

Reverse Engineering the Canon

Deconstructing the Canon of the History of Philosophy

Name: Jil Delling

Supervisor: Carlo Ierna

Context

- ❖ History of philosophy teachings consist of very limited canon of philosophers (the big 7)
- ❖ This leaves out a significant number of philosophers
 - ❖ multiple philosophical works seem to have just been forgotten
- ❖ Needless to say: none of them are female!
- ❖ But history of philosophy has a huge influence on our society today

The big 7:

Rank order	Philosopher	No. of articles	% of total	Cumulative % of total
1=	Descartes	44.25	9.5	
1=	Kant	44.25	9.5	19.0
3	Hume	38.5	8.3	27.3
4	Locke	36.95	7.9	35.2
5	Leibniz	29.4	6.3	41.5
6	Berkeley	17.5	3.8	45.3
7	Spinoza	16.75	3.6	48.9

Research aim:

- ❖ **Ultimate aim:** get away from traditional way of teaching history of philosophy and demonstrating a new way of exploring and learning about it
- ❖ We can do this by:
 - ❖ Re-examining how this canon was chosen and look at other philosophers in the modern age
 - ❖ Teaching modern philosophy in reverse chronological order
- ❖ This gives us the opportunity to deconstruct the canon of the history of philosophy
- ❖ Making the history of philosophy more diverse: including philosophers of different gender, culture, and race

Research Procedure:

- ❖ To start this project off, I first read through a few articles which pointed out the disappearance of female philosophers after the late 18th century and examined the prominence of the 'big 7' in today's articles and journals.
- ❖ Afterwards, we looked at various historiographies of different philosophers, and produced a huge spreadsheet including all philosophers who were mentioned, organised in a chronological order. This allowed us to see whether there is indeed some kind of pattern or a narrow canon.
- ❖ Next, we researched the reasons behind this specific chosen canon by reading through their introductions and prefaces to investigate whether the philosophers provide reasons for choosing to mention specific philosophers.
- ❖ Finally, we put together and analysed our results and discussed these, their meanings, implications and what we could do about them.

Relevance:

- ❖ Philosophy defines many things in today's society, such as what we see as knowledge or freedom, and what is a right or wrong way of living. Moreover, philosophy strengthened prejudices like sexism and racism in a way that is still very notable today. Changing the way history of philosophy is taught and bringing other philosophies to the foreground can have a great effect on credibility, because this is directly related to each other. It will also give those cultures more credibility because we can see where it comes from and how much stands behind their beliefs and cultures. Furthermore, I think that nowadays it is essential to include works and philosophical perspectives by women as well.

