Transgressions That Matter

What trans* philosophy is and how it informs the discipline

By Lily Crawford

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Supervised by Dr. Mathea Slåttholm Sagdahl

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University of Oslo

Faculty of Humanities

Department of Philosophy,
Classics, & History of Art and Idea

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Abstract

Trans* philosophy, given its recent emergence, is in the process of establishing itself within the discipline. This thesis argues that trans* philosophy is an illuminatory project that confers intelligibility onto trans* lives by engaging with trans* phenomena. As such, it meaningfully contributes to philosophy. Providing illuminations through positive argumentation critically undermines normative ways of conducting philosophy to strengthen theory production; conferring intelligibility redresses epistemic oppression; engaging with trans* phenomena challenges the boundaries of what is ordinarily considered philosophy, resulting in more honest and relevant theory. These three separate but interconnected tenets are impelled by trans* narratives.

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Introduction

1.1 Motivations

Transgender people are disproportionately incarcerated in the United States, where 16% of transgender individuals are imprisoned in their lifetime, as opposed to the national average of 6.6% (Grant et al., 2011, p. 158). Many think of prisons as an institution for protecting their community from harm, but this sentiment is hard to find among transgender people. In fact, they often hold prisons in deep contempt. This thesis emerged from my curiosity surrounding this discrepancy. I wondered why transgender people hink so differently about prisons and what these alternative thought practices offer, if anything, to how philosophers theorize about the criminal legal system. Is it because of their higher incarceration rates? Or was that answer too simplistic? Perhaps their contempt is motivated by something philosophers had overlooked.

The arguments I produce stem from my curiosity, but more importantly, they emerge from T4T spaces. T4T is a term for describing places created by and for transgender people. It was coincidentally created by Craigslist, America's Finn.no, in the pre-dating-apps era when people posted online ads looking for romantic relationships. The ads had a shorthand for the type of relationships one sought after. F4M meant a female looking for males, M4M was a male looking for males, etc. Thus, T4T was born (Awkward-Rich & Malatino, 2022, p. 4). This online space was among the first to connect transgender individuals to one another, and with time, T4T has expanded to places outside the internet. Anywhere transgender people are in community with one another is a T4T space.

T4T is where my theorizing begins. The knowledge I produce comes from transgender people, but it is not solely for transgender people. As such, I spend lots of time translating – making our lives, language, and knowledge comprehensible to those who are not transgender, also called cisgender people. Our knowledge transcends the boundaries of what is ordinarily considered knowable, and as such, centering transgender epistemologies and translating them for a predominantly cisgender audience is an epistemic challenge. With that, I urge the reader to continue humbly and charitably.

My quest to understand the disproportionate prison sentencing and discrepancy of attitudes towards prisons among cisgender and transgender people brought me down a narrow, unworn path. It quickly became apparent that trans philosophy is still making its debut. I evidence this with the fact that my mentor, a philosopher in the United States, and my thesis advisor, a philosopher in Norway, have common connections in the field. It is further evidenced when looking at citations; I am unsure if I have seen two papers in trans philosophy without an overlapping references. Lastly, this is displayed when looking at the subfield's founders and how many of them are at the beginning of their academic careers. While I originally wanted to write on the intersections of trans philosophy and prison studies, it became clear that I first needed to answer foundational questions.

Trans philosophy is making its debut, but it remains uncertain whether or not it is here to stay. Consequently, my thesis focuses on two questions of central importance: What is trans philosophy? Furthermore, how does trans philosophy, as a framework, contribute to how philosophers produce theory?

*1.2 A brief argument for the word trans**

Gender terms are not stable, but rather, multiple and contested. Up until now, I used the term *transgender* to describe those who disidentify with the gender assigned to them at birth. From here on out, I will use the term trans*. *Trans** is a context-specific place holder within this thesis for the productive political tensions of those who align with transgressing gender norms.

