

## **A Defense for Multicultural Inclusion in Philosophy Textbooks: An Analysis from the Border**

by Manuela A. Gómez

### **English Abstract**

This article defends the need for multicultural inclusion of curriculum artifacts in philosophy courses in an effort to increase the number of minority philosophers. In terms of diversity, philosophy has the worst representation in the academic world. The first step to close this gap is to ensure that philosophy educators include more than just western ideas in their textbooks and class materials. This article includes research data from the U.S.-Mexico border.

### **Resumen en español**

Este artículo defiende la necesidad de incluir material multicultural en el currículum de clases de filosofía para así incrementar el número de estudiantes minoritarios. En cuanto a diversidad, el campo de la filosofía académica tiene la peor representación en el mundo. El primer paso para eliminar esta discrepancia es de asegurarnos que como educadores, incluyamos a voces distintas a las Europeas en nuestras clases y libros de texto. Este artículo incluye investigación y datos de la frontera México-Estados Unidos.

### **Resumo em português**

Este artigo defende a necessidade de incluir material multicultural no currículo das aulas de filosofia, a fim de aumentar o número de estudantes de minorias. Em termos de diversidade, a disciplina da filosofia acadêmica tem a pior representação do mundo. O primeiro passo para eliminar essa discrepância é garantir que, como educadores, incluamos outras vozes além das europeias em nossas aulas e livros didáticos. Este artigo inclui pesquisas e dados da fronteira EUA-México.

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Philosophy has a history of being produced and dominated by upper class European men, not because others have not had original philosophical ideas, but because it is not until recently, that very few textbook publishers and philosophers have made proactive efforts to incorporate diverse perspectives into the philosophical discourse. I argue that as philosophy educators, we are responsible for actively incorporating multicultural content into our curriculum to encourage philosophical thinking in our minority students. An exposure to multicultural ideas allows students to see beyond tradition and dogmas and embrace a much broader epistemic perspective. It also promotes self-confidence in students, as they can see others, like themselves,

reflected in the curriculum. This is important, especially in the current American sociopolitical climate, in which minority students have been demeaned and attacked with hateful rhetoric and policies that have contested their unique identities.

After teaching college philosophy on the U.S.-Mexico border for over 15 years, my research focuses on analyzing whether the primary introduction to philosophy course textbook *Philosophy: The Power of Ideas* by Moore and Bruder (2014) which is used by the entire El Paso Community College (EPCC) system meets the needs of multiculturalism. EPCC is in a border region between El Paso, Texas and Ciudad Juarez, Mexico with certain representational features that make it unique. Firstly, most students are predominantly Mexican American. To be specific, 85% of them identify as Hispanic. Most are bilingual, and many are English language learners. Secondly, they interact between two very different countries that merge into one distinct border culture.

Juarez is known for its infamous drug war violence and alarming femicides statistics. At one point, it was characterized as the most violent city in the world. On the other hand, El Paso has been labeled the safest city in the United States. This unique polarizing dichotomy of cultures is what we encounter in the classrooms of EPCC.

Something most students have in common is that many of them come from a high poverty background. This creates challenges like high dropout rates that lead to lack of college completion. This also means that many students that do attend college, only receive an associate's degree and very few consider majoring in fields like philosophy. In 2017, out of the 73,000 degrees and certificates granted by EPCC, only 3 were for philosophy majors ("El Paso Community College Fact Book," 2017).

EPCC offers a total of 5 philosophy courses which are: (PHIL 1301) Introduction to Philosophy, (PHIL 2306) Ethics, (PHIL 2303) Logic, (PHIL 2321) Philosophy of Religion, and (PHIL 2307) Introduction to Social and Political Philosophy. These courses aim to expose students to a broad range of philosophical ideas to promote their critical thinking abilities. The aim is for students of all disciplines to be able to incorporate philosophy in an applied way to their lives on the border.

Multiculturalism in education is a contemporary strategy that promotes learning about more than just Western ideas. In this pedagogical strategy, students are purposely exposed to other world cultures, people, and philosophies that represent and give a voice to minorities, including women and underrepresented populations of the world. Multiculturalism benefits all students in the context of education, but it becomes more relevant in border regions because of the plurality of identities and experiences.

My research consists of analyzing whether the textbook used by EPCC focuses on the histories, cultures, languages, and religions that represent the voices and experiences of minority students while providing relevant philosophical content, at least enough to create a genuine interest in philosophy.

