Why So Stuck?

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In a 1998 book, the psychologist Virginia Valian asked the question of her title, *Why So Slow? The Advancement of Women* (Valian 1998). This question has become perennial specifically within the profession of philosophy, where the advancement, or just the representation, of women seems a bit worse than slow. While the past decades have seen advances in our numbers within professional philosophy, in recent years we seem to be stuck. When I reviewed data gathered by the APA on women in philosophy in the mid-1990s for an article in 2005, 29.2% of those receiving philosophy Ph.D.s in 1996 were women, compared to only 17.4% of the total of Ph.D.s in philosophy in 1995 (Walker 2005). Yet the most recent reports from multiple sources show that the percentage of women Ph.D.s in philosophy are “relatively static since at least 1997,” ranging from 25%-33% each year, with no growth pattern (Solomon and Clarke 2009, includes other references). Kathryn Norlock’s investigation, with the help of a statistician for the National Center for Education Statistics, estimated based on 2003 federal payroll data that the percentage of women employed in post-secondary philosophy education was around 21% (Norlock 2006). Because the *Digest of Education Statistics* now sorts out philosophy, Norlock has been able to confirm recently the 21% figure for women post-secondary philosophy teachers; but the figure of women employed full-time in philosophy comes in at an anemic 16.6% (DES 2009, Table 256). That is not the only reason it is sad to look at this table; miserably, no percentages at all appear for Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaska Native women, who “round to zero” in our profession.

The dramatic and continuing under-representation of women in academic philosophy (as a post-graduate discipline and as an academic profession) is getting persistent attention at this point—at least from women in philosophy. Inquiries, some of them prompted by the APA’s Committee on the Status of Women, have bunched up in recent years. A 2007 CSW panel at the Central Meeting explored the question: Why still only (roughly) 21% (and even that, inclusive of women teaching philosophy part-time)? At the Eastern Division Meeting in 2010, the CSW sponsored a panel, “Is the Climate Any Warmer for Women in Philosophy?” At the Pacific Division Meeting in 2011, the CSW arranged a session on “Gender Climate, Institutional Recognition, and Material Compensation.” Clearly, philosophy seems to be stuck, as regards women, and it is not going unnoticed, at least by women. The four contributions that follow were parts of the 2010 session at the Eastern Division Meeting in Boston, where several participants were snowed
and within our profession. Michelle Saint emphasizes the politically and institutionally maintained within our universities about how to change obstacles that are graduate work in areas such as feminist philosophy, critical resource, “The Pluralist’s Guide to Philosophy,” that will provide, done in philosophy. Alcoff is one architect of a forthcoming web practices and physical environments, and this could clearly be women faculty and improving the gender climate in STEM needed, of other kinds. DesAutels conducts workshops, based directions, as well as toward greater diversity, desperately our profession forward in more gender-just and gender-friendly practices, that offer us things most of us can actually do and novel potential of the professional philosophical blogsphere, despite its own dangers and morale traps. She directs us (as do DesAutels and Alcoff) to the unprecedented and revealing blog, What Is It Like To Be A Woman in Philosophy? (http://beingawomaninphilosophy.wordpress.com/), and its more recent pendant blog, What We’re Doing About What It’s Like (http://whatweredoingaboutwhatitslike.wordpress.com/). Saint also alerts us to the aggressive public stand taken by several male philosophers on ways to discredit known sexual harassers. The hierarchical structures, formal and informal, of academic institutions and departments have made it difficult for those most vulnerable to abusive and disrespectful treatment to speak up or find allies within or beyond their environments. The virtual philosophical community might change that in important ways, by recruiting new and wide communities of concern and solidarity.

Finally, Rae Langton returns us to the question of what the profession itself can accomplish institutionally. She provides us with the brief overview of a report on women in philosophy in universities in Australia, compiled with almost complete participation of Philosophy Departments and sponsored by the Australasian Association of Philosophy, the counterpart to our APA. Here we get useful comparative data and recommendations. Now all we need is something to compare them to.

References
Alcoff, Linda. Singing in the Fire: Stories of Women in Philosophy (Alcoff 2003) collected harrowing tales from successful women in the profession (raising the question of what might have happened to less successful ones), acknowledges that the past decades have seen significant and positive changes in the situation and prospects of women in philosophy. Yet current reports, including ones now collecting in the recently emergent philosophical blogosphere, reveal that stunning and overt forms of sexism, including physical aggression, are not, it seems, uncommon. Michelle Saint, a recently minted Ph.D., digs into the new virtual world surrounding our profession, with decidedly mixed results. I repeat: anecdotal evidence remains important against the backdrop of what has been established in other professional academic areas through careful research. The anecdotal evidence should make us feel an urgent need to have such careful research done for our own discipline and profession; in the meanwhile, it brings to life vividly what it is like to live in those worlds characterized by “overt discrimination and subtle bias,” and worse, by sexual predation, harassment, and demeaning insult.

Our contributors, however, do not leave us in despondency. On the contrary, they bring forward not only fresh information, but also reports of effective interventions, grass roots movements, novel channels of information, and targeted trainings and practices, that offer us things most of us can actually do and insist upon, as well as learn and educate about, to start moving our profession forward in more gender-just and gender-friendly directions, as well as toward greater diversity, desperately needed, of other kinds. DesAutels conducts workshops, based in the body of research already available, aimed at advancing women faculty and improving the gender climate in STEM fields, targeting basic and changeable features of academic practices and physical environments, and this could clearly be done in philosophy. Alcoff is one architect of a forthcoming web resource, “The Pluralist’s Guide to Philosophy,” that will provide, at long last, fair and accurate information on opportunities for graduate work in areas such as feminist philosophy, critical race theory, GLBT philosophy, and continental philosophy that are marginalized and misrepresented in the disproportionately influential Leiter Report. Alcoff urges us to think politically and institutionally about how to change obstacles that are politically and institutionally maintained within our universities and within our profession. Michelle Saint emphasizes the