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Diversifying Philosophy with Methods from the Social Sciences

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The history of academic philosophy as well as current gatekeeping practices in hiring, funding, publishing, and teaching show how philosophy, like many other academic disciplines, has been and continues to be affected by and reinforce various societal and global power dynamics [1]. Diversifying the discipline by integrating previously neglected voices and perspectives can be seen as a way to combat epistemic injustices and discrimination in academia, to promote research integrity as well as very fruitful and inspiring for philosophical discourses. Apart from diversifying the group of academic philosophers, the question arises how to diversify the content of philosophical discourses or the 'canon'. To address this question, I take the sub-discipline of environmental ethics as an example to argue that philosophy could benefit from more empirical approaches from the social sciences.

While the discipline is obviously still not as diverse as would be ideal, there have been many efforts in environmental philosophy to include indigenous perspectives because of the special and deep connection of indigenous peoples to their natural environment [2]. Including references to any indigenous group has become "the thing to do" in environmental philosophy in order to show one's progressiveness. But in many cases, still predominantly white environmental philosophers use aspects of indigenous knowledge only as an aside. In many cases, white environmental philosophers engage with canonical figures like Hegel and then simply add a brief remark like "just like a Dakota proverb says ...". How can non-indigenous environmental philosophers learn from indigenous communities and respectfully incorporate indigenous perspectives on the environment into their work?

I argue that if we want to diversify the philosophical 'canon', apart from supporting people from marginalized groups in our ranks, we should learn from different philosophical traditions, not only by using secondary literature about them, but by engaging personally and practically with the people who hold these wisdoms, in ways similar to participatory research in the social sciences. A prerequisite for self-critical and anti-discriminatory research practices is transparency about one's own position as a researcher. In both respects, we can learn from the social sciences in how they have responded to criticism of their methodologies and methods, and how many social scientists are now trying to make their research less hierarchical, less colonial, more respectful, reciprocal, and fair. As an example, I will use Barbara Schellhammer's research [3], which combines her expertise in social work with her philosophical inquiry.

[1] Silva, G. J., *South. J. Philos.* 57 (2019)

[2] Errico, S., *The rights of indigenous peoples in Asia* (2017)

[3] Schellhammer, B., *polylog* 42 (2019); 44 (2020)