odds with a conception of philosophical inquiry in which we freely explore questions, consequences be damned. I argue, however, that although we might be in the business of asking questions, we do not absolve ourselves of responsibility for the risks that inquiry incurs.

1. ON CONSEQUENTIAL RESEARCH

As Heather Douglas (2014, 2015, 2016) has noted, ethical lapses in scientific research, such as the Tuskegee experiment, have forced practitioners in the sciences to reckon with the serious ethical challenges involved with experimenting on human subjects and human communities. These ethical lapses, both with respect to how the research is conducted (e.g., Tuskegee) and the outcomes of the research (e.g., atomic bombs), have pushed both the sciences and the social sciences to develop codes of professional ethics. Returning to the subject matter of philosophical inquiry, the idea that philosophy has practical consequences that should constrain how we conduct our research is often,

perhaps understandably, met with a kind of incredulity. If there are any practical risks associated with doing philosophy we think not of the paradigmatic examples in the sciences of either Tuskegee or the atomic bomb but of Socrates being executed by the state or the murder of this journal's namesake, Hypatia. Despite how frequently people compare themselves to Socrates on Twitter in response to being "cancelled", such risks are small for professional philosophers.[1] Furthermore, given philosophy's supposed lack of progress over the centuries, one could be forgiven for doubting the practical impact of philosophy on the world. Nonetheless, I think we should resist this view of philosophy for two reasons.

First, I take this view to be undermined by the continued practice of philosophy; after all, why continue to do philosophy in the first place, if such a view is right? Perhaps philosophical practice is continued through the mere intellectual edification to be found in posing and contemplating questions. However, as I'll note in Section 3, there are reasons to doubt this conception of philosophical practice. Second, such a conception of philosophy ignores the close connection between critical theory, applied philosophy, philosophy of science, and feminist philosophy, all of which clearly count as philosophy of consequence, i.e., philosophy that has a public-facing component.[2] Furthermore, bioethicists are a notable exception to the idea that philosophers are ill-suited to contribute to policy. For a more pernicious example that clearly demonstrates the practical consequence of philosophical inquiry, consider Katelyn Burns's (2019) reporting in *Vox* of the influence of trans-exclusionary radical feminist arguments in the recently decided Supreme Court case Bostock v. Clayton County and R.G. & G.R. Harris Funeral Homes v. EEOC and Aimee Stephens (and in turn the contrasting Brief of Philosophy Professors as Amici Curiae in Support of the Employees).[3] As Burns (2019) notes, Kathleen Stock's "work is cited in several amici briefs to the Supreme Court in the Stephens case, showing how gender-critical academia is assisting to legitimize anti-trans policy positions."

As these examples demonstrate, philosophers, and in turn our work, is of consequence. If it's appropriate to have ethical oversight to stave off rare high impact events in scientific research, it doesn't strike me as terribly out of place to also institute such a rule for philosophical inquiry. It is naïve and irresponsible to think that philosophy takes place in a vacuum, and not in a society rich with real-world consequences and practical import. We cannot ignore the increasingly pressing need to take seriously the idea that there could be constraints on philosophical inquiry, that is, the need for developing an ethics of practice for philosophical inquiry.

The task of answering this challenge, i.e., the challenge of developing an ethics of practice for philosophical inquiry, can seem daunting. As Thiem et al.'s (2019) white

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[1] It is further worth noting that many examples of prominent "cancellations" are in fact resignations where the respective institutions demonstrated a continued commitment to protecting the academic freedom of the scholars facing protests calling for their resignation.

[2] Often, for this very reason, such work is not considered real philosophy (see Dotson 2012). Additionally, for an analysis of the impact of the work of philosophers of science on the field of the sciences more generally, see Khelfaoui et al. (2021).

[3] Bostock v. Clayton County, 590 U.S. __ (2020). Brief amicus curiae of Philosophy Professors. 3 July 2019. https://www.supremecourt.gov/DocketPDF/17/17-1618/107015/20190703125853982_17-1618%2017-1623%2018-107%20PhilosophyProfessors%20Brief.pdf

paper on publication ethics in philosophy demonstrates, the issues within this domain are wide-ranging. As the authors note, the issues include, but are not limited to, what distinguishes verbatim plagiarism from plagiarism of ideas—this an especially pressing question in humanities fields where the scholarly products of our work are *ideas*—to determining best practices for research involving marginalized and vulnerable populations. Further, and related to concerns about plagiarism, how do you use the insights and experiences of such marginalized and vulnerable groups without verging into the territory of appropriation? However, we do not need to start from scratch to answer these questions posed by Thiem et al. (2019). Fruitful answers can be found by comparing scientific practice to philosophical practice. That is, exploring the answers to the question of the responsibilities of scientists qua scientists can help us get a handle on the responsibilities of philosophers qua philosophers.[4]

In thinking about the place of values in guiding scientific inquiry, Richard Rudner (1953, 2) is the first to caution that the scientist qua scientist must consider the "the *importance*, in the typically ethical sense, of making a mistake in accepting or rejecting the hypothesis" (emphasis in the original).[5] Such mistakes can come in varying degrees and lead to similarly varying degrees of caution the scientist must exercise. For example, you need a much higher degree of confirmation regarding the safety of an experimental drug than you would for determining whether a stamp-making machine is defective. The difference between the two ultimately rests on a distinctively moral difference, namely, the moral consequences of getting it wrong.

