

# Introduction: Envisaging a More Gender-Responsive Philosophy

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In her 1792 work, *The Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Mary Wollstonecraft, the English pioneer feminist, and educational thinker, has since then established that education, particularly equality of men and women in education, is imperative. This landmark work is considered as a celebration of the rationality of women given her context when women were considered weak, artificial, and not capable of reasoning effectively. Wollstonecraft was the first woman to pick up the mantle of egalitarianism challenging the prevailing ideology of the divine right of kings and the inherent natural rights of man and woman. She believed that the development of reason would enlighten man of his error, and only by his acting upon his reason, would virtue be gained, and injustice abolished. Wollstonecraft perceived education as the apex in creating a new world order. She believed that the education females received in 18th century England subjugated them to male authority by denying them the development of their ability to reason. She perceived education as improvement of the individual and improvement of the social order. The new educational paradigm which Wollstonecraft envisioned was one based on reason and coeducation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Alice L. Manus, *Visions of Mary Wollstonecraft: Implications for Education* (Texas: Educational Resources Information Center, 1993), 1.

This vision has found its (rightful) place in the modern society over 200 years after Wollstonecraft's work, proving that women are beyond their social and menial activities. Her contribution which influenced numerous feminist thinkers and philosophers that followed her, and the struggles implicit in the kind of rationality/consciousness their generations (tried to) justify, have certainly helped shape the ideologies and statutes of the world today. There had been initiatives on gender equality all over the world for the past century. Yet more than 200 years since Wollstonecraft's time, there remain aspects of the struggle that challenge women and their status. Despite the efforts for gender equality, women all over the world remain confronted with laws and regulations that limit and impede their economic and social empowerment opportunities.

According to the World Economic Forum's (WEF) 2021 Global Gender Gap report,<sup>2</sup> more than 135 years will be needed for countries to close the gender gap, an increase of more than 35 years from the WEF's 2020 report. Across the four sectors measured—political empowerment, economic participation, education, and health—the greatest disparities are seen among political empowerment, a measure of gender parity within politics which takes into account political representation from the parliamentary level to heads of state, a gap that will take 10 years longer to close.<sup>3</sup> For the past three years of its participation in the WEF ranking, the Philippines exceeded its Asian neighbors in addressing the gender gap.

In 2009, the Philippine Government made a landmark legislation of finally enacting the Magna Carta of Women, described by the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW), the national machinery for gender equality and women's empowerment, as the women's human rights law in the Philippines that seeks to eliminate discrimination through the recognition,

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<sup>2</sup> "Global Gender Gap Report 2021," in *World Economic Forum*, <[http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2021.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf)>.

<sup>3</sup> Kaia Hubbard, "Around the World, the Greatest Gender Disparities Are in Politics," in *US News* (13 April 2021), <<https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2021-04-13/the-greatest-gender-inequality-in-the-world-is-in-politics>>.

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protection, fulfilment and promotion of the rights of Filipino women. In 2011, K.M. Labagala in his paper titled, “Beyond Emancipation: A Case Study on the Magna Carta of Women in the Philippines,” stated that while this law provides reinforcement for the State’s intrinsic role of promoting equality between the sexes, there have been issues regarding the implementation and women awareness on the statute.<sup>4</sup> Gathering data from focus group discussions, expert interviews and participant observation, he looked into the fairness of the law’s implementation with regards to the degree, scope and magnitude of women’s participation, by examining its Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) and its implementation strategies and mechanisms. The case study found that there is no clear implementation strategy as evident in the lack of information dissemination about the statute which places in jeopardy the very essence of the law. Meanwhile, my own 2016 critical reading of the Magna Carta of Women, on the other hand, exposed Simone de Beauvoir’s existentialist feminism in its provisions. It showcased the need for both situated freedom and reciprocal recognition in the transcendence of the woman’s becoming, which can be found in the said law. I concluded that the Magna Carta of Women serves as an essential tool in representing the essence of an empowered Filipino woman.<sup>5</sup>

In the field of education, particularly in philosophy, the woman’s struggle is what is claimed to be the presence of “aristocracy of sex” in the discipline where women find hard to thrive. In the 2020 editorial of Marella Mancenido-Bolaños and Darlene Demandante, titled “Women and Philosophy: An initial move towards a more inclusive practice of Philosophy in the Philippines,” reckoned how the women academic philosophers continue to be one of the visible groups of minorities in this

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<sup>4</sup> K.M. Labagala, “Beyond Emancipation: A Case Study on the Magna Carta of Women in the Philippines” (Korean Association for Policy Studies International Conference, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Gina Opiniano, “Simone de Beauvoir’s Existentialist Feminism: A Critical Reading of the Magna Carta of Women” (Dissertation: University of Santo Tomas, The Graduate School, Manila, 2016), 101.

