

Is the Philosophy Blogosphere a Male Domain?

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I remember reading a book to my children called *Millions of Cats* (Wanda Gag) in which an old man heads off to find a kitten for himself and his wife, and then returns with hundreds, thousands, and even millions, billions, and trillions of cats. I've spend some time in the last year looking for philosophy and other academic blogs, and on each excursion I've turned up hundreds and even thousands (not yet millions...) of such blogs. In all fields, hundreds and thousands, millions and billions of blogs have been launched on the internet—an overwhelming rate and number for enthusiasts of any type. So, like the old man and woman in *Millions of Cats*, any web surfer will soon realize that she can take in no more than a fraction of the blogs offered to her.

On each trip I've taken to survey philosophy blogs, I notice that their contributors and discussants are mostly men. Moreover the percentage of women philosophers participating on philosophy blogs seems much lower than our numbers in the profession—25-30% for the latter, whereas in the philosophy blogosphere, women show up less than 5%). Noticing this discrepancy, I posted the following message on a high-traffic women's studies list:

In the past several years, philosophers have begun dozens of group and individual blogs covering a range of philosophical areas of research. (see <http://www.epistemelinks.com/Main/MainBlog.aspx> , <http://consc.net/weblogs.html> ; <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/5457020/site/newsweek/>). Most of the contributors on these blogs are men. For those of you in other disciplines, are women virtually absent from the blogs in your discipline? Is blogging becoming a significant avenue to publication (either for pre-publication feedback or as an alternative to conventional publication) and, if so, how will this affect women in academia if we don't get involved? Alternatively, is blogging just a time drain and a distraction from the kind of publishing that counts? In philosophy, blogging is becoming a significant way to draw attention to one's research by posting online papers for discussion, and networking with other philosophers. Here again, in my field, the large majority of scholars who are circulating drafts of papers online are men. (see <http://consc.net/people.html> ; <http://phonline.org/>). When mainstream journals and publishers would not publish feminist work, we set up our own journals and published with alternative presses. But the blogosphere seems more democratic and porous--anyone can set up a blog, comment on an existing blog, post a paper online, and bloggers can cross-post and link to other blogs so that conversations move from one blog to another. In short, if feminist and women scholars are not present in the blogosphere, it seems more a matter of choice and I'm wondering why women scholars may be choosing not to take advantage of this new medium. I've recently joined a philosophy group blog (Pea Soup) and set up another blog, but is blogging something we should be recommending to our junior female colleagues?

I received a range of comments from list members. Some worried that blogging could become yet another time drain for women, without much gain. Some were concerned that blogs, unlike subscriber lists, would expose feminist scholars to pointless attacks from internet bullies. One person directed me to a useful blog by a Norwegian professor who, among other things, comments on blogging, [Torill Mortensen](#). Some questioned whether women's absence from the academic blogosphere was by "choice," and whether there are both external and internal barriers to their participation (for an interesting paper on this, see <http://www.jimandellen.org/ConferencePapers.WomenCyberspace.html>). Others mentioned the use of blogs in teaching, suggesting that women may be creating blogs for this purpose, rather than to share work and ideas with colleagues.

I am not the first to notice the relative absence of women from the philosophy blogosphere. Joshua Glasgow raised this issue on the philosophy blog "Pea Soup"¹ in 2004: http://peasoup.typepad.com/peasoup/2004/07/gender_philosop.html#more. The discussion posts that followed suggest that some male philosophy bloggers do not see the absence of women philosophers on philosophy blogs (or in the discipline) as evidence of a problem (such as, the systematic exclusion of women). One philosophy blogger (phlogger, perhaps?) suggests that women may be absent because they are less interested in philosophy or less good at it than men, and thus their absence is merely the effect of individual choice or the existence of meritocracy. Fortunately, these views were challenged in this discussion, and have been challenged by decades of social research on gender asymmetries in the professions and human behavior.

In addition to a gender gap in the philosophy blogosphere, there is also an age gap. Bloggers tend to be young and relatively recent Ph.Ds, and many are still in graduate school. Given that the number of women in philosophy graduate programs and with philosophy Ph.Ds has significantly increased over the past several decades (supposedly), one would expect the number of women philosophy bloggers to be higher, given that bloggers tend to be drawn from the cohort in which the largest number of women should be appearing.²

One important service some philosophy blogs serve is drawing attention to databases of online papers in philosophy. Again, if one looks at the names of the authors of these papers, women are significantly underrepresented, even in fields of philosophy where women have published at relatively high rates. For example, on David Chalmer's directory of online papers <http://consc.net/people.html>, the vast majority of the authors listed are men, even in categories such as social and political philosophy, normative

¹ Philosophy blogs tend to have playful and colorful names, such as "The Garden of Forking Paths," "Philosophers Carnival," "Fake Barn Country," "Desert Landscapes," "X-Philosophy," instead of the staid and dignified: "Journal of Philosophy," "Philosophical Review," "Philosophical Studies." I'm not sure what to make of this.