Returning to Burns's (2019) reporting, in a world where transmisogynistic violence is rampant, to contribute to a philosophical discourse that would further encourage or justify such violence carries with it high moral risks and those risks ought to constrain how we conduct philosophical inquiry on such matters. That is, we cannot playfully debate the dignity or humanity of others in the same way we might debate whether there are tables or just simples arranged table-wise.[6] The relevant sense of 'cannot' here is the moral sense. When it comes to theorizing about others, i.e., treating others as objects of our inquiry, there are important moral risks present that raise the stakes of the debate and make it even more imperative that we treat the subjects of our inquiry with the right kind of respect. For example, there may simply be some ways of asking a question that inherently demeans or dehumanizes the group of whom the question is asked. That is, there are at least two risks here: a risk inherent in the content of the views under consideration and a risk to the subjects of our inquiry. These risks, however, can not only come apart but also they run together in complicated ways.

Audrey Yap (2021) has argued that philosophical inquiry can result in hidden costs to both the inquirer and the people being inquired about. To make this point she employs

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[4] Another reason for turning to the question of what are the responsibilities of scientists qua scientists to answer the question of what are the responsibilities of philosophers qua philosophers is that we risk reinventing the wheel unless we explore whether this argument by analogy works. My approach here is greatly influenced by Gabbrielle Johnson's (forthcoming) demonstration that current debates about fairness in risk-assessment algorithms are iterations of familiar arguments in feminist philosophy of science about inductive risk and demarcation.

[5] This point about the place of values in science has been taken up in more sophisticated and nuanced ways by the research projects of Douglas (2009, 2014, 2015, 2016), Johnson (Forthcoming), Longino (1987, 1995, 1996) et al. For a contrary view, see Bright (2018).

[6] See Bettcher (2018) for more on this point.

María Lugones's (1987) notion of world-travelling—e.g., the ways non-dominantly situated peoples learn to code-switch—to argue that doing this work in academic contexts can often cost the traveler something important in at least two ways. First, one might feel (and often rightly feel) exploited. In virtue of your positioning you might routinely be called upon to educate others about your community.[7] Another risk one takes on is that your work may be appropriated. As Emmalon Davis (2018) argues, as marginalized knowers produce knowledge that work may be taken up by those outside of the community and in that uptake the connection to the marginalized group responsible for the knowledge production may be severed, lost, or disguised. In other work Davis (2021) also describes the following double-bind for marginalized practitioners: one's work often only gets uptake when it's about one's own group, but at the same time that work gets discredited for not being "objective". And further still, as Yap (2021) notes while drawing on the work of the Kahnawake scholar Audra Simpson, sometimes the work we do in the community related to our identities can leave us as outsiders to our own community. As Simpson (2007, 78) writes, "can I do this and still come home; what am I revealing here and why? Where will this get us? Who benefits from this and why?".

These are costs incurred by the subjects of our philosophical inquiry, and sometimes these costs are exacerbated when the inquirer is the subject of their own inquiry. Even with all of these costs outlined, we've likely not exhausted the costs of inquiry to either the subjects of the inquiry or the inquirer themselves. For example, this discussion demonstrates that risks can also eventuate differently based not only on who is conducting the inquiry but also another complicating factor is the *context* of the inquiry. For example, John Stuart Mill (1991, 62) famously noted the following constraint on when it's permissible to ask some questions:

> even opinions lose their immunity, when the circumstances in which they are expressed are such as to constitute their expression as a positive instigation to some mischievous act. An opinion that corn-dealers are starvers of the poor, or that private property is robbery, ought to be unmolested when simply circulated through the press, but may justly incur punishment when delivered orally to an excited mob assembled before the house of a corn-dealer.[8]

As I noted earlier, in a world where transmisogynistic violence is rampant, to contribute to a philosophical discourse that would further encourage such violence carries with it high moral risks and those risks ought to constrain how we conduct philosophical inquiry on such matters. Although in Section 2 I'll articulate how some methods of inquiry can violate expectations of respect and thus, in Mill's terms, perhaps should not circulate "unmolested", the following basic point remains: what risks are present and how these risks shape our obligations when conducting philosophical inquiry can shift

[7] See Berenstain (2016) for more on the concept of epistemic exploitation.
[8] Thanks to Nishi Shah for directing me to this passage in Mill. For a somewhat contrasting view, see Barnes (2018). For more on how the right to free speech intersects with academic freedom, see Emerick (2021).

according to both who is asking the questions and the contexts in which those questions are asked.[9]

The implication of the identification of these various risks suggests a kind of *moral encroachment* on the norms governing philosophical inquiry. Traditionally, moral encroachment is the idea that the evidential support you need to be epistemically justified in believing something can vary according to the moral stakes.[10] For example, believing that someone is a waiter because of the color of their skin is a paradigmatically racist belief. However, there might be contexts in which the color of someone's skin is excellent evidence that they are a waiter. Moral encroachers argue that although you have what looks like otherwise strong evidence on which to base your belief, because of the moral risks involved, i.e., racism, you should be held to a higher justificatory standard than other contexts where such moral risks are absent. Similarly, as we saw from Rudner, the level evidential support required for being justified in believing that an experimental drug is safe is higher than the level of evidential support required for being justified in believing that a stamp-making machine is defective.[11] So, when it comes to answering the question of how to do philosophy in a way that treats people with proper respect, I suggest that one strategy is to implement a version of this moral encroachment framework. That is, there are moral stakes associated with the moral risks not only with regard to what questions we ask and make room for, but stakes for the people whom those questions are about.

