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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Open-mindedness and ajar-mindedness in history of philosophy

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Abstract
There was once a princess called Sophia,
whose philosophy museum was superior.
But most of the stores
became locked behind doors,
which led to collective amnesia.

Then along came a band of ajar-minders,
who decided to issue reminders
of the treasures inside
that hadn't yet died,
and opened the doors to all finders.

KEYWORDS
ajar-mindedness, broadening the canon, closed-mindedness, Eurocentrism, history of philosophy, open-mindedness

INTRODUCTION

Open-mindedness is generally regarded as a paradigm intellectual virtue, with closed-mindedness the corresponding vice. Open-mindedness is clearly a virtue in both philosophy and history of philosophy. We should be open to as many different views as possible and take them seriously both in forming and arguing for our own and in expounding and evaluating those of others. Yet open-mindedness is a character trait, and its mere possession by some people does not guarantee its possession by others. Institutional structures must be right to enable open-mindedness to flourish. We must facilitate the opening of doors for all of us to develop open-mindedness. Having too many open doors available may leave someone paralysed for choice, however, and none of us, individually, can open all the doors that we might like to be open. Nevertheless, we can all play a part in making sure that doors are not closed, and I want to capture this by talking of 'ajar-mindedness', the concern to leave doors at least sufficiently open for someone to glimpse the reward that lies behind them (playing on the fittingly cross-cultural ambiguity of 'ajar', which means 'slightly open' in English and 'reward' in Arabic and Urdu). We can

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think of this as more a practical than a theoretical virtue—or as an institutional virtue needed to complement the intellectual virtue of open-mindedness. In this paper I focus on the virtues of open-mindedness and ajar-mindedness—and the vice of closed-mindedness—in (the practice of) history of philosophy,[1] but I hope what I say will have relevance in other areas. Being open-minded in history of philosophy includes being open-minded about the genres in which philosophy and histories of philosophy have been written in the history of philosophy, so let us begin with a story (*eine Geschichte*, with appropriate play in German).

1 | THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY MUSEUM

Some three hundred years ago, in the central German principality of Thinkingia, Princess Sophia, who had been taught by the great Enlightenment philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, decided to build a palace to house all the works of philosophy that she had been collecting. Her wealth enabled her to buy up whole libraries, but her reputation became such that she was sent a copy of every new publication in Europe, and guests from wider afield also brought with them texts from their own countries when they visited, practices that continued after her death. The palace was gradually extended over the years to house all the texts, and it now has thousands of rooms of different sizes and shapes, some filled with the works of just one philosopher together with the burgeoning commentaries on those works, and some bringing together the texts of lesser-known philosophers grouped by period and country. The layout of the rooms has evolved, too, with walls removed to create bigger rooms and walls added to divide into smaller rooms. Carefully selected curators and scholars have had access to the various rooms over the centuries, but after the Second World War the palace was officially established as the History of Philosophy Museum and opened to the public.

The museum gradually attracted more and more visitors, and guides were employed to show people around. Most people only came for brief visits, so the guided tours were designed to show them the highlights. In fact, many of the rooms had become so dusty and dilapidated over the years that they had had to be closed for health and safety reasons, or their collections moved into the basement stores to enable grander rooms to be created to display the star exhibits. Certain tours became very popular, most notably the 'Magnificent Seven Ride', as it came to be known, through the imposing halls of early modern European philosophy, with a choice of taking the Rationalist Route or the Empiricist Experience if short of time. This earned the museum a lot of money, facilitating new building projects, such as the permanent exhibition called 'Where It All Began' in a reconstruction of Plato's Academy in the landscaped gardens, with an underground cave and an interactive hologram of Socrates, who would interrogate you as soon as you said anything. The 'Fab Four Tour' in the new modernist extension to the West Wing, displaying analytic philosophy, has been growing in popularity among foreign visitors, with computers available to translate everything you say into a choice of logical languages. The greatest investment was made, though, in the stunning Museum Shop and Café, which now has far more visitors than the museum itself. As well as buying homeopathic hemlock tea or super-intense Kierkegaardian coffee to drink in the café, you can purchase potted guidebooks to the most famous philosophers and replicas of Descartes's stove, Heidegger's hammer, and Wittgenstein's poker, with a knockdown for all three. (The replicas of Occam's razor were withdrawn some time ago.)

[1]The term 'history' is used in three main senses. As I have noted elsewhere (e.g., Beaney 2019), it can mean a (relevant) series of past events, a (relevant) account of such a series, or the discipline of writing such accounts. Context usually makes clear which sense is intended, but I generally use it in the first sense with the definite article, as in speaking of 'the history of philosophy' to denote philosophy's actual past, in the second sense with either the indefinite or no article, as in speaking of 'writing a history of philosophy', and in the third sense with no article, as in speaking of 'doing history of philosophy'. Where any confusion might arise, an appropriate qualification will be added in parentheses, as here.