The philosophy courses offered at EPCC serve as a platform to provide students with philosophical backgrounds, tools, and methods to continue their studies. Ideally, students that are exposed to introduction to philosophy courses, which is a core requirement for social sciences majors, become further interested in other more advanced philosophy courses. Therefore, there is such significance in having an accessible multicultural curriculum in the introduction to philosophy course. If students become engaged in the introduction course, they are more likely to continue taking consequent philosophy courses, and perhaps consider philosophy as a major. Philosophy is one of the disciplines with the most need for diversity in the academic world.

The representation of scholars of color in philosophy is plausibly worse than in any other field. In 2003, the number of full-time women philosophy instructors in the United States was 16.6 percent and included very few women of color, less than one percent (Haslanger, 2013). Therefore, textbook engagement in a border community college or any university with large amounts of minority students is an imperative step towards closing this disparity gap.

The main questions I consider in my research are: does the book meet the needs of multiculturalism? How can the students see themselves represented in the textbook, not just in a passive sense but in a contemporary active philosophical role? A passive philosophical role is characterized by the reaction to philosophical claims. In this role, a student reasons from prompts given through another person or source. They simply understand the material as spectators. On the other hand, an active philosophical role involves making philosophical claims through arguments and propositions of new ideas. In terms of a dialogue, one involves the act of responding and the other involves making claims and counterarguments. Philosophy requires a person to do both. To have more minorities in academic philosophy, we need to engage students to take an active role and realize their potential to be creators of knowledge and not just be passive learners. If we want more diversity in academic philosophy, minority students need to realize their potential as philosophy students and as philosophy educators.

Textbooks have the capacity to present information to students in a way that can be representative of their experiences or they can further marginalize some of them by not engaging them in a meaningful way that is relevant to their lives. The content may be meaningful and useful but that is not sufficient itself to have the material be communicated and make a strong impact on minority students.

Certain features increase the ability for the material to be communicated and for students to have resiliency in the face of encountering material that may be difficult or foreign to them. One of these is the ability for students to place themselves in the curriculum and ask whether any of these philosophers or theories are relevant to their lives. Without this ability, they cannot fully grasp the material. Furthermore, if they feel excluded from the discourse, they are less likely to learn to become active creators of

philosophical epistemologies. Thus, a textbook that is diverse in the representation of cultures models an ideal artifact that provides the necessary tools to achieve successful critical thinking.

*Philosophy: The Power of Ideas* by Moore and Bruder (2014) is written for first and second-year university students with little to no previous exposure to philosophy. The book is divided into 17 chapters. These chapters explore the history of philosophy and progress into contemporary philosophical issues. .

I began the textual analysis through initial coding of the table of contents of the textbook which gives information on each chapter. I identified the demographic backgrounds of the philosophers mentioned. This included making numerical counts of minorities, women, countries, religions and non-heteronormative persons mentioned in the chapters. I considered whether the examples used are historical or contemporary, and how much space is given to some ideas by paragraph count. Another method I incorporated was an analysis of the levels of integration of multicultural content as presented by Banks (1989) in his *Approaches to Multicultural Curriculum Reform* (Banks, 1989). I determined the level of integration by identifying the content and analyzing the context in which it was presented.

Banks' method looks at how multicultural content is integrated into the curriculum. It categorizes integration through four levels. No single level is adequate in terms of representation because they all have room for improvement to provide a balanced inclusive account of diverse perspectives.



However, each level deals with a modality of presentation of multicultural content as it occurs in the curriculum. Level 1, which is the contributions approach, focuses on heroes, holidays, or attributes of groups of people. Level 2, the additive approach deals with concepts, and perspectives of groups, but are put within the context of Western thought. Level 3, the transformation approach, deals with concepts and perspectives from other groups that are not from the majority or the Western world. Level 4, the social action approach is characterized by focusing on social issues and problems. It does not

necessarily deal with concepts and instead focuses on those problems and how to solve them.

### **Textbook Findings**

The table of contents mentions a total of 78 male philosophers, of which 60 are white males. There is also a total of 18 women philosophers, of which all, except one from Asia, are from Europe and the United States. In terms of region, Latin American, Asian, African and Middle Eastern philosophies are the least represented. Latin American philosophy received one page and briefly mentioned Carlos Astrada and Francisco Miro Quesada. That is one page out of a book that has 578 pages. The works presented by women philosophers are categorized in a section called "Other Voices." In this section, they also group Eastern philosophers and postcolonial thought.

