

Tyson, Sarah. 2018. *Where Are the Women? Why Expanding the Archive Makes Philosophy Better*. New York: Columbia University Press. Pp. 320.

ISBN: 978-0-231-18397-0. \$30.00.

Reviewed by Char Brecevic

Are we able to find women in the history of European and Anglophone philosophy and, if so, how ought we to reclaim their contributions? In *Where Are the Women? Why Expanding the Archive Makes Philosophy Better*, Sarah Tyson does not simply provide answers to these questions, but elucidates how competing approaches to reclamation are grounded in different theories of exclusion. One of the central aims of the book is to demonstrate how inadequate theories of exclusion may perpetuate exclusionary philosophical practices. This critique motivates the development of Tyson's own reclamation strategy, one that she refers to as transformative reclamation.

In chapter one, Tyson outlines and critiques four approaches that various scholars have used to reclaim women's writing in the history of European and Anglophone philosophy: enfranchisement, alternative history, corrective history, and transformation. Tyson argues that the first three approaches inadvertently sustain exclusionary practices—for example, by treating women as a homogenous category of individuals, assuming that excluded women produce unified philosophies, failing to question philosophical ideals and disciplinary standards that foster exclusion, and not providing justification as to why women's work is necessarily corrective. Therefore, because transformative approaches are not guilty of undertheorizing exclusion in these ways, Tyson argues that they “offer the most promising path for reclaiming women's philosophical authority” (3). Building from this general overview and establishing a more focused background against which her own account of transformation will be contrasted, Tyson uses chapters two through four to present the reclamation strategies and theories of exclusion developed by Genevieve Lloyd, Luce Irigaray, and Michèle LeDoeuff, respectively. She concludes that Le Doeuff offers the most promising reclamation strategy, given that she invites speculative overreading of available works through uchronic history and, unlike Lloyd and Irigaray, actually engages with work produced by historical women *as* philosophical.

Given the importance of uchronic history in Tyson's project, she dedicates much of chapter five to clarifying the intended aims and inevitable limitations of uchronic practices. Uchronic history

is an imaginative exercise in which one considers, for example, what the world might have been like if historical women's writings were not excluded and, in turn, how the nature of contemporary philosophy might have developed differently. The objective of uchronic history is not to determine "the right version of history or the correct canon of philosophy" (142). Rather, the objective of uchronic history is to exemplify the fact that philosophical thinking has been shaped by both presences and absences. By acknowledging that European and Anglophone philosophy is partially formed by that which it systematically excludes, imagined histories are a means by which our contemporary concepts and philosophical frameworks can be interrogated. In the most extreme cases of exclusion, when there is little historical evidence of which to make use, Tyson claims that "while we cannot fathom what has been lost, we can identify and castigate philosophical practices that would have us pretend these violences are not at work" (154).

To demonstrate how the practice of uchronic history might work without perpetuating exclusion, Tyson uses the final chapter to reclaim *The Declaration of Sentiments* and Sojourner Truth's famous 1851 speech in Akron, Ohio. With respect to the former text, uchronic engagement yields the understanding that the women writing this declaration were not asking to be treated like men, but were arguing in favor of a critical reevaluation of sexual difference in American life. However, by highlighting the ways in which these women failed to address the vectors of oppression that separated them from enslaved women or Native American women, Tyson suggests that "there were resources for drafters of and signatories to the *Declaration* to propose an even more radical vision than they did" (189). In the case of Truth's speech, Tyson focuses on using the uncertainties of the text to engage with Truth as a philosophical authority. Through Tyson's uchronic reading, Truth's claim that she is "a woman's rights" coupled with her well-known rhetorical question, "ain't I a woman?" function so as to continuously problematize the categories of *women* and *rights*. Reading Truth's speech as a destabilization of subjecthood, Truth's authority "was taken up not to secure the safety of the women's movement, but to think freedom without white supremacy" (202). Tyson concludes that her reclamation model allows contemporary readers to identify and claim responsibility for the injustices that shaped European and Anglophone philosophy. In doing so, the transformation of exclusionary philosophical practices is made possible.

Where Are the Women? is an engaging work that forces philosophers to ask difficult questions about their discipline. How do the epistemic standards of traditional philosophical practice facilitate exclusion? How do the boundaries separating philosophers from all others detract from rather than contribute to philosophical knowledge? Tyson's thorough discussion of figures like Diotima and

Sojourner Truth clearly demonstrates why mere supplementation of historical women's work to the traditional philosophical canon is inadequate. With the lack of textual evidence indicating clear authorship of Diotima's or Truth's views, the standards governing historical work in philosophical practice would not allow one to get very far in reclaiming either of these thinkers—let alone establishing either as a genuine philosopher. But Tyson makes a convincing case that the use of uchronic history to expose absences and silences in the historical record is a powerful means of allowing these historical women to speak even when they are not present. Further, her call for transformative reclamation surpasses previous reclamation attempts in its avoidance of homogenizing the modes of exclusion that leave women out of the historical record. Consequently, Tyson provides an excellent account through which different vectors of power and oppression can be analyzed in the process of reclaiming philosophically neglected thinkers.

My one critical comment is a concern about efficacy. In the final chapter, Tyson notes Nell Painter's struggle to convince audiences that the sensationalized representation of Sojourner Truth is historically inauthentic. Tyson suggests that "there is not just intellectual resistance to Painter's argument, but a love for Truth's symbolic function that prevents other modes of engagement with Truth" (198). Indeed, what is true is not always what is most persuasive. With this in mind, one question that remains is what philosophers can do when their attempts at transformative reclamation are met with intellectual resistance. When even the most thoroughgoing, mindful scholarship cannot overpower the common gravitation towards the sensational or the mythical, how efficacious will this transformative reclamation strategy actually be? While any reclamation model would have to contend with this difficulty, Tyson's model seems uniquely susceptible to this problem given that transformative reclamation via uchronic practice is not concerned with determining accurate versions of historical events. Consequently, one engaged with such a practice cannot appeal to historical accuracy as a means of dissuading resistant audiences of specious historical narratives. For those ready to participate in transformative reclamations, what steps can be taken to better ensure that speculative imaginings are not met with uncompromising recalcitrance? Lacking a complete answer to this question, it is unclear how Tyson's transformative model can in fact be transformative—that is, how it can effectively convince those who are not already committed to non-exclusionary, speculative means of philosophical reclamation.

Despite this worry, Tyson has contributed important insights into the discussion concerning reclamation of excluded voices in the history of European and Anglophone philosophy. By challenging conventional understandings of philosophical authority while being mindful not to

reproduce other modes of exclusion, *Where Are the Women?* invites us not only to problematize our ways of thinking, but to “live philosophy in new ways” (206).