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In recent years, however, there has been growing criticism of the museum's curatorial policies and practices. Both enthusiasts of early modern European philosophy and critics of the Magnificent Seven Ride urged the museum to show more early modern stuff. Elisabeth of Bohemia's correspondence, which had been Princess Sophia's particular favourite, was found in one of the sealed rooms adjoining the Descartes chamber, and the room was reopened to exhibit it. Other texts by women writers were found in the basement stores, and a decision was made to create a 'Women's Way' weaving through the existing rooms, with some new connecting corridors via the basement. The tours were always booked up, but people complained about the dinginess of the corridors. Visitor research prompted comments on the oppressive and putrid air in the Kant library at the end of the Magnificent Seven Ride, with its thousands of tomes in multiple languages. Removing some of the shelving revealed smaller rooms hidden behind, with all sorts of eighteenth-century works that contained surprising anticipation and development of Kant's views. Several skeletons were also discovered, presumably of scholars who had got trapped there when the rooms were sealed. So the library was redesigned, with the rooms cleaned and opened up.

Princess Sophia had had a special interest in Chinese philosophy and had collected all the Latin translations that had been made of Chinese texts by the missionaries as well as works in Chinese that were given to her. A breathtaking Chinese Room had been built to display them, but by the time of the nineteenth century, there were few scholars left to read the Chinese, and the texts were deemed philosophically insignificant. They were sacked and dumped in the basement, and the Chinese Room was whitewashed to form the new American Arcade. The Chinese texts have been rescued from the basement, however, and a new Chinese Room is being planned.

Inevitably, all these developments generated controversy. Some argued that the Chinese Room should be housed in a separate building with other incomprehensible exotica, while inclusivists wanted space to be found in the main building. This became known as the Chinese Room Argument. Some felt frustrated at the sluggishness of change and vented their fury by breaking into the museum on Walpurgisnacht and defacing the statues of Hume and Kant. A new group of 'Friends of the History of Philosophy Museum', nicknamed the 'Ajar-minders', was set up to advise the museum on the changes needed, and this has resulted in many of the smaller rooms and basement stores being opened and their doors left permanently ajar to allow glimpses of the treasures inside in the hope that some people, at least, will enter and be encouraged to help in their restoration. All sorts of disCarded texts in the unLocked rooms have been exHumed and deKanted into new displays. To prevent Berkeleying up the wrong treatments, as the new Spinoza-doctors put it, there are plans to have special exhibitions organized by theme and genre rather than philosopher and period. Some texts were even discovered that presented arguments in the form of stories, exemplifying all sorts of subversive virtues, a discovery that caused acute discomfort among the senior curators. The Ajar-minders have crowdsourced the creation of a playroom in which younger visitors can write their own stories about their experiences in the new History of Philosophy Museum. *Narrare aude!*

2 | INTELLECTUAL VIRTUES AND VICES

In *Vices of the Mind*, Quassim Cassam offers a wonderfully rich and persuasive account of what he calls 'epistemic vices', a term he says he prefers to 'intellectual vices' to highlight how such vices "get in the way of knowledge" (2019, 5). This leads him to call his account (slightly paradoxically) *obstructivism*, captured in the following definition:

> (OBS) An epistemic vice is a blameworthy or otherwise reprehensible character trait, attitude, or way of thinking that systematically obstructs the gaining, keeping, or sharing of knowledge. (23)

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The focus on the obstruction of knowledge makes good sense, especially in an age marked by an increasingly dangerous disdain for 'truth' and 'facts'. But I see no reason to restrict concern with intellectual vices to their effect on knowledge, especially when Cassam himself has a very specific conception of knowledge in mind, namely, propositional knowledge (knowledge-that), understood as requiring not just true belief but 'reasonable confidence' (10).

Now it may be that Cassam's account at various places depends on his particular conception of knowledge, but I will take his word that that account is compatible with more than one view of knowledge (10). Indeed, a lot of what he says is also compatible with, or at least readily adaptable to, other forms of 'cognition'. Consider, for example, *understanding*, taken as involving explanation and (connective) comprehensiveness rather than justification and (propositional) exactness.[2] Here it might be better to talk of 'intellectual' rather than 'epistemic' virtues and vices, and we could adapt Cassam's definition accordingly:

> An intellectual vice is a blameworthy or otherwise reprehensible character trait, attitude, or way of thinking that systematically obstructs the gaining, deepening, or promoting of understanding.

From now on, then, I will talk of 'intellectual' rather than 'epistemic' virtues and vices, since this allows us to be more open to the full range of forms of cognition that may be fostered or obstructed by certain virtues and vices.