² See Julie Van Camp, "Deep Thought: For (Mostly) Men Only? Does It Matter?" presented at the 2006 Pacific SWIP meeting, May 6, UCLA, http://www.csus.edu/org/pswip/Programs/program_spr_06_ucla.htm or http://www.csulb.edu/%7Ejvancamp/SWIP_women_doctorates_philosophy.doc Also, see Margaret Urban Walker, "Diotima's Ghost: The Uncertain Place of Feminist Philosophy in Professional Philosophy," *Hypatia* 20 (Summer 2005), p. 158.

ethics, applied ethics, aesthetics, history of philosophy, where women have published at significant rates (by my count in March 2006, women account for less than 15% of contributors in these categories, and 0-10% in metaphysics, epistemology, most philosophy of science categories, and philosophy of religion). I have not gone through other online databases for papers in philosophy in a systematic fashion, but my initial impression is that the results would be similar, see:
<http://www.epistemelinks.com/Main/MainPage.aspx> .

Some philosophers who maintain individual blogs and/or participate on group blogs have established a formidable online presence. Their blogs draw attention to their scholarly work, as well as their views on the work of others and on issues in the profession. Here again, the most prominent philosophers are men: Brian Leiter (“Leiter Reports” and “Philosophical Gourmet”), Brian Weatherson (“Thoughts Arguments and Rants”), and David Chalmers. All three have Wikipedia entries under their names (which could be written by them or others). Chalmers’s website (not really a blog, <http://consc.net/chalmers/>) not only contains information about his work, but tracks discussion of his work by others. Leiter’s “Philosophical Gourmet Report” has had substantial influence on the ranking of philosophy graduate programs both within and outside the profession, and in this way influences the choices of prospective graduate students, as well as administrators who provide resources to philosophy programs. “Leiter Reports” (<http://leiterreports.typepad.com/>) and “Thoughts Arguments and Rants” (<http://tar.weatherson.org/>) are online “water coolers,” sites to follow controversies, announcements, and gossip in the profession.

Some feminist philosophers are beginning to take advantage of the relatively unrestricted or anarchic character of the internet. In 2004, Julie Van Camp challenged the Leiter (Philosophical Gourmet) Report for its gender bias (for its poor representation of women on the advisory board and reviewers), and proposed criteria for evaluating graduate programs in order to help women students select departments (see http://www.csulb.edu/~jvancamp/Female_Friendly.html). Following some discussion on SWIP-L regarding woman- and feminist-friendly programs, Kathryn Norlock compiled a list of such programs from information volunteered by SWIP members and posted this list on the SWIP website: <http://www.uh.edu/~cfreelan/SWIP/GradPrograms.htm> After more discussion on SWIP-L about updating this information, she announced that she started a Wikipedia page so that members could directly add new information themselves to the compiled list:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feminist_Philosophy_Graduate_Programs

Unlike a webpage, which has a more traditional editing process, Wikipedia entries can be edited by readers of the page. Much has been written about this participatory and inclusive method of editing, which I cannot address here, but Wikipedia is an extraordinarily successful Internet enterprise.

In response to some events in the APA, especially the Pacific Division, I started a blog called “APA Governance”: http://apagovernance.typepad.com/my_weblog/ As a result of this effort, I was invited to join a group blog, Pea Soup <http://peasoup.typepad.com/> , and to “cross-post” entries on the two blogs (this is apparently common in the blogging

world). My experience with blogging has been mixed. APA Governance has received lots of hits (well over a thousand in a few months), but no comments. Instead, discussion of the issues raised on the blog has been taken up on “private” (subscriber-only) email lists on which APA members participate. It may be that a blog is too “public” a place for the discussion of issues internal to a relatively small organization. Pea Soup contributors are active and maintain ongoing discussions on ethics (mostly metaethics), but I’ve found it difficult to keep up with it when the topics are not closely related to my research interests. Yet, I would encourage any woman or feminist philosopher interested in metaethics and moral theory to get involved with this blog, as it’s a good way to test out ideas, discuss new trends in the field with other scholars, and find out about relevant conferences or publications.

Women, in general, are not absent from the blogosphere (see <http://www.blogger.org/>), nor are feminists (see <http://www.thefword.org.uk/blog/index> <http://feministing.com/>), and philosopher bloggers are getting the attention of the mainstream media <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/5457020/site/newsweek/>. Yet women- and feminist-philosophers have barely shown up. There is also much research on blogs and public spheres that should interest political philosophers <http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/>; and there are blogs on gender and technology that should interest feminist philosophers: <http://netwomen.ca/Blog/> <http://www.genderandcomputing.no/> <http://www.misbehaving.net/> .

The gender gap in the philosophy blogosphere, together with the increasing impact of blogs on our profession and society, raises the following issues:

1. Why are women philosophers relatively absent in the philosophy blogosphere?
2. What consequences will the maleness of the philosophy blogosphere have on gender diversity in the profession?
3. Should feminist philosophers encourage younger female colleagues to participate in the philosophy blogosphere?
4. Is blogging likely to draw attention to work in feminist philosophy, or is it more likely to subject such work to intellectually irresponsible and non-serious attack?
5. Are subscriber-only discussion lists (e.g., SWIP-L, FEAST-L) more suitable than blogs for the purposes of most academics, including feminist philosophers, or are both valuable as communicative tools?
6. Will universities begin to count blogging as a type of profession publishing and activity and, if so, will this be detrimental to women faculty?

At the point in *Millions of Cats* when the reader recognizes that an abundant number of cats will not receive the care and attention of the old man and woman, my kids would invariably suggest that we get a few more cats. I’m not yet convinced that the proliferation of blogs raises equivalent moral dilemmas and choices, but it does pose questions about our profession that I hope others will be able to address.