Like all definitions, *trans** is exclusionary and does not encompass everyone who transgresses gender norms. For example, it excludes transmedicalists who think being transgender is a medical condition and not a political category. Additionally, my definition potentially incorporates those who are not traditionally considered transgender, such as stone-butch lesbians. What is vital for my purpose is that it encapsulates those who intentionally align themselves politically with defying the gender norms thrust upon them at birth. Also, this definition remains limited to my thesis.

Keeping the definition of *trans** limited to a context-specific place holder is intentional. Trans*-phobia has a long history of disbelieving trans* people and categorizing them in ways that run contrary to their sense of self. Therefore, it is vital for those writing on trans* topics to specify how we use overarching terms that categorize people. Using a restricted definition of *trans** is an attempt to avoid trans*phobic

language. I will provide a short history of the word, explain a potential problem arising from it, and then argue why this problem grants those doing trans* philosophy the opportunity to think critically about how we categorize trans* people.

Around 2010, *transgender* came to describe those who were not cisgender but still resided within the gender binary, that is, transgender men and transgender women. *Trans** was created in response to this, offering an all-encompassing term to describe transgender women, transgender men, and all other gender nonconforming identities (Bettcher, 2019). Those who had historically been excluded from the category *transgender* created an inclusive umbrella term.

However, the same problem quickly resurfaced. *Trans** was elided into the same meaning as *transgender* and no longer referred to the gamut of gender nonconforming identities, replicating the problem it attempted to solve (Bettcher, 2019). Nearly everyone abandoned the term *trans**, and few people today identify as trans*. Choosing to implement a term few people self-identify as is initially concerning, this is what trans*phobes do when imputing identity categories, after all. However, this contention fails to hold its ground upon further investigation.

Philosophers address this problem when recognizing that we are always already imputting identities. Whether we use the language of *transgender* or *trans**, some people included in our analysis will not identify with our arguments. Exclusion is inevitable when writing about a group of people spanning across age, nationality, class, race, and ability. Philosophers have two options: own up to this or leave it unacknowledged. I propose choosing the former. Owning up to how diverse the trans* experience is enriches our theorizing and, at the very least, makes us more honest.

Acknowledging the imputation of identities is not necessarily accomplished when switching from *transgender* to *trans**. However, *trans** offers a unique place to begin. It lacks cultural reference, holds a certain amount of ambiguity, and denotes a footnote requiring the reader to seek more information. *Trans** asks philosophers to get specific, to think about who the phrase refers to, whose voices are excluded, and how these things impact the theory produced. In Talia Mae Bettcher's words, we are forced to theorize with eyes wide open (Bettcher, 2019, p. 18). I will further explain each of *trans**'s benefits below.

First, *trans** lacks cultural reference, and as such, few people hold deeply entrenched associations. Philosophers can consequently construct a definition that accurately represents the people we are

theorizing with. The definitions need not be uniform and can accurately depict the group philosophers are engaged with.

Second, the asterisk is not easily read aloud. Whether one ought to pronounce the term as "trans star," "trans asterisk," or simply "trans," with a silent asterisk referring to a footnote, remains unclear. Ambiguity, here, is advantageous. There is no single, correct way to pronounce trans*; in the same way, there is no unified, right way to write about trans* phenomena. Our experiences, voices, and positions are various and may contradict one another, and *trans** visually represents this tension.

Building upon this, *trans**'s asterisk meaningfully implies a footnote, signalling that the reader needs additional information. Philosophers cannot account for every trans* experience, and using the asterisk in academic writing textually represents the capaciousness of the trans* experience. Because trans* phenomena are inherently various, philosophers need to clarify who we are writing about. Do we have pre-theoretical sociality among a particular trans* community? Is it, for example, white middle-class Norwegians or impoverished people of color living in America? These details matter because power impacts the body at all levels and alters the theory we produce. Finally, it is worth noting that the use of the asterisk has greatly increased in recent years (e.g., Ellison et al., 2017; Green & Bey, 2017; Jourian et al., 2015; Keegan, 2020; Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014).