3 | OPEN-MINDEDNESS AND CLOSED-MINDEDNESS

Open-mindedness is often given as a paradigm example of an intellectual virtue, and closed-mindedness, as Cassam puts it, "is usually at the top of philosophical lists of epistemic vices" (2019, 30). An open-minded person, as described by Jason Baehr and endorsed by Cassam, is someone who "characteristically moves beyond or temporarily sets aside his own doxastic commitments in order to give a fair and impartial hearing to the intellectual opposition", who "is willing to follow the argument where it leads and to take evidence and reasons at face value" (Baehr 2011, 142; Cassam 2019, 150; cf. Riggs 2019, 150). A closed-minded person, by contrast, is described by Cassam as someone who "is disposed to freeze on a given conception, to be reluctant to consider new information, to be intolerant of opinions that contradict their own, and so on" (2019, 33). Both are taken as character traits, that is, as "stable dispositions to act, think and feel in particular ways" (12, 31). They are further described as *high-fidelity* (rather than low-fidelity) traits, traits that require a high degree of consistency in manifestation to be attributed to someone (32–34), and as traits for which we are *revision responsible* (rather than acquisition responsible), traits that can be modified by our own efforts, which is why we can be commended or blamed for them (42–43).

Is closed-mindedness always a vice, however? Drawing on the work of the psychologist Arie Kruglanski (2004), Cassam notes the need that we often have for cognitive closure, for firm and unambiguous answers to questions, which enables us to "get on with our lives" (2019, 5, 17, 35–36). But valuing closure is not valuing closed-mindedness, he argues, since closure in its 'proper sense' means having done all that could reasonably be done in answering a question, and this is not a vice (36). Another reason that might be given for valuing closed-mindedness is that it helps us protect knowledge we already have—as when we refuse to listen, for example, to conspiracy theories that might undermine our confidence. But here, Cassam responds, we must

[2]For arguments for shifting the focus from knowledge to understanding, see, e.g., Zagzebski 2020a and 2020b; Elgin 2006; Roberts and Wood 2007; Grimm 2019. On Maria Montessori's views on this, see section 9 below.

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just recognize that if we do have knowledge, then any purported evidence that might be offered to change our minds is likely to be false (37).

In chapter 5 he addresses the related issue of whether dogmatism is sometimes justified—for example, in helping the scientist in what Kuhn called 'normal science' maintain the commitments needed to solve the problems within the relevant 'paradigm'. In response to this, Cassam suggests that what we actually have here is better described as firmness or tenacity, the contrary of which is not open-mindedness but intellectual 'flaccidity' (2019, 113), a term he takes from Roberts and Wood (2007, 185). Tenacity is needed to pursue an answer to a question as far as it will go, to the point where remaining problems or anomalies can no longer be dealt with or ignored, when open-mindedness is indeed then needed to find alternative approaches.

4 | OPEN-MINDEDNESS AND CLOSED-MINDEDNESS IN HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

Let us now turn to a field—history of philosophy—in which we can explore the issues of open-mindedness and closed-mindedness in a particularly instructive way, which is of great relevance at the present time when there is growing concern to broaden the canon and diversify the curriculum in (academic) philosophy. Most historians of philosophy would, I am sure, regard themselves as open-minded—open, for example, to any approach or discovery that might shed light on what they are interested in. Indeed, they might well regard themselves as much more open-minded than certain ahistorical analytic philosophers, who disdain—and often take pride in disdaining—'mere' history of philosophy in pursuing their own philosophical agenda. Historians of philosophy, it might be argued, are especially aware of the *presuppositions*, often hidden away in the historical context, of philosophical views. They may be willing to put aside their own commitments and views in trying to understand those of a past thinker, in just the way that is characteristic of open-mindedness.

Yet historians of philosophy typically have their own favourite philosopher or philosophical tradition or period, and in being (admirably) tenacious in trying to understand a past philosopher, they often become advocates or defenders of that philosopher. They may be open-minded in considering objections to that philosopher's views, but in interpreting and reconstructing those views in responding to the objections, they contribute to the formation of a canon that increasingly becomes fixed, as the history of philosophy itself shows. Even if historians of philosophy themselves, individually, are open-minded, then, the result may be *institutional closed-mindedness*: an institutional practice is established in which the work of only certain philosophers gets taught and researched. This may filter back down to the individual level, so that one might also talk of *professional closed-mindedness*: as a historian of philosophy in a university department, one may end up teaching the same set of philosophers year after year, encouraging further research on those philosophers and reinforcement of the canon. Recall that a closed-minded person was described above as someone who "is disposed to freeze on a given conception, to be reluctant to consider new information, to be intolerant of opinions that contradict their own, and so on" (Cassam 2019, 33). Correspondingly, one might speak of the *professional philosopher* or *philosophical profession* as a whole as disposed to freeze on a given canon or syllabus, to be reluctant to consider new (non-canonical) philosophers, to be intolerant of alternative traditions that conflict with their own, and so on. We are in a situation today where there is increasing recognition of just how closed-minded the philosophical profession is in this respect.

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TABLE 1 Top sixteen philosophers discussed in the *BJHP*, volumes 1–20

Rank order	Philosopher	No. of articles (in *BJHP*, vols. 1–20)	% 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
8	Hobbes	14.9	3.2	52.1
9	Aristotle	11.5	2.5	54.6
10	Malebranche	10.5	2.3	56.9
11	Reid	10.25	2.2	59.1
12=	Plato	7.5	1.6	
12=	Hegel	7.5	1.6	
12=	Mill	7.5	1.6	
12=	Kierkegaard	7.5	1.6	
12=	Nietzsche	7.5	1.6	67.1

5 | FROM CANON-FREEZING TO CANON-THAWING?