One of the few black people represented in the textbook is Trayvon Martin from the Zimmerman shooting. The case presented in chapter one is described in a manner that favors Zimmerman. For instance, Zimmerman is called by his name, whereas Martin is referred to as an individual and his name is not mentioned until later. It does not state that Martin was a minor. Zimmerman is considered a community volunteer and Martin as a man cutting between houses at night implying that he looked suspicious. This incident is used as a contemporary real-life example that illustrates that every day events are worthy of philosophical examination. However, there is no reference to the sociopolitical implications of race. There are no statistics about police brutality against African Americans in the United States, nor does the example refer to the Black Lives Matter movement. This information is needed to have a meaningful and authentic philosophical discussion about this incident.

Some other examples that include minorities and women are stereotypical. For instance, in chapter one, when using a cartoon to illustrate the practical uses of philosophy, they depict a tired woman washing the dishes, while the man happily walks away from the responsibility of helping by saying "because I no longer see the dishes they cease to exist." This is meant to relate to Berkeley's epistemological views. None of the other visual examples include a woman in a powerful role. They are depicted as secondary subjects with traditional and limiting gender roles.

In chapter five, the photograph of a black girl eating corn is captioned by: "Can this girl know she is eating corn? Academics and Pyrrhonists say no, Augustine says yes." The girl is unnamed. However, in chapter 12, there is a big picture that takes up half of the page of Paul Ryan with the title of U.S. Representative of Wisconsin and nominee of the Republican party for U.S. vice president in 2012. He is mentioned simply because he is influenced by Ayn Rand's writings.

On the other hand, chapter 16 has a small profile of black feminist bell hooks, whose name is not capitalized. She is addressed as a provocative essayist, who raises thorny issues and attacks domination. Her ideas are presented in half a page including

her small picture whereas Ayn Rand's ideas are given five pages and the bonus picture of Paul Ryan.

The book also fails to make a distinction between being female and being a feminist. Since it groups all women philosophers into the same category as "Other Voices" and labels it as feminist thought, this could easily confuse students and lead them to believe that only females can be feminist, and that they mean the same thing. This type of separation presents feminism as an alternative philosophy out of the mainstream. One issue with this type of separation is not only that it leaves voices out, but it also has negative consequences for mainstream students because it reinforces their false sense of superiority (Banks, 1993).

Overall, the textbook navigates between Levels 2 and 3, which means some multicultural content has been added to the curriculum, and some pages are dedicated to diverse ethnic and cultural groups, but they are harshly separated as alternative voices, not enough to engage minority students from the border.

A step towards creating genuine diversity, tolerance, and respect in society is the creation of all-inclusive multicultural classrooms and curriculum artifacts. Philosophy as the mother of all disciplines has a strong responsibility to showcase the myriad of beliefs from historical and diverse contemporary figures from all over the world. The efforts of this book are not enough for it to be successfully representative of different students, especially not of EPCC, or any border students with complex identities.

Even though it is far from perfect, it is better than other current textbook alternatives. My experience as a member of the EPCC textbook selection committee, has allowed me to witness the very limited options that we have when choosing curriculum artifacts with multicultural content. This textbook at least attempts inclusion. It has been revised nine times, which indicates the willingness and openness from the book editors to improve its content.

Including more work of women philosophers and other minority thinkers helps students become active participants in philosophy by showing the existence of others like them actively and successfully doing philosophy. This inclusion also better represents all historical features of philosophy and its development.

This particular type of research on multicultural content in textbooks and curriculum artifacts allows philosophy educators to have the tools to demand for more inclusive material from book representatives and publishers. Until we find truly multicultural content in philosophy textbooks, we will have to continue to supplement our courses with handouts and additional readings that are not included in the textbook to ensure that we are providing a voice and adequate representation to those who have yet to be heard.



In conclusion, as philosophy educators, we have an ethical responsibility to examine the textbooks and curriculum artifacts that we bring into our classrooms, especially if we are teaching minority students. We have an obligation to promote active philosophy learners because this will in turn produce more philosophers, and therefore more diversity in academia. We must demand multicultural content from textbook publishers and editors. It is imperative to be the face of this demand and meet with them to make sure our requests are heard. We need to supplement our courses with multicultural material when it is not available. If there is no availability, then it is also duty to create and publish this material ourselves.

Manuela Alejandra Gómez  
El Paso Community College

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#### **Author's note:**

Since this research paper was presented, the EPCC textbook committee no longer uses *Philosophy: The Power of Ideas* by Moore and Bruder (2014) for any of its philosophy courses.

#### **References**

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