2. ON RESPECTFUL RESEARCH

With regard to philosophical inquiry there are two ways to spell out what being held to higher standards might mean. First, the moral stakes of our inquiry can raise the evidential threshold we must cross with respect to how confident we can be that our inquiry will not cause harm or that our inquiry will not wrong those we're inquiring about. Second, the moral stakes might determine what questions ought to be considered live options or which options one should be agnostic about. That is, related to the first, the evidential threshold one must cross to present certain views on a question, i.e., to treat them as a live option, may be higher for some questions than others. Inquiry involves commitments, in asking questions we introduce those commitments into the common ground and perhaps there are some things that shouldn't be admitted into the common ground.

There remain, however, two sets of challenges here. First, what does it take to treat others with proper respect within the practice of philosophical inquiry? To sketch a

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[9] Similarly, for pedagogical reasons we might pose a question a way we wouldn't dream of posing the question were we in a different context. For example, Talia Mae Bettcher (2019, 17) notes:

> At a lower undergraduate level, I may very cautiously raise the question whether homosexuality is immoral in order to show that there is no good argument that it is. However, I wouldn't dream of raising such a question in an advanced course in LGBT philosophy—for one thing, the posing of the question is heterosexist. I make—and expressly problematize—my concession in the lower division course for pedagogical reasons.

[10] For accounts of moral encroachment see Basu (2019), Bolinger (2020), Fritz (2017), Moss (2018), and Pace (2011).

[11] As Quill R Kukla (2015), Jason Stanley (2016), Rima Basu (2021), and Gabbrielle Johnson (forthcoming), have noted, the argument from inductive risk in philosophy of science has interesting parallels to the arguments for both pragmatic and moral encroachment.

possible answer we can turn to a related debate, i.e., what it takes to treat others with proper respect within our thoughts. Second, one might have some new worries about the strength of this analogy between the responsibilities of scientists qua scientists and the responsibilities of philosophers qua philosophers. First, the arguments so far for the risks involved in philosophical inquiry rest on similarities to the risks involved in scientific inquiry. A disanalogy between the forms of inquiry could be pushed as follows: the real difference between philosophy and science is that science, unlike philosophy, relies primarily on induction; whereas philosophy relies on deduction. Only induction allows for inductive risk so as long as we stick to a purely deductive method then there are no risks involved in philosophical inquiry.[12] And second, one might worry that mitigating the risks involved in doing philosophy may undermine the philosophical enterprise itself. I will take each of these challenges in turn. I will answer the first set of challenges in this section, and then turn to the second set of challenges in Section 3.

Apart from the practical risks, there's an additional moral risk that comes with the abstract theoretical methodology that characterizes much of philosophical inquiry. Our objector will likely try to press the point that whereas unethical scientific experiments violate human rights, philosophical thought experiments do not violate any such rights. This risk involved in scientific inquiry and practice is why scientific methodologies must be subject to institutional review boards (IRBs). As Heather Douglas (2014, 968) has noted, scientists have "responsibilities to treat human and animal subjects with a high level of respect and to submit methodologies involving such subjects for review (e.g., to IRBs) to ensure that high standards are being met" Our objector notes that there is no similar process for vetting philosophical methodologies. Presumably they'd argue that this is because there are no similar moral risks involved in philosophical inquiry and practice. Such an objection, however, is working with an impoverished idea of what the ethics of research are.[13]

Consider closely the phrase, responsibilities to treat human and animal subjects with a high level of respect. Respect in experimentation can take familiar forms in scientific experimentation. For example, obtaining informed consent or simply not torturing test subjects. Respect, however, will include all kinds of things not obviously within this range. IRBs exist not only to ensure that ethical constraints apply to scientific research that has direct interventions in people's lives, but also to the social sciences and disciplines like ethnography. In order to take seriously the worry that we may be failing in our obligations to others when conducting philosophical inquiry, we need a broader understanding of our obligations to others are that already underpins the work that IRBs do, namely, that as researchers we have obligations to the broader community our research either involves or impacts. We've already established that there are at least two risks involved in philosophical inquiry, i.e., risks inherent in the content of the views under consideration and risks to the subjects of our inquiry. There are likely still further risks and simply because IRBs don't currently vet philosophical research doesn't mean they shouldn't.

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[12] Thanks to Gabbrielle Johnson for not only raising this objection but also suggesting how it should be answered.

[13] Another concern one might have is that philosophical research simply does not fall under the purview of IRB approval processes because the methods and knowledge produced by philosophical inquiry are simply not akin to the methods and knowledge produced by the sciences. I take up this worry in Section 4.

In virtue of engaging in this practice of philosophical inquiry we're well-positioned to think about the kinds of ethical risks that are already at issue in the sciences and think about whether those same risks, or variants of those risks, emerge for the work that we do. I cannot here hope to give a complete answer to the question of what respect in philosophical experimentation should look like, but I can gesture at at least one avenue for developing such an account that emerges from the recent literature on *doxastic wronging*. Doxastic wronging is the thesis that we can wrong others in virtue of what we believe about them. Although this view is controversial, the arguments given in its support also support the less controversial view that we could wrong others in how we go about asking questions about them.[14] Demonstrating the weaker claim is all we need to make plausible the idea that there are additional moral risks that emerge in the context of philosophical inquiry.