Let me provide some empirical evidence of canon-freezing by drawing on my own experience as editor of the *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* (*BJHP*) from 2011 to 2020. The journal was founded in 1993, and two years after I took over (having cleared a two-year backlog), I did an analysis of the articles published in the first twenty volumes of the *BJHP*. To my surprise I found that *half* the entire journal had been devoted to the work of just seven philosophers—what I called the 'Big Seven' of early modern philosophy. If one added the articles on nine more philosophers (including three more early modern philosophers), then that made up *two-thirds* of the entire journal. The results are displayed in Table 1 (Beaney 2013, 2, where the methodology is explained).

The *BJHP* was founded by John Rogers, a Locke scholar, and the Editorial Board was composed entirely of early modern scholars, so it is not surprising that papers on early modern philosophy were submitted and published. It is also true that, until relatively recently, standard courses and textbooks on early modern philosophy dealt almost entirely with the work of the Big Seven. When we consider the other nine philosophers listed in the table, they are also all canonical figures—three more from the early modern period, Plato and Aristotle from the ancient period, and four from the nineteenth century. Obviously enough, this simply reinforces the canon. A budding historian of philosophy will realize that they should work on one of the top canonical figures if they want to get published and find a teaching job in a department of philosophy.

While recognizing that there are very good reasons why these sixteen philosophers made it into the canon, publishing much more on other philosophers was my top priority as editor. The Editorial Board was gradually reformed to be more representative of work in history of philosophy, and I explicitly said in my 2013 editorial that we welcomed submissions on other philosophers, "not only on canonical figures outside the early modern period but also on lesser-known thinkers in all periods" (2013, 3). I did a second analysis five years later, and the results of the 'top sixteen' in those five years (volumes 21–25) are given in Table 2.

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TABLE 2 Top sixteen philosophers discussed in the *BJHP*, volumes 21–25

Rank order	Philosopher	No. of articles (in *BJHP*, vols. 21–25)	% of total	Cumulative % of total
1	Plato	13.5	5.3	5.3
2	Kant	12.08	4.7	10.0
3	Hume	11	4.3	14.3
4	Spinoza	9.25	3.6	17.9
5	Nietzsche	9	3.5	21.4
6	Leibniz	7.16	2.8	24.2
7	Hegel	7.08	2.8	27.0
8	Locke	7	2.7	29.7
9	Aristotle	6.75	2.6	32.3
10	Schelling	6	2.3	34.6
11	Hobbes	5	2.0	36.6
12	Descartes	4.83	1.9	38.5
13	Peirce	4.58	1.8	40.3
14=	Mill	4	1.6	
14=	Heidegger	4	1.6	43.4
16	Henry More	3.83	1.5	44.9

There are some interesting changes, on which I commented in the editorial in which I presented the results of the second analysis (Beaney 2018). For example, Berkeley made no appearance in this period (God was looking elsewhere, perhaps), and Peirce and More are there because of special issues we had. But the significant change, for present purposes, is the reduction in the proportion of articles published on the Big Seven from 49 percent to 20 percent, and on the earlier top sixteen from 67 percent to 40 percent, although there was now a new top sixteen that still took up 45 percent of the journal.

For comparison I also did an analysis of the *Journal for the History of Philosophy* (*JHP*) over the same five-year period (2013–17),[3] and the corresponding results for the top sixteen philosophers on the earlier *BJHP* list are given in Table 3.

What is remarkable about these figures is that the same sixteen philosophers make up two-thirds of the *JHP*, just as they did in the first twenty volumes of the *BJHP*, and the top seven on the *JHP* list form *half* the journal, just as the top seven on the earlier *BJHP* list formed half the journal (Plato and Aristotle making their appearance among the *JHP* top seven). There is a different ordering, with Kant way out in front in the *JHP*, and Descartes, Locke, and Berkeley much lower, but the core ancient/early modern philosophy canon is the same. The *JHP* was thus in the same position that the *BJHP* had been in five years earlier. I also noted that only nine articles were published in the *JHP* in this period on twentieth-century philosophy, half the number of those on Kant alone, and there was not a single article on any woman philosopher. Over the same five-year period, by contrast, there were seventy articles published in the *BJHP* on twentieth-century philosophy and eight on women philosophers, a sign that the canon was beginning to thaw. (For further details, see Beaney 2018.)

[3]Steven Nadler (early modern philosophy) was editor from 2013 to 2015, when Jack Zupko (medieval philosophy) took over. At the end of 2017 Zupko unilaterally imposed a moratorium on all early modern philosophy submissions, which caused uproar in the scholarly community. Although the moratorium was partly an attempt to reduce a backlog, it was also a heavy-handed way to thaw the canon, as early modern non-canonical figures, such as women philosophers, were also excluded.