Theorizing with eyes wide open leads us to acknowledge that *trans** can never be a unified identity or political agenda. It can only serve as a functional term and context-specific place holder for the people we produce theory with. Eve Kofsky Sedgwick beautifully asks, "What if the richest junctures weren't the ones where everything means the same thing?" (Sedgwick, 1993, p. 8). *Trans** grants those doing trans* philosophy the opportunity to form a distinct, purposeful, and descriptive language for trans* phenomena that means different things within different contexts.

1.3 Outline

This thesis addresses two foundational questions: What is trans* philosophy, and how does trans* philosophy, as a framework, impact how philosophers produce theory? To answer, I argue that trans* philosophy is a practice accountable to illuminating and conferring intelligibility onto trans* lives, and it must begin from pre-theoretical sociality among trans* phenomena. These three features are distinct but interconnected. I show how centering these three tenets leads philosophers to confront epistemic oppression, produce richer theories, and create a more relevant and honest discipline. I will explain each step of my argument below.

First, I implement Talia Mae Bettcher's work "What is Trans Philosophy?" (2019) to argue that it is a distinct discipline dedicated to illuminating trans* phenomena, and I contend it must also make trans* lives more intelligible and come from a place of pre-theoretical sociality among trans* people. Illumination, in short, is answering the challenging questions trans* people confront; conferring intelligibility is granting presuppositional norms required for personhood; and pre-theoretical sociality is the worldly engagement with trans* phenomena. These three characteristics of trans* philosophy undermine traditional Western conceptions of the discipline as critical, perplexing, and objective. I form an account of how trans* philosophy's three tenets provide a critical intervention on how philosophy is ordinarily conceived and conducted.

Second, after establishing this framework, I look at trans* philosophy's second tenet, conferring intelligibility, and how it informs philosophical practices. I use Kristie Dotson's work "Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression" (2014) to show that trans* people experience epistemic oppression, which is an infringement on their capacity to participate in knowledge production. Dotson asserts that epistemic oppression takes three forms, and I use specific case studies to argue that trans* individuals experience all three forms. Then, I demonstrate how trans* philosophy uses the conferral of intelligibility to confront this epistemic oppression. Trans* philosophy's second tenet is the first one I focus on because the concepts used in this chapter are relevant to the remainder of the argument.

Third, I reveal how trans* philosophy's first tenet, illumination, leads philosophers to richer theorizing. To do this, I turn to the context of prison studies, utilizing Perry Zurn's work "Waste Culture and Isolation: Prisons, Toilets, and Gender Segregation" (2019). Zurn confronts epistemic oppression by centering trans* epistemologies produced about the prison. This, in turn, alters dominant thought practices surrounding the function of prisons. Trans* epistemologies contest that prisons operate according to an eliminative logic. That is to say, trans* people conceive of prisons as relying on a set of practices that remove them from society.

I rely on trans* testimony to illuminate the eliminative logic's three separate but interconnected

components. First, the logic works to purify the social center by creating notions of pure and impure where trans* people are rendered "impure." Mary Douglas, Julia Kristeva, and María Lugones back this notion. Second, prisons purify the social center by iteratively segregating trans* people from society and within the prison itself. Third, through these isolation practices, the prison makes trans* people relationally thin, reinforcing the idea that trans* people are both isolable and impure. My purpose here is not to create a normative argument. Instead, I use this argument to demonstrate how centering trans* epistemologies illuminates new ways of thinking, leading to a more robust theory.

Fourth, I analyse trans* philosophy's third tenet, pre-theoretical sociality among trans* phenomena, to show how this practice makes philosophy increasingly relevant and honest. This chapter takes a distinct turn from my structured, contemporary writing style. Through the work of Ladelle McWhorter in "The Abolition of Philosophy" (2018), I examine the life of Michel Foucault and his relationship to philosophy. He spent over a decade of his career being discontent with philosophy. Eventually, he accepted himself as a philosopher by thinking about the discipline as a way of life, meaning a practice where philosophers use the knowledge they produce and employ it in their daily affairs. Through this, he used philosophy as a platform for centering subjugated knowledges.