The challenge we face is that conducting inquiry about others seems to necessitate a certain abstraction and a certain removal from the standard moral relationships we find ourselves in. This sentiment is echoed in an open letter by Linda Martín Alcoff et al. (2019) where the authors state that, "[w]e should conduct our research freely and responsibly, without treating other people's lives as though they are abstract thought experiments." This form of abstract philosophical inquiry seems to require taking an *objective stance* towards the subjects of our inquiry. As P. F. Strawson (1962, 190) notes:

> To adopt the objective attitude to another human being is to see him, perhaps, as an object of social policy; as a subject for what, in a wide range of sense, might be called treatment; as something certainly to be taken account, perhaps precautionary account, of; to be managed or handled or cured or trained; perhaps simply to be avoided.

We adopt this objective attitude when the agent is excluded from ordinary human relationships, e.g., they are a child. Furthermore, this management, handling, training, or avoidance need not occur at the level of action, but it can also occur at the level of thought. For example, a therapist ought to take the objective attitude towards their patient to have the distance necessary for what is required of their role. The objective attitude, importantly for the questions of philosophical inquiry that interest us, can be taken up out of intellectual curiosity. If philosophical inquiry can take the form of asking questions about the worthwhileness of someone's life, about whether it is morally permissible to engage in a discriminatory practice, about what status individuals are to be afforded, to do such inquiry we must choose to view those that will be affected by the conclusions of our arguments as objects of study. In so doing, we cannot have, or we actively choose not to have, an ordinary interpersonal relationship with those we are

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[14] For more on doxastic wronging see Basu and Schroeder (2019), Basu (2019b), and Basu (2021). See also Enoch and Specter (manuscript) for some criticisms of the view.

theorizing about.[15] In doing so, we no longer reason *with* them, but rather reason about them.[16]

Consider also María Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman's (1983, 576) critique of white feminist philosophy. They note, (in a hispana voice), "there is nothing that necessitates that [white/Anglo feminists] understand our world: understand, that is, not as an observer understands things, but as *a participant* understands them" (emphasis added). Although not necessarily the same as the objective stance and participant stance distinction that one finds in Strawson, we see here again an articulation of the idea that there are risks involved in abstraction that go beyond mere epistemic risk, i.e., the risk of abstracting away important details of the case and being led away from the truth in that abstraction. When you abstract, you perceive *arrogantly* as Marilyn Fyre (1983) argues. Similarly, when you abstract you run the risks that emerge from no longer knowing *with others* when their perspectives may be essential to the subject at hand (see Pohlhaus 2006). That is, while you run the epistemic risk of missing valuable information that ought to inform your theorizing, crucially you run the additional distinctively moral risk of failing to treat others as they ought to be treated. To make this idea of "failing to treat others as they ought to be treated" clearer, let us consider the harms that emerge from not being sensitive to this risk.

Take, for example, a prominent philosopher giving a prominent keynote at a prominent conference. The risks present in the content of their presentation combined with the risks present in their choice of abstract methodology, is likely going to place them in a position to undermine the standing of threatened groups when they argue that members of that group ought to be discriminated against. What has been neglected is an additional risk that they ought to be sensitive to which concerns the standing of the group they're inquiring about. This example is of course not merely a fanciful philosophical thought to play with, but rather it is the event that prompted the first draft of this paper. I am here referring to the reaction to Richard Swinburne's keynote at a conference for the Society of Christian Philosophers. In his keynote address Swinburne put forward an argument that many objected to on moral grounds. This argument compared homosexuality to a disability, and the argument was reasonably taken to be offensive to both the LGBTQ community and to people with disabilities. In response, organizer Michael Rea issued an apology. After issuing the apology, he came under attack for doing so. Second, when Christina Van Dyke suggested that the ideas advanced in the keynote are responsible for "incalculable harm to vast numbers of disadvantaged people", she was mocked for appealing to some abstract, and supposedly laughable, notion that people could be harmed by a philosophy keynote.

I believe Swinburne's keynote did constitute a wrong toward members of the marginalized communities he was theorizing about and it is a good example of all three of the general risks involved in philosophical inquiry: the risk present in the choice of method, the view itself, and the risks to the subjects of the inquiry. That is, the wrongs

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[15] This isn't necessarily a bad thing, for example, as I conduct this piece of philosophical inquiry I am taking the objective attitude towards philosophers as philosophers are my object of study. It is, however, often a bad thing. There may be hard cases to categorize, and we do not wrong merely by taking the objective stance. However, what's important is acknowledging that occupying the objective stance comes with risk of wronging.

[16] Notice that this idea can also capture the intuitions underpinning the slogan, "nothing about us without us".

that stem from the keynote involve both the expressive harms that come from the publicity of his position as a keynote speaker, the method of abstraction, and disrespect for the subjects of his inquiry. On the first point, consider the signal that inviting problematic speakers to an event sends. Norms of invitations require that you treat the invited speaker respectfully. As Fantl (2018, 188) argues, "[t]his explains why the most harmful consequences of abusive speech in a university setting include debilitating feelings of isolation and estrangement. […] if you feel that the group shares the speaker's attitudes or even just thinks of them as a live hypothesis—then it is very difficult to feel like you are a member of the group." The wrong here is a kind of betrayal trauma. Borrowing from Jennifer Freyd (2008, 76), Fantl (2018, 189) notes that "[b]etrayal trauma is a kind of trauma that 'occurs when the people or institutions on which a person depends for survival significantly violate that person's trust or well-being.'" These sentiments are echoed explicitly in t philosopher's (2019) explanation for leaving the philosophy profession. She notes that she has "been driven off social media because of feelings of stress, vulnerability, anger, and pain that surface whenever there is new trans-related philosophical news." She no longer feels like philosophy offers her a community and these violations of trust have had a serious effect on her well-being. There is something worse about the publicity of a keynote, but even arguments that lack this level of publicity can betray a failure to demonstrate respect.[17]