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TABLE 3 Top sixteen philosophers in Table 1 as discussed in the *JHP*, volumes 51–55

Rank order	Philosopher	No. of articles (in *JHP*, vols. 51–55)	% of total	Cumulative % of total
1	Kant	18	15	15
2	Aristotle	9.5	7.9	22.9
3=	Plato	7	5.8	
3=	Hume	7	5.8	
3=	Spinoza	7	5.8	40.3
6=	Leibniz	6.5	5.4	
6=	Hobbes	6.5	5.4	51.1
8	Descartes	5	4.2	55.3
9	Locke	4.5	3.8	59.1
10	Nietzsche	2.5	2.1	61.2
11=	Hegel	2	1.7	
11=	Mill	2	1.7	64.6
Not ranked	Berkeley	1	0.8	
Not ranked	Malebranche	1	0.8	
Not ranked	Reid	1	0.8	67.1
Not ranked	Kierkegaard	0	0	67.1

6 | EUROCENTRISM

The canon as revealed by the articles published in the *JHP* and (the earlier volumes of) the *BJHP* will come as no surprise to any philosopher. Courses on ancient philosophy always include Plato and Aristotle, and courses on early modern philosophy the Big Seven (and often only these). When it comes to philosophy after Kant there may be some variation, but in the nineteenth century we will at least find Hegel and Nietzsche, and in the twentieth century we then get a divide between analytic and 'continental' philosophy. Courses on the history of analytic philosophy begin with Frege, Russell, Moore, and Wittgenstein, and on continental philosophy with Husserl, Heidegger, and Sartre. In America there may be separate courses on pragmatism, beginning with Peirce, James, and Dewey. There are obvious questions to ask. Why no women philosophers? Why no philosophers writing in languages other than Greek, Latin, English, French, and German? And why no 'non-European' philosophy?

The answers to these questions are long and complicated, and I can only gesture at the answers here. There has been a lot of work recently on women philosophers. The *BJHP*, for example, has published three special issues on women philosophers, in the early modern period, in the nineteenth century, and in the hundred years from 1870 to 1970.[4] Here we have definitely turned the corner, though there is much still to do, such as in broadening our conception of the genres in which philosophy is written (see, e.g., Hutton 2019). I will focus here on the third question, connecting it to the issue of closed-mindedness that we have been considering, which will indirectly (though only partly) help answer the second question. Does the undoubted Eurocentrism of current academic philosophy (at any rate in 'Western' university departments of philosophy) manifest closed-mindedness? And if so, how can we combat this?

[4]See issues 27, no. 4 (2019), 29, no. 2 (2021), and 30, no. 2 (2022), respectively. And for discussion of the issues raised by work on women philosophers, see the relevant introductions—Hagengruber and Hutton 2019, Stone and Alderwick 2021, Connell and Janssen-Lauret 2022a—as well as Hutton 2019. See also Connell and Janssen-Lauret 2022b.

7 | INSTITUTIONAL CLOSED-MINDEDNESS

Are philosophers working in Europe and North America especially closed-minded? It would be easy to draw this conclusion from the empirical evidence just given. On the other hand, as I have said, many philosophers themselves, individually, may be open-minded in the sense described by Baehr above, in their being willing "to give a fair and impartial hearing to the intellectual opposition" and "to follow the argument where it leads and to take evidence and reasons at face value". This presupposes, however, that they are *acquainted with* the intellectual opposition, and if we are thinking of 'non-European' opposition, then this is unlikely to be the case. They might be *aware of* such opposition, in the minimal sense that they know of its existence, but if the relevant texts have not been translated into languages that they understand, or secondary accounts given, then they are not in a position to give it any hearing at all, let alone a fair and impartial one. This suggests that what is really obstructing full engagement with 'non-European' philosophy is *institutional closed-mindedness*.

At several points in his book Cassam mentions the role of structural factors in the explanation of human conduct, but he regards structural explanations as relatively limited in comparison with explanations based on personal character (2019, 23–24, 46–52). In general, I think he downplays structural factors too much, but it is especially important to recognize their role in combatting Eurocentrism. Just as we now talk of institutional sexism and institutional racism, so too we can—and should—talk of institutional closed-mindedness, a 'character trait' of institutions (which clearly intersects with institutional sexism and racism). Recall the definition of an intellectual vice given above, modifying Cassam's 'obstructivist' definition by substituting 'understanding' for 'knowledge':

> An intellectual vice is a blameworthy or otherwise reprehensible character trait, attitude, or way of thinking that systematically obstructs the gaining, deepening, or promoting of understanding.

A straightforward definition of an institutional vice can then be given on this model:

> An institutional vice is a blameworthy or otherwise reprehensible organizational structure, practice, or way of operating that systematically obstructs the gaining, deepening, or promoting of understanding (or any other form of cognition).

Once we recognize the concept of an institutional vice, we can then talk of institutions being closed-minded in just the way I suggested above: an institutional practice in which the work of only certain philosophers gets taught and researched is institutionally closed-minded. This institutional closed-mindedness inevitably filters down to the personal level: as a student wanting to get a good degree, as a prospective research student wanting to get a job in philosophy, and as a lecturer or professor wanting to get tenure or promotion, one has to play the game. One is frozen, then, into becoming *professionally closed-minded*.