Foucault's thought practices offer trans* philosophy a few valuable insights. First, it shows how centering marginalized knowledges is an established practice that ameliorates epistemic oppression. Second, it calls for philosophers to be more involved in applying their theories. Trans* philosophy makes a point of departure with Foucault about when philosophers need to be engaged. I make the case that pre-theoretical sociality, or what I call worldly engagement, is pertinent before theorizing begins. Then, I argue that this makes the discipline more honest and relevant in how we produce theory. Furthermore, I demonstrate why honesty and relevancy are consequential aims not only for trans* philosophy but for the discipline as a whole.

This thesis demonstrates how trans* philosophy's three tenets form a meaningful framework for centering subjugated knowledges and challenging the delimits of philosophy. It confronts epistemic oppression by conferring intelligibility, provides illuminations through positive arguments thus creating richer theories, and makes philosophers more honest and relevant by beginning with worldly engagement. I urge philosophers to take seriously the knowledge produced by trans* people, and in doing so, I confront

deeply held norms surrounding who is considered a legitimate producer of knowledge. Trans* philosophy illustrates that who creates knowledge matters and centering subjugated knowledges fundamentally alters our relationship to philosophy.

1.4 Parameters of the thesis

Before delving into the argument, I want to note four parameters briefly. First, I am not concerned with prescribing tactics for ending the prison's eliminative logic or exact guidelines for conducting philosophy. I engage with illumination, and while my illuminations may implicate the importance of specific actions, I am not engaging with the politics of prescription. Doing so would require a much more detailed argument beyond the scope of this thesis.

Additionally, my argument narrowly focuses on the category trans*. It is essential to note the intersecting oppressions confronting trans* people. For example, Black trans* women are disproportionately incarcerated at higher rates and experience higher rates of violence within the prison system (Grant et al., 2011, p. 163). Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of trans* people who are murdered are trans* women of color, women who are sex workers, and women who are poor (MacKenzie and Marcel, 2009). Trans*phobic violence exists across identity differences. The reader should bear in mind the severe limitation withstood because of my singular focus on the category trans*.

Third, I did not conduct data collection for this thesis, but my background in sociology allowed me to identify sound methodologies of those who did. To confront epistemic oppression by incorporating trans* testimony, I rely on interviews, prison letters, archives, and newspaper articles published by researchers and historians. My mode of engagement with these texts closely mirrors Barbara Christian's argument in "The Race for Theory" (1987), where she writes,

> For people of color have always theorized–but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. . . . How else have we managed to survive with such spiritedness the assault on our bodies, social institutions, countries, our very humanity? My folk, in other words, have always been a race for theory–though more in the form of the hieroglyph, a written figure which is both sensual and abstract, both beautiful and communicative. In my own work I try to illuminate and explain these hieroglyphs, which is, I think, an activity quite different from the creating of the hieroglyphs themselves. (Christian, 1987, p. 52)

Like Christian, I do not create the hieroglyphs. My role is to engage with them as an interpretive agent. As

chapter three will clarify, this returns epistemic agency to trans* people.

Christian's sensual and abstract way of engaging with people of color's theory is akin to another philosopher who inspires the way I engage with trans* testimony, Sara Ahmed. Ahmed poses the notion of a "sweaty concept," which is how one describes difficult things that "resist being fully comprehended in the present" (Ahmed, 2017, p. 12). My work is rife with sweaty concepts; through them, my descriptive work is also conceptual. Ahmed clarifies this by writing,

> A concept is worldly but it is also a reorientation to a world, a way of turning things around, a different slant on the same thing. More specifically, a "sweaty concept" comes from a description of a body that is not at home in the world. By this, I mean description as an angle or point of view: a description of how it feels not to be at home in the world or a description of the world from the point of view of not being at home in it. (Ahmed, 2017, p. 13)

The sweaty concepts I employ are found in the worlds I inhabit; they are not concepts I merely contemplated into existence. Ahmed explains that choosing the word "sweat" was intentional as it is a bodily function arising from arduous activity. Similarly, describing trans* bodies that must strain to be in the world generates sweaty concepts. Limited data confines my thesis, but my engagement with trans* narrative is interpretive and generates conceptually valuable, sweaty concepts.