field of work.<sup>6</sup> They call for a more inclusive practice of philosophy from marginalized sectors (in terms of gender, race, disability, etc.), and set in motion a significant collection of works of women doing philosophy in the Philippines through a thematized issue in *Kritike*, an international journal in philosophy. This effort invites more scholarly actions and dialectics (*dialogues, critiques, rejoinder*) to be undertaken, and other social actions such as those efforts philosophy organizations and independent scholars in the country have been doing for the past few years. Conceived with its own humble purpose, this special section on “Philosophy, Gender, and Education” in the April 2021 issue *Suri* is consistent with the goal of providing an avenue to a “collective voice” of women and men on the discussion of women and feminist issues, education, and philosophy.

## **PHILOSOPHY, GENDER, AND EDUCATION**

In March 2021, the Philosophical Association of the Philippines, in partnership with Pathways Center for Lifelong Learning Inc. and Philippine Normal University-South Luzon,<sup>7</sup> held various activities in celebration of the Women’s Month. With the theme “Philosophy, gender and education,” the activities featured the intersections among philosophy, gender and education. These include a panel discussion on gender and development and the role of higher education institutions (HEIs), a roundtable discussion on gender sensitivity in education, a webinar on

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<sup>6</sup> Marella Ada Mancenida-Bolaños and Darlene Demandante, “Women and Philosophy: An Initial Move Towards a More Inclusive Practice of Philosophy in the Philippine Context,” in *Kritike*, 14:1 (June 2020), 1, <[https://www.kritike.org/journal/issue\\_26/mancenidobolanos&demandante\\_june2020.pdf](https://www.kritike.org/journal/issue_26/mancenidobolanos&demandante_june2020.pdf)>.

<sup>7</sup> Gratitude is hereby expressed to the PAP Board, Pathways Board, PNU-SL administrators (especially Dr. Rodrigo Abenes and Ms. Brenda Villamor), and University of Santo Tomas Faculty of Arts and Letters, Department of Philosophy administrators (especially Dr. Marilu Madrunio and Dr. Jovito Cariño) for supporting the Women’s Month activities. Dr. Hazel Biana, Dr. Fleurdeliz Altez-Albela and Ms. Veniz Maja Guzman, the women members of the PAP Board, are likewise specially mentioned for the ideas provided, and other significant contributions shared in the conduct of various gender-related activities.

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gender equality in HEIs, a gender productivity workshop in partnership with the University of Santo Tomas Department of Philosophy, and writeshop sessions.

This special section of *Suri* features three papers which emerged from the Women’s Month writeshop. Authors of selected papers presented their works in progress on topics related to philosophy and education, feminist philosophy, gender and the curriculum, and gender education. A group of women panelists, namely, Dr. Praksis Miranda, Dr. Hazel Biana, Dr. Melanie del Rosario and Ms. Rosallia Domingo, evaluated the papers by giving their feedback on the content, methodology, and potential directions of the papers towards publication. The articles in this section represent the explorations pursued during the writeshop. They delve into the essentials of some philosophical foundations such as ethics, epistemology, political philosophy and philosophy of law, and how they contribute to the existing discourses on feminist philosophy.

The first article is titled “Feminist jurisprudence and the determinacy of adjudication” authored by Enrique Benjamin R. Fernando III. In this paper he explores the feminist jurisprudence and establishes the significant role of laws in determining the status of women in society. In his paper, he lays down the underpinnings of the laws that have been oppressive to women, and how, through the years, they potentially contributed to the worsening of the condition and the status of women in society. He argues for the need to propound a source-based model of adjudication based on Joseph Raz’s theory of law to illustrate how legal practice can be consistent with feminist ideals. He advocates for the position that, theoretically “laws are possible to be just, fair, and equitable towards women, and can be made compatible with the ideals of contemporary feminist jurisprudence so as to become a powerful tool of social reform.”

In the next article, Sarah Jane B. Veñegas whose work is titled “Against suspending judgement in the virtue of testimonial justice” banks on Miranda Fricker’s *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of*

*Knowing*. In this paper, Veñegas expounds Fricker's testimonial injustice as a form of epistemic injustice. Testimonial injustice occurs when we attribute more or less credibility to a statement based on prejudices about the speaker, such as gender, social background, ethnicity, race, sexuality, tone of voice, accent, and so on. Testimonial injustices wrong someone in their capacity as a speaker or knower because the increased or decreased credibility accorded to their testimony is based not on any relevant concerns, but on prejudices that have nothing to do with whether the speaker or knower should be granted credibility. This in turn gives an unfair advantage in communicating their knowledge to those who are not subject to these prejudices.<sup>8</sup> Veñegas articulates the feminist concept of testimonial injustice as a means that further exacerbate existing socioeconomic inequalities and injustices against women by virtue of the prejudice of them being women and presents the nature of the virtue of testimonial justice and the attitude of acceptance to counter the impacts of testimonial injustice.