Let me tell a personal story to illustrate this. My doctoral thesis was on Frege and Wittgenstein, at a time (in the late 1980s) when Wittgenstein was going out of fashion (at any rate, the later Wittgenstein, who was seen as hostile to professional philosophy—for good reasons!). After one unsuccessful job interview, I was told that I wouldn't get a job if I emphasized my interest in (the later) Wittgenstein. And indeed, when I did manage to get a job a few months later, it was my work on Frege that was key. Wittgenstein is hardly a non-canonical figure, even allowing for fashions. But had I worked on someone outside the analytic tradition, even someone as canonical within the 'intellectual opposition' as, say, Collingwood (also born in 1889), I would certainly never have got an academic post. Duly frozen into the system, I dutifully spent most of the first decade of my professional career working on Frege (Beaney 1996; 1997) and teaching standard courses on early modern philosophy and analytic philosophy, while trying—in my

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spare time—to understand more of the broader historical context in which analytic philosophy developed. In 1999–2000, when I was an Alexander von Humboldt Fellow at the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg (in a period of thawing out for which I will always be grateful), as I was working on conceptions of analysis in the history of philosophy, I came across the writings of Susan Stebbing and realized just what an unjustly forgotten figure she had become, despite the influential role she had played in the history of analytic philosophy. Opening the door I found ajar, I discovered some treasures that were worth restoring.[5]

8 | AJAR-MINDEDNESS AND CANON-BROADENING

My acquaintance with Stebbing was fortuitous, when I entered the room in the (copyright) library at Erlangen that housed the English-language philosophical journals (tucked away behind the tomes on the mighty German idealists). By the time I joined the *BJHP* Editorial Board in 2008 as associate editor responsible for nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophy, it was clear to me that there was a wealth of research to be done filling out the historical context in which the relevant canons had formed and broadening those canons. But we were in a catch-22 situation. People were not submitting papers on non-canonical figures because we were not publishing such papers, and we (and other journals) were not publishing such papers because no one was being encouraged to write them.

As mentioned above, the first step in breaking out of this situation was to create a more representative Editorial Board and to state explicitly that we were keen to publish on non-canonical figures. A more significant step was to introduce special issues in which we could be *proactive* in broadening the canon. Journals, in general, are reactive: they respond to what is sent to them. So if the papers received are already unrepresentative of the wider field, then this may simply be replicated in what is published. With special issues—and the *BJHP* has two each year—we can set the agenda and have guest editors to direct the canon-broadening. As well as the three special issues on women philosophers mentioned above, there have also been special issues on ancient philosophy of health and disease, medieval theories of relations, Cambridge Platonism, French Spiritualism, and historiography, among others.

Rigorous peer review is generally taken as essential to an international journal, and it might be thought that as long as such a system is in place in a history of philosophy journal, the best papers will be published regardless of whether they are on canonical figures or not. But peer review systems (whether double-blind or triple-blind) may themselves exhibit professional closed-mindedness. Papers on a canonical figure will typically get sent to experts on that figure, and such experts may well have a professional vested interest in having such papers published, especially if the papers engage (unless very critically and unfairly) with their own work. The result will be reinforcement of the canon. On the other hand, a paper on a non-canonical figure, by its very nature, may have to be sent to referees not expert on that figure, who may assess it on inappropriate criteria. As editor of the *BJHP*, I found, for example, that referees would comment on the failure to engage with the secondary literature or on the lack of comparison with the ideas of more canonical figures of the period. But the existing secondary literature might well be meagre or of poor quality, and to demand such comparison is just to reinforce the canon. A paper on Kant, say, may look more solid and scholarly because it stands on the shoulders of the work of many other scholars (Beaney 2018, 5), whereas a paper on a non-canonical figure may look thin precisely because it is breaking new ground. To change the metaphors, rearranging the objects in an existing room is not the same as opening a door that has been locked for a long time.

Reviewers need to be aware, then, of the implications of canonization. As Cassam argues, intellectual vices such as closed-mindedness are traits for which we are *revision responsible*, and

[5]See Beaney 2000; 2003; 2005; 2016; 2017, chap. 5. Interest in Stebbing has now taken off: see Chapman 2013, and the bibliographies in Beaney and Chapman 2019 and 2021. I was also inspired to work on Collingwood, beginning with Beaney 2001.

this means that we must recognize our own professional doxastic commitments if we are to put them aside in becoming more open-minded. Editors can signal their own open-mindedness, but institutional measures—such as proactivity in commissioning special issues—are also needed if doors are to be unlocked in broadening the canon. Who knows what rewards might lie in the locked rooms, but we need the doors to be open to give scholars the chance of looking inside. This is what I mean by saying that we must be *ajar-minded*. As professional philosophers, we must ensure that no doors are locked, to make it possible to see any hidden treasures. So let us characterize ajar-mindedness as follows (retaining the use of our central metaphor, since metaphors themselves promote ajar-mindedness):

> An institutional structure, practice, or way of operating is ajar-minded if it facilitates the broadening of understanding (or any other form of cognition) by ensuring that doors are sufficiently open to allow the relevant space or resources to be accessed.