In defense of the argument that beliefs can wrong, I've previously argued (see Basu 2021) that beliefs about others commit us to content that represents perspectival claims about that individual's status in the world. Our beliefs mediate our interpersonal relations with others, and in so doing, our beliefs carry moral weight and can themselves be the source of moral wrongdoing. If we consider the act of inquiry, when we play devil's advocate and entertain arguments just for the sake of argument, we are doing something when we put the argument forward, we are revealing something about ourselves, our commitments, and how we relate to the subject/s of our inquiry. In inquiry we may not be as committed to the content as when we believe, but inquiry into other persons nonetheless mediates our relationship to those persons. The wrong here is an interpersonal one; the wrong here is a relational one. When conducting philosophical inquiry, we are not thereby absolved from the moral recommendation to do better by one another. That is, given that philosophical inquiry reflects your commitments to subjects of your inquiry, there is an extra demand, an extra burden, on the inquirer to assure the subjects of your inquiry that you do not in fact have a deficiency of moral respect for them.

To sum up where we have now arrived, although certain moral risks involving scientific experimentation are absent in philosophical thought experiments, we see a distinctive kind of moral risk arise in the latter context. This is the risk of not treating others as we ought, or more simply, a risk of treating the subjects of our inquiry as *objects*. This is a risk that emerges from the abstraction that characterizes much of philosophical inquiry, so it is a risk distinctive of the methods we choose to employ. Relatedly we can ask

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[17] As Anderson and Pildes (2000) note, standing is an important social good, part of the "basis for self-respect" that political philosophers take to be more fundamentally important than even distributive claims. You can have your standing eroded by repeatedly publicly questioning whether you have it, and this erosion occurs more quickly when the standing was tenuous or already threatened. Thanks to Renée Jorgensen for helpful discussions of this point. Another aspect of this case worth considering is how the platform of a keynote gives higher-order evidence that the views being presented are the correct views that one ought have. For more on platforms and how they provide higher-order evidence, see Levy (2019).

whether there are some questions that are beyond the philosophical pale. Perhaps there are some questions that one cannot ask in a way that is compatible with orienting towards others with dignity and treating them as beings that are worthy as respect, i.e., questions concerning whether or not they are deserving of dignity or respect, as we've previously discussed with regard to risks that might be inherent in the content of view. Although I cannot settle this question here, it is one of the risks we must determine how to balance. And in asking that question we see that philosophical inquiry finds itself in a similar position as scientific inquiry in requiring an ethics of practice.

3. ON THE STRENGTH AND RELEVANCE OF THE ANALOGY

The second set of challenges an ethics for philosophical practice must contend with concerns both the strength and relevance of the analogy between scientific inquiry and philosophical inquiry. First, an objection could be raised that the real difference between philosophical inquiry and scientific inquiry is that scientific inquiry relies primarily on induction whereas philosophy relies primarily on deduction. For example, someone giving a metaphysical view of womanhood through conceptual analysis is engaging in a different form of inquiry than the kind of predictive inquiry that scientific practice is aimed at. My answer here will be quick and I again draw on resources from philosophy of science. The more you narrow what philosophy is and aims to do in order to cut its ties with anything resembling practical import as discussed in Section 1, the less well that model of philosophy will serve us as a general model of philosophical research. For example, consider John Dupré's (2012, 65) explanation of why physics is a bad model to employ when thinking through questions about the place of values in scientific inquiry:

> There are plenty of more or less wholly value-free statements, but they achieve that status by restricting themselves to things that are of merely academic interest to us. This is one reason that physics has been a sometimes disastrous model for the rest of science. We hardly want to limit science to the investigation of things that don't matter much to us one way or the other. The application of assumptions appropriate only to things that don't matter to those that do is potentially a disastrous one.[18]

Perhaps there will be fewer harms attached to methods of inquiry that are the most abstract and in those cases our inquiry can continue unrestrained. Restricting ourself to such a narrow conception of philosophical inquiry, however, ignores the breadth of what philosophical inquiry seeks to question. As soon as the subject of that inquiry concerns actual people in the actual world, risks will enter into the picture again and we need an account of how we ought to respond to these risks. That is, we cannot escape the need to develop an ethics of philosophical practice by retreating to more abstraction.

A more challenging objection is that mitigating the risks involved in doing philosophy might undermine the philosophical enterprise itself. As Graham Priest (2006) notes (and as feminist philosophers of science have noted more generally, see Anderson 2004 and Antony 2002), a certain dogmatism is essential to scientific inquiry. According to

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[18] Thanks to Gabbrielle Johnson for bringing this quote to my attention.

Priest (2006), what distinguishes philosophical inquiry from other intellectual endeavors is how central the development of a critical attitude is to philosophy.