Lastly, Kriedge Chlaire C. Alba in her work "The importance of Martha Nussbaum's view on education for democracy to alleviate gender norms in the Philippines" reveals Nussbaum's position on "education as profit," cultivating citizens like livestock or products that can make money only and tolerates hierarchy and domination, that which Nussbaum considers as the silent crisis in modern society. In this article, Alba articulates Nussbaum's discussion on the role of education to cultivate instead the students' active, reflective, and empathetic thinking abilities, a key feature of education for democracy. The paper develops on this education for democracy premise arguing for a more inclusive environment that fosters the honing of students' reflective thinking without the presupposition of gender-related roles and norms. She challenges to apply these thoughts in the context of Philippine education, it being embedded

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<sup>8</sup> Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1.

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with problematic gender norms that amplify the lacuna of gender inequality in and through education. She concludes that education for democracy allows both men and women to foster the importance of empathy and reciprocity, essential in alleviating the distorting gender norms in the Philippine society.

These three articles are common primarily in their pursuit for knowledge-building, and more importantly in their posing of a challenge to fill some theoretical and/or practical gap/s in philosophy, gender, and education. And while only certain lenses have been presented through these papers, and limited perspectives have been put forward, but they made possible the contribution to the conversations on the intersections of philosophy, gender, and education. As it is customary in philosophy, these papers may be supported for some concurring positions, or challenged by some relevant antithesis, either way, the sharing of these papers is an invitation to converse and/or collaborate.

## **TOWARDS A MORE GENDER-RESPONSIVE PHILOSOPHY**

The invitation to discourse implicitly calls for reflection on what other aspects of philosophy, gender and education need to be given attention to. It also certainly implies more work to be done given the evolving issues of gender as a socially dynamic entity, of education being constantly challenged by changes such as the need to revise curricula every so often, and philosophy being since then confronted with its being a male-dominated discipline and the implications that come with it. My introduction does not intend to give an exhaustive elucidation of the reasons that cause the seemingly adverse condition of women in philosophy as these have been propounded in other narratives of those with the same postulation. This rather will attempt to present a response to achieving a more inclusive philosophy particularly in the context of the Philippines with focus on gender-responsiveness.

Among those tangible actions that have been undertaken are the efforts of philosophy academics, men and women alike, to publish, locally and internationally, research works on topics such as gender and philosophy, feminist philosophy, and women philosophers, as well as the individual and institutional attempts of broadening the curriculum through the inclusion of previously neglected works of women, introducing them in learning materials, reading about their works as part of philosophical discourses, and such other innovative strategies.

Outside but within the periphery of academics, various professional philosophy organizations and independent scholars have organized quite a number of gender-related and inclusivity activities. A new organization founded in June 2020 called Women Doing Philosophy, composed of Filipino women philosophers, promotes the scholarly, professional, and personal flourishing of women philosophers, and aims to work on supporting women from underrepresented regions, classes, across genders and ethnicities among others in the country.<sup>9</sup> These commendable efforts are ways in which philosophy in the Philippines is gradually transformed into becoming more inclusive. But more work needs to be done.

On another related perspective, recommendations to “disrupt the schema”<sup>10</sup> in philosophy such as making women (and other minorities) visible in the discipline, and making explicit the schemas for gender, race, class, and philosophy are some of those propounded by Sally Haslanger in her paper “Changing the Ideology and Culture of Philosophy: Not by

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<sup>9</sup> Cassandra Teodosio and Tracy Llanera, “The Women Doing Philosophy Group in the Philippines,” in *Blog of the APA* (2 March 2021), <<https://blog.apaonline.org/2021/03/02/the-women-doing-philosophy-group-in-the-philippines/>>.

<sup>10</sup> A schema resembles a stereotype but is more inclusive and neutral. Gender schemas are hypotheses that we all share, men and women alike, about what it means to be male or female. Schemas assign different psychological traits to males and females. We see boys and men as capable of independent action, as agents; they are task-oriented and instrumental. We see girls and women as nurturant, communal, and expressive. In brief, men act; women feel and express their feelings. Virginia Valian, “Sex, Schema and Success: What’s keeping women back?” in *Academe*, 84: 5 (Sep/Oct 1998), 2.



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Reason (Alone).”<sup>11</sup> This recommendation is deemed likewise a concretization of what I wish to put forward, a *gender-responsive approach to philosophy*. Gender responsiveness refers to outcomes that reflect an understanding of gender roles and inequalities and which make an effort to encourage equal participation and equal and fair distribution of benefits.<sup>12</sup> It respects differences based on gender and acknowledges gender, together with age, ethnicity, language, disability, and religion are all part of a learner’s identity. Furthermore, it enables education structures, systems, and methodologies to be sensitive to all women and men, and ensures that gender parity in education is part of a wider strategy to advance gender equality in society. Finally, it continuously evolves to close gaps on gender disparity and eradicate gender-based discrimination.