9 | MARIA MONTESSORI'S VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY

In 2014 the *BJHP* published an article on Maria Montessori's epistemology by Patrick Frierson. This certainly opened a door to me, and in the context of the present paper, I now appreciate the treasures it made available. Frierson describes what he calls Montessori's 'interested empiricism', which emphasizes the role that *interest* plays in our engagement with the world, engagement that involves *understanding* and not just 'knowledge' (in the sense of some form of 'true belief'). Such interest can be cultivated through training, and Montessori distinguishes between mere 'understanding the reasoning of others' and "actively thinking about what they are saying, critically but open-mindedly assessing it as a possible understanding of the world one should adopt *for oneself*", as Frierson puts it (2014, 777). She also emphasizes the importance of 'meditation', which Frierson characterizes as "prolonged engagement with a particular task or experience", developing our unconscious cognitive processes, which "allows understanding of the world to penetrate to the core of our epistemic lives" (784).

For present purposes, what is most relevant is Montessori's account of intellectual virtues, which both supports some views in virtue epistemology today and challenges others. Her emphasis on understanding rather than knowledge (taken as involving the accumulation of facts) is especially noteworthy, and she talks of the virtues of courage, patience, persistence, love (of the world rather than of knowledge), and manual dexterity (surprising as that might seem to some) as essential in fostering understanding. She also stresses the role of 'indirect preparation', whereby tasks and experiences are carefully selected by teachers "not only for their immediate conscious pedagogical lessons but also for the ways that they unconsciously prepare students for lessons that may not happen until years later", as Frierson puts it (2014, 786 n. 23). Here is an excellent reason for fostering ajar-mindedness. As I am now illustrating, the value of having a door opened in the past might only be appreciated much later.

Let me end this section with a further story. Having read my editorial of 2018, Frierson emailed me to say that he was struck by my comparison of the *BJHP* with the *JHP*. He had submitted an earlier, much longer version of his article to the *JHP* and had had it summarily desk rejected by the editor, not just for its length but also for its topic. A paper on Maria Montessori, he was told, would not be of "sufficient interest to the JHP's audience". Frierson commented: "I think the sentiment expressed in this reply is interestingly symptomatic of the challenges of expanding the canon in philosophy (and also part of why non-canonical figures tend to get included only when one can show their relevance to existing canonical figures)" (personal communication, 28 April 2021). He said that he had had similar responses from major academic presses in getting a book on Montessori published. I am glad to report that that book has now been published (Frierson 2019).

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10 | AJAR-MINDEDNESS IN COMBATTING EUROCENTRISM

Over the past decade the *BJHP* has made a significant contribution to broadening the canon *within* European philosophy, but it has only recently started to do the same with regard to 'non-European' philosophy. For example, until 2018 the *BJHP* had published only one paper on Chinese philosophy (Reihman 2013). Since then seven have appeared.[6] Over the past few years, it has also published on Arabic and Islamic, Indian, and African American philosophy. Here the task of broadening the canon is harder, but the principles are the same. In particular, we can see how once two or three papers have appeared, the seriousness of any stated aim to publish in a certain area is recognized and more submissions come in. Once a door is ajar, and someone is encouraged to go through it, others may soon follow.

It is not just a matter of opening doors, however, but also of showing how the doors became closed in the first place—to prevent them from being shut again. To take just one example, we need to recognize how Asian philosophy and African philosophy were deliberately excluded from the canon in Europe during the late eighteenth century—as Peter Park (2013) has powerfully argued. Most people today will not have heard of Christoph Meiners (1747–1810), Dieterich Tiedemann (1748–1803), and Wilhelm Tennemann (1761–1819), but they were very influential in their heyday in arguing against treating Asian and African philosophy as genuinely philosophy, arguments that were accepted by Kant and Hegel in developing their own Eurocentric views. Other philosophers of the time, such as Anselm Rixner (1766–1838), Joseph-Marie de Gérando (1772–1842), Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829), and Friedrich Ast (1778–1841), had included Asian and African philosophy in their histories, but they lost out in the debate, and the subsequent dominance of Kant and Hegel ensured that their voices were silenced for two centuries. So here is another reason for reading more broadly, to understand the process of canonization itself, enabling us to evaluate it and combat it more effectively. Talk of finding 'treasures' in the work of Meiners, Tiedemann, and Tennemann may be inappropriate, but we certainly need the doors to their work left ajar to understand how other doors were closed and hence to help us reopen them.

11 | OPEN-MINDEDNESS AND AJAR-MINDEDNESS IN THE *ZHUANGZI*

The most powerful argument that I have come across in the history of philosophy for the virtues of both open-mindedness and ajar-mindedness is provided—or better, *performed*—in the *Zhuangzi*, one of the founding texts of Daoism and the most exhilarating work in the whole of ancient Chinese literature (for a readable translation, see Zhuangzi 2013 [1968]). In challenging views such as Confucianism, with its emphasis on strict adherence to rituals and faithful fulfilment of our social roles, it can be read as a critique of closed-mindedness, and in its ajar-minded use of stories, dialogues, aphorisms, arguments, parables, parodies, paradoxes, neologisms, and wordplay, it teaches us open-mindedness.