The conception of philosophy that Priest (2006) offers is *philosophy as critique*. According to this conception, unlike other disciplines like mathematics, history, or the sciences, when it comes to philosophy "there is nothing that may not be challenged" (Priest 2006, 201). This conception of philosophy has three salient features. First, philosophy is subversive. Second, philosophy is unsettling. And third, philosophy challenges everything, it is of "universal import" (Priest 2006, 203). That is, as philosophers we are in the business of asking questions designed to unsettle, and as a result, often questions that also upset. Crucially, the critical attitude at the core of philosophical inquiry is unrestrained. Thus, to impose limits on inquiry or to impose boundaries on what questions may be asked is to undermine the philosophical enterprise itself. This is the sense in which perhaps addressing the moral risks I previously outlined is antithetical to philosophical practice.[19] Furthermore, according to Priest (2016), we must not only question everything, but we are also allowed to use our most adversarial methods to do so in the interests of unsettling others and being subversive. However, this conception of philosophy as critique obscures what it is we in fact do when we inquire.

The idealized view of philosophy that has been offered privileges certain kinds of critique and a certain kind of methodology while disallowing other kinds as inconsistent with the philosophical project of open unfettered inquiry. However, as we'll see, this conception itself leaves itself open to the critique that philosophy is not engaged in mere critique. That is, one response is to say that critique should be more universally applied. That is, in critiquing philosophical inquiry itself we should engage in an honest self-assessment of philosophy and this practice of inquiry. If inquiry involves limiting areas open for consideration, perhaps there are moral considerations that shift those limits to ones that are more conscientiously concerned with their effects on the most marginalized.[20] Relatedly, developing an ethics of philosophical practice may not only involve reconsidering what questions we consider, what boundaries we draw, but also what methodologies we employ in exploring those questions and in mapping conceptual space. That is, our choice of methodology is itself a value judgment and it is here that we see another familiar argument from the philosophy of science: the demarcation problem (see Longino 1995, 1996). Methodology-choice is a value-laden

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[19] Although it's true that anything can be questioned, we often bracket certain questions when discussing others. After all, consider the student in your class who continues to bring up external world skepticism as a challenge to every argument. The student seems to be doing philosophy, in some sense, *wrong*. Furthermore, even in the sciences we sometimes question the fundamentals, e.g., in a Kuhnian crisis. Perhaps in philosophy we just more often call the fundamentals into question, in which case there is no in principle distinction between scientific inquiry and philosophical inquiry, just a difference in degree.

[20] See, for example, Robin Dembroff's (2021, 1000) discussion of how when we ask the question "'what is a woman?', philosophers must be aware that proposed answers bear real-world consequences for people – including persons with intersex variations, women of color, and trans and gender nonconforming persons." Furthermore, as Dembroff (2021, 1001) further notes, echoing the observations about moral encroachment and the higher stakes involved in some debates, it does not follow from this that what this awareness, this shifting of limits, requires is that we "we should construct whatever definition would least offend, or would best cater to the wishes of these groups. Rather, we take this awareness to place a moral obligation on us to be particularly scrupulous, rigorous, and informed about our subject matter. Doing so requires demonstrating sensitivity to relevant existing literature, both inside and outside of analytic philosophy, as well as understanding this issue's stakes and complexity."

choice and it is one of the risks we must be sensitive to when engaging in philosophical inquiry. Given that we are not in fact free to choose any method we wish when engaging in philosophical inquiry I will canvas an alternative method to the method of critique. I turn now to discussing each of these points in more detail.

On the first point, philosophical boundaries, as Kristie Dotson (2011) has pointed out, philosophers don't in fact ask questions about everything. There are baked in limitations of what gets asked. Thus, Priest's framing doesn't capture the way in which philosophy is actually practiced. As Dotson (2011, 403) notes, the questions that get counted as philosophical questions are often "constricted, oppressive, and ethnocentric." While commenting on philosophy's leaky pipeline and its inability to retain the small number of diverse people it manages to attract, Dotson (2011, 403) notes that when she watches one or two philosophically trained Black women quit the field of philosophy each year the final realization that serves as their impetus for quitting "is not, 'I have failed at philosophy,' but rather, 'philosophy has failed me.'" Many of the diverse people that philosophy manages to attract can get pushed out because the questions they ask do not get treated as philosophical questions. As Dotson goes on to note, she routinely gets asked how the questions she's asking count as philosophy (see also Dotson 2012). That such questions arise strongly suggests that there are background conditions baked into how we do philosophy, and these background conditions make themselves apparent under the guise of disciplinary boundaries.

What Dotson (2011) finds is that a certain set of questions and a certain adversarial method in addressing those questions have become privileged. What counts as philosophical are positions that have already been staked out. After all, those are positions that can be *critiqued*. And given the demographic make-up of the history of philosophy, it is often the case that the questions and philosophical positions that have been staked out do not speak to practitioners like herself. As Dotson (2011, 407) puts it:

> [A]cademic philosophy is structured in such a way that established trends in philosophical thought delimit what questions can be addressed, and this is reinforced by the dominant conception of philosophy as critique; this effectively marginalizes problems and/or concerns of diverse people that do not fit comfortably within an already set disciplinary agenda.