In the Philippine basic education sector, the Department of Education (DepEd) issued a Gender-Responsive Basic Education Policy anchored on its Gender and Development (GAD) mandate as stipulated in the 1987 Philippine Constitution, Republic Act (RA) No. 9710 or the Magna Carta of Women (MCW), RA 10533 or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, and the Philippines’ International Human Rights Commitments to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) among others. Through this policy, the DepEd commits to integrate the principles of gender equality, gender equity, gender sensitivity, non-discrimination and human rights, in the provision and governance of basic education. This is in line with the DepEd’s mandate to ensure access to quality basic education for all.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See Sally Haslanger, “Changing the Ideology and Culture of Philosophy: Not by Reason (Alone),” in *Hypatia*, 23:2 (2009), 210-223.

<sup>12</sup> Gayle Nelson, *Gender Responsive National Communication Toolkit* (Denmark: UNDP, 2015), 7.

<sup>13</sup> Department of Education, “Gender-responsive basic education policy” (DO 32, S. 2017), <<https://www.deped.gov.ph/2017/06/29/do-32-s-2017-gender-responsive-basic-education-policy/>>.

On the other hand, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) in 2015, issued a memorandum order, titled “Establishing the Policies and Guidelines on Gender and Development in the Commission on Higher Education and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs),” also known as CHED Memorandum Order No. 1, series of 2015 (CMO 1, s. 2015 for brevity). It stipulates “gender mainstreaming as one of the major strategies in educating and informing various sectors of society on the need to recognize and respect rights of women and men.” The CMO further specifies the scope of the Guidelines to be the enabling mechanisms that CHED and HEIs shall establish, such as GAD Focal Point System or GFPS, and the integration of the principles of gender equality in the trilogical functions of higher education: 1) curriculum development, 2) gender-responsive research programs, and 3) gender-responsive extension programs.<sup>14</sup>

In the said CMO, gender responsive curricular program (GRCP) refers to a curriculum that shall prevent all forms of gender-based discrimination in instruction, research, extension, as well as in marketing methods and the use of promotional materials. It ensures the promotion of “women’s empowerment” to be undertaken through the “provision, availability, and accessibility of opportunities, services, and observance of human rights which enable women to actively participate and contribute to the political, economic, social, and cultural development of the nation.”

Philosophy, being offered as a subject in basic education (senior high school), as a course in baccalaureate programs, and as a degree program in higher education institutions, is encompassed in the said DepEd and CHED policies. Hence, a gender-responsive approach to philosophy is imperative. This means that the approach to philosophy calls for re-examination in order to check its adherence to the goals and tenets

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<sup>14</sup> Commission on Higher Education, “Establishing the Policies and Guidelines on Gender and Development in the Commission on Higher Education and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) Commission on Higher Education (CHED)” (CHED Memorandum Order No. 1 Series of 2015), <<https://ched.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/CMO-no.-01-s.-2015.pdf>>.

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of gender-responsiveness, thus its compliance to the national mandates. This may include revisiting the existing policies relevant to the offering of philosophy as a subject, course or degree program, or as specific as revising the existing philosophy curriculum and the syllabus. It may also entail looking at the issues of women in the discipline, of the implications of their embodied existence. If philosophy were to become more open to women's insistence on thinking through the implications of their embodied existence—an existence enmeshed by identity markers such as gender, race, caste or class<sup>15</sup> and is accorded sustained inclusivity efforts, then one can envision a philosophy that is neither masculine nor feminine, but rather inclusive. Although compliance is only one important facet to consider in the picture, the very essence of executing a gender-responsive approach to philosophy is also deemed of paramount importance. The existing efforts of concerned stakeholders may already serve as springboard in pursuing a direction for philosophy that considers the facets of inclusivity. These efforts are all worthy to be sustained, if not further improved in the hope of bearing more concretization of this vision for philosophy with a gender-responsive approach being essential towards this direction. Ultimately, the concerted and “collective voice” of philosophy academics and philosophy enthusiasts who, despite belonging to different institutions and organizations, are called upon to effect a united effort geared towards a more gender-responsive hence inclusive philosophy.

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<sup>15</sup> Rebecca Ratchliffe and Claire Shaw, “Philosophy is for posh, white boys with trust funds—why are there so few women?,” in *The Guardian* (5 January 2015), <<https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2015/jan/05/philosophy-is-for-posh-white-boys-with-trust-funds-why-are-there-so-few-women>>.

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