I have characterized the core philosophical outlook that emerges from the text as *connective perspectivism* (Beaney 2021, § 3.1). The *Zhuangzi* begins with an advocation of 'roaming' (*yóu* 遊), understood as moving from one perspective to another, embracing the transformations that occur and refusing to settle in any one identity. In the second chapter, on 'equalizing things' (*qí wù* 齊物), we are urged to 'walk two roads', going along with ordinary practices, which may be entirely appropriate in the circumstances, but in full awareness of alternative practices and their interconnections. This openness to other perspectives and practices is recommended throughout the *Zhuangzi*, as the continual flow of stories, dialogues, and so on, inspires us to think for ourselves. In the famous

[6] For the record, they are Sarkissian 2018; Jones 2019; Cantor 2020; Carey and Vitz 2020; Stephens 2021; Huang and Ganeri 2021; Lai 2022.

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butterfly story at the end of chapter 2, Zhuang Zhou is reported as having dreamed he was a butterfly, "flitting and fluttering around", and we can see this as a metaphor for the roaming in the text that we have to do to make sense of it. The *Zhuangzi* is a vast palace with thousands of doors left ajar through which we can glimpse the treasures that await an awakened mind.

12 | FOSTERING AJAR-MINDEDNESS AND OPEN-MINDEDNESS IN PRACTICE

I have taken the case of the *BJHP* to suggest how ajar-mindedness can be exemplified and open-mindedness encouraged in journals for the history of philosophy. But there are many other practices and institutions that must be transformed, from recruiting policies to student involvement in curriculum design, from diversity and implicit bias training to cultivating language skills. I mention the latter because one of the most important tasks is translating philosophical writings across languages, a mammoth and unending process if all texts are to be translated into all languages, not only to make the texts accessible to more people but also to enrich the languages themselves and hence philosophical thinking in those languages. The development of Chinese philosophy at the beginning of the twentieth century was fostered by the translation of European philosophy, and the increasing possibilities that English speakers now have of studying Chinese philosophy is due to the new as well as better translations that are now available. But not only does translation require substantial time and resources, a whole culture change is also needed among philosophers if the importance of translation is to be properly appreciated.

As far as teaching practices are concerned, there are two main ways to diversify the curriculum. One is to have dedicated courses on Chinese philosophy, Islamic philosophy, and so on. This requires experts, or at least those with an 'area of competence', in the relevant fields; and very few departments will ever be able to cover all the major areas. Nor would students themselves be able to take more than one or two such courses. The second way is to integrate elements of different philosophical traditions into all basic courses. An introductory course on ethics, for example, could easily dedicate one lecture to Confucian ethics and one to Buddhist ethics, say; and a course on personal identity could devote one lecture to Avicenna's theory of the soul and one to the African conception of *ubuntu*, say. There are now excellent resources and advice on the internet, as well as accessible introductory textbooks and reliable translations, to make such selected topics relatively straightforward to teach. Here we would indeed have ajar-mindedness in practice, opening at least some doors sufficiently for the potential rewards to be seen.

In his own article in this issue of *Metaphilosophy*, Cassam (2023) argues that philosophy can and should contribute to human emancipation, identifying 'emancipatory virtues' such as irony, reflectiveness, imagination, contrarianism, and worldliness that are vital in promoting what he calls a 'liberation philosophy'. Open-mindedness and ajar-mindedness must surely be counted among such emancipatory virtues, cultivated through history of philosophy to contribute to this urgent project.

CONCLUSION

In fifty years' time, historians of philosophy will look back at the 2020s and describe academic philosophy in Europe as the last bastion of Eurocentrism. They will explain the gradual transformations of practices and institutions and the development of greater openness to the variety of philosophical approaches, perspectives, and styles. Or will they? Is this being too optimistic? Will canonization become ever more entrenched and philosophy ever more fragmented into separate traditions and specializations? Will philosophers become *more* closed-minded? To leave the future open and the reader to make up their own mind, let us end with two final stories, each a transformation of the famous cautionary tale that concludes the inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi*.

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> The sovereign of the southern realm was called Experience; the ruler of the northern realm was called Reason; the queen of the middle realm was called Openness. Experience and Reason would sometimes visit the realm of Openness, who always treated them very well. They decided to repay Openness for her generosity. They said: "All thinkers study seven canonical figures, while Openness studies none. So let us teach them to her." So each day they taught her one of the canonical figures. On the seventh day, Openness was dead.
>
> The emperor of the eastern realm was called Zhéxué (哲学); the patriarch of the western realm was called Philosophy; the queen of the middle realm was called Openness. Zhéxué and Philosophy would sometimes visit the realm of Openness, who always treated them very well. They decided to repay Openness for her generosity. They said: "We each study our own seven thinkers, while Openness studies none. So let us each teach them to her." So each day they taught her one of their thinkers. On the seventh day, Openness could tell her own stories.

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