Of course, it is not *good* that philosophy has these sorts of disciplinary boundaries. How the boundaries have been set up is to exclude practitioners like Dotson. So, according to this first response, although philosophers like Priest might think that philosophical inquiry aims at challenging everything, in actuality, philosophical inquiry is constrained by a disciplinarily enforced border regarding what sorts of questions can be debated and what sorts of questions get uptake. In this regard, philosophical inquiry more closely resembles scientific inquiry and in developing an ethics of philosophical practice we can't pretend that there aren't boundaries. Instead, what we must do is accept that there are boundaries and determine what they ought to be. In pursuing this normative question, we're now engaging in the same line of inquiry as feminist philosophers of

science with regard to whether the value-free ideal is the right model for scientific inquiry.[21]

Philosophers of science have long debated the role of ethical and moral considerations in settling the question of which scientific hypothesis to accept, and as Helen Longino (1995, 1996) has argued, there is no purely epistemically hallowed set of epistemic virtues or principles in guiding hypothesis selection. For example, the choice between a theory that promotes accuracy on the one hand and novelty on the other depends not on purely epistemic considerations but socio-political ones. This is the demarcation problem in philosophy of science and an analog to it appears in the case of philosophical inquiry. What are the set of epistemic virtues or principles that ought to guide hypothesis selection in philosophical inquiry? Given that we're now asking the same questions, scientific inquiry and philosophical inquiry seem to have much more in common than the initial philosophy as critique objection suggested.

To see a place where we have this value-laden choice about something that seems otherwise purely epistemic, consider the risks we incur in our choice of methodologies. Some ways of engaging in philosophical inquiry carry with them risks of harm that have been outlined in Section 2. Philosophical inquiry in fact admits of a plurality of methodologies and our choice between these methodologies (and which we determine to be legitimate or illegitimate) is a value-laden choice. For example, instead of subversion, we might instead seek a methodology that promotes the virtue of illumination.

To arrive at this alternative methodology, let us first consider the assumptions that are baked into the idea that philosophical inquiry is at its roots a subversive practice, designed to wake one from their dogmatic slumber and challenge the status quo. As Talia Mae Bettcher (2019, 8) has noted:

> [T]his conception of philosophy rests on a highly controversial assumption: namely that for the "prephilosophical man" the "world tends to become obvious" and "common objects rouse no questions" and that this man is "imprisoned in the prejudices derived from common sense." In short, this is to assume that all appeared well and good before philosophy arrived on the scene: Our common sense, our everyday understanding of the world was, if superficial, happily undisturbed. In other words, this is to assume a close fit between individuals and their "everyday."

As Bettcher goes on to note, this assumption is baseless, and the baselessness of the assumption is clear to those of us for whom the world has never been obvious and our movement through the world as routinely been questioned and challenged. Bettcher (2019, 8) notes that for trans people, their version of the "everyday" is "shot through with perplexity, shot through with WTF questions. We live in the WTF. We did not need philosophy to uncover its perplexity. It was already there."

We do of course need to be a bit more careful here. It might be that given one's experiences they'll be more likely to take a skeptical or distanced attitude towards gender norms, social norms, or sexual norms. But it's unclear to what extent that translates to a broader skeptical attitude towards other questions in philosophy, e.g., the nature of causation. Nonetheless, we can draw out the general lesson that the value of philosophy stems not from the installation of a critical attitude in a particularly subversive or adversarial mode as there are other ways a critical attitude might be installed. Rather, for certain practitioners and certain approaches to questions, a better method is not critique, but rather illumination. This tension with philosophy of critique offers us a response to the earlier normative question of whether philosophy ought to aspire to a more ideal form of philosophy of critique. The answer we're pushed towards ,if we take Bettcher's philosophy as illumination seriously, is "no". Philosophy as illumination is of course compatible with philosophy as critique, but as Bettcher will go on to note, we need to be better about the questions we close-off.[22]

As anyone working on topics concerning race and racism can attest, there will always be an audience member that challenges a paradigmatic example of racism as not in fact racist. There is often nothing satisfactory that one can say, in part because they're not really playing a cooperative game and Bettcher's (2019) account can help illuminate the wrong in the lack of cooperation. If one does not take certain presumptions on board or one tries to argue that they're false, as Bettcher (2019, 10) argues, then "one is not doing feminist, queer, or trans philosophy at all; one is doing something else. At least on the face of it, this 'something else' looks, in part, like an attempt to undermine the validity of these very domains of inquiry." The objector might now return to their original question and ask whether acceptance of starting points runs against the spirit of philosophical inquiry. However, just as it is mistaken to think that scientific inquiry has no starting points and that those starting points aren't shot through with value judgments, so too it is a mistake to think that philosophical inquiry has no standardly accepted starting points as demonstrated here by Bettcher and Dotson's arguments.

As Bettcher (2019, 11) also notes, "the acceptance of starting points is necessary to any philosophical investigation, and the sorts of starting points accepted vary depending upon the philosophical endeavor at hand." Consider, for example, what is inappropriate about raising the skeptical scenarios that we cannot know that trolleys exist (given external world skepticism) during a talk about trolley cases. There is a time and a place for external world skepticism, but a talk on trolley cases is clearly not it. Similarly, consider my audience member's resistance to granting the basic starting assumptions about racism as being analogous to an audience member's resistance to grant the basic starting assumption that an external world exists. Furthermore, even the choice of example here ought to be scrutinized. After all, when talking about trolley cases we might be subject to the critique that we are once again using people as abstract objects for the purpose of philosophical play. Not only do we have a case where actual people are being used as a thought experiments, the structure of the case elides important features of our actual world that are central to ethical decision making. As Robin James (2018) notes, when you put someone at "the helm of [the] trolley, we see that the trolley problem is a fun puzzle to solve precisely because it abstracts away from the physical,

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[22] And as Dotson argued, we also need to be better about the questions we give space to so that they can be taken up. And as the discussions of power have noted, we need to be better about whose voices should be uplifted given whose voices are already so prevalent in much of philosophical research.

emotional, and affective experience of violence and death." The choice of trolley examples, itself, betrays certain background commitments and assumptions.[23]

4. CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

This project can be seen as continuing a conversation started by the Thiem et al.'s (2019) white paper on publication ethics. When thinking about what principles should guide ethical research in philosophy, we need first to articulate what risks are present in the practice and disarm the objection that ethical constraints on the practice of philosophy would undermine the very thing that makes philosophy different from the other disciplines. Philosophy is not unique in being immune from moral criticism. However, there is something that the objector gets right. The ethical guidelines for philosophical practice stem from distinctive risks present in philosophical inquiry that are in some ways different from the risks that give rise to ethical guidelines for other forms of inquiry, e.g., scientific inquiry. That is, there are kinds of moral criticism apt for philosophical inquiry that are unique to how it is practiced.

Comparing the need for ethical oversight for philosophical research to the *raison d'être* for IRBs might suggest that the answer to the lack of ethical oversight for philosophical research is to implement IRB approval for philosophical projects. While some philosophical work, e.g., work in experimental philosophy that involves the recruiting of test subjects, does require IRB approval, philosophical work more generally is excluded from requiring IRB approval. The reason given is that philosophical research is not considered "research". For example, the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Office of Research Integrity defines research as follows: "a systematic investigation (i.e., the gathering and analysis of information) designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge."[24] Because the philosophical method is considered neither systematic, i.e., it doesn't employ the scientific method, nor generalizable, i.e., the conclusions about a sample population are not taken to extend to the wider population represented by the sample, the knowledge produced in most philosophical articles doesn't count as research in the way that the term 'research' is used by IRBs. Although this might suggest we have further reason to reject the comparison between scientific research and philosophical research, that would be too quick. That there are different methods and different research outcomes does not eliminate the need for developing an ethics of practice for philosophical inquiry. Rather, what this demonstrates is that the current model of IRB approval is not well-suited to evaluating the particular risks present in the methods employed by philosophers. So, either we ought to expand definition of research used by IRBs to both include methods beyond the scientific method and a definition of generalizable knowledge that is similarly more expansive or we should think seriously about alternative, i.e., non-IRB, models for ethical oversight. Either route requires taking seriously that there are ethical concerns that arise in the course of philosophical research and the question of how best to address those concerns.

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[23] Consider also Anscombe's (1957, 267) argument that Oxford moral philosophy corrupts the youth by focusing "on examples which are either banal: you have promised to return a book, but…and so on; or fantastic: what you ought to do if you had to move forward, and stepping with your right food meant killing twenty-five fine young men while stepping with your left foot would kill fifty drooling old ones."

[24] See https://ori.hhs.gov/module-1-introduction-what-research

Further, when evaluating the risks involved in philosophical inquiry, I want to put forward a word of caution: in saying that philosophy is a morally hazardous activity I do not mean to suggest that we should refrain from all philosophical inquiry that carries any sort of risk. We engage in risky activities all the time. However, to answer the question of how much risk we should tolerate, how we should respond to the risks inherent in philosophical practice, we need to first recognize that there are risks. In thinking about how to balance these risks, there are many open questions that remain. For example, as we think about how philosophy is practiced in academia, there are important dimensions of power and authority that will need to be accounted for in a full development of an ethics of practice for philosophy. For example, sometimes dismantling structural injustice will cause harm and when proposing solutions those who have been treated unjustly may have a better understanding of what justice requires than those who treat others unjustly do.[25] That is, as we think about how to balance the risks of inquiry we must also contend with questions of justice and power. Nonetheless, the goal of this paper has been much more modest. As a first step in the conversation my goal has been to draw attention to at least three such risks: risks present in the methods we employ, risks inherent in the content of the views under consideration, and risks to the subjects of our inquiry.

For more complicating factors, consider Barrett Emerick's (2021) arguments concerning the questions that arise at the intersection of free speech and academic freedom that might also arise for what kinds of questions we can responsibly ask and investigate. Further, earlier I discussed Dotson's (2011) observation that given the demographic make-up of the history of philosophy, it is often the case that the questions and philosophical positions that have been staked out do not speak to practitioners like herself. There are, however, even deeper concerns still about the history of philosophy and how the demographic make-up of the field may obfuscate and lead our inquiry astray. For example, when Charles Mills (2007, 14) critiques the whiteness of philosophy and the white racial frame that shapes philosophical inquiry he quotes Linda Martín Alcoff's (1996, 2, n. 1) observation that "the 'society' about which these philosophers are writing often seems to be composed exclusively of white males." In addition, perhaps there are also deep structural issues present in how our research is published, the incentive structures present in academia, and as Remco Heesen and Liam Bright (forthcoming) have argued with respect to scientific practice, we ought to abolish peer review more generally. Further still, since the first draft of this paper and various revisions, a lot has happened in professional philosophy that demonstrates the every-growing pressing need for developing an ethics of philosophical practice. For example, this journal and others have had their own publication ethics controversies, the inaugural issue of *The Journal of Controversial Ideas* has been published, and even more philosophers have decided to leave a profession that treats their lives as playthings.

I cannot provide all the answers to how we should do philosophy in an ethically responsible way but I hope this paper will provide some much-needed impetus for taking seriously the question of what an ethics of practice ought to look like for philosophical inquiry. An ethical reckoning of philosophy is called for by—and calls out—the very sort of inquiry that philosophy is.

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[25] Here we might also consider Douglas's (2003) discussion of the moral responsibility of scientists and the difference between role responsibilities and general responsibilities with regard to how much autonomy scientists ought to give up in subjecting their work to moral scrutiny.

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