Lastly, this thesis engages with what Jack Halberstam refers to as "low theory" which ze describes as "theoretical knowledge that works at many levels at once, as precisely one of those modes of transmission that revels in the detours, twists, and turns through knowing and confusion, and that seeks not to explain but to involve" (Halberstam, 2011, p. 15). I am not merely an explanatory agent for trans* narrative – low theory steers this thesis. Additionally, as a trans* person, I involve my own voice. I join the project taken up by Jack Halberstam, Leslie Feinberg, Riki Anne Wilchins, Dean Spade, Kate Bornstein, and many others who urge trans* people to be producers of knowledge and not merely case studies of knowledge. Incorporating low theory and personal narrative is how I accomplish this.

My project aims to illuminate and largely sidesteps prescriptions. It is bound to the category trans*, but the reader should bear in mind how identities are always located within power relations. Furthermore, it is constrained by the trans* testimony that was accessible to me and the trans* people I was pre-theoretically engaged with. Despite these limitations, my engagement with trans* testimony, as motivated by Christian and Ahmed, is conceptually generative. I also incorporate low theory and my own voice to be conceptually generative and assert myself as a knowledge-producer.

2

Trans* Philosophy's Three Tenets

2.1 Introduction

Trans* philosophy emerged alongside queer theory in the 1990s. Quite aptly, it is often presented as feminist philosophy's child and queer theory's fraternal twin – even referred to as the 'evil twin' by some scholars (Stryker, 2004, p. 212). Feminism's children were essentially indistinguishable in their origins, but as they developed, trans* philosophy was established at the University of Oregon's 2016 conference *Trans* Experience in Philosophy* (Zurn, 2016). As a relatively new field of inquiry, trans* philosophy is contending with foundational questions. As such, this chapter answers the most foundational of questions: what is trans* philosophy?

To begin answering this, I briefly overview Judith Butler's argument in *Undoing Gender* (2004) for how institutionalized philosophy has created a tautological paradox by asking, "Is philosophy philosophy?" Butler appeals to foregoing this question in lieu of expanding our conception of philosophy. Expanding the discipline by accepting trans* philosophy creates new knowledge and strengthens the field. Next, I look at trans* philosophy's starting point of accepting and affirming trans* identities as a constituently necessary place to begin philosophical work.

After laying the groundwork, I detail why trans* philosophy is a practice of illuminating and conferring intelligibility onto trans* lives through pre-theoretical sociality among trans* phenomena. The first tenet, illumination, distinguishes trans* philosophy from merely philosophizing about trans* issues since it critically undermines normative ways of doing philosophy. Trans* philosophy relies on positive argumentation to bring illumination rather than pursuing the normative path of negative argumentation that creates perplexity. To make this argument, I rely on Talia Mae Bettcher's work, "What is Trans Philosophy?" (2019).

To describe the second tenet, conferring intelligibility onto trans* lives, I return to Judith Butler's work, but this time in *Bodies and Power, Revisited* (2002). This section shows how conferring intelligibility is integral to illumination. Furthermore, I incorporate Jay Prosser's notion of "the body narrative" (Prosser,

1998) to demonstrate how trans* testimony is a valuable tool for conferring intelligibility. I will expand this short argument for incorporating trans* narrative into philosophy in the third chapter.

Trans* philosophy's third tenet is pre-theoretical sociality among trans* phenomena. Bettcher refers to this as engaging in the "every day" and as "ground-bound philosophy," and I develop her ideas into what I refer to as worldly engagement, or beginning philosophy from our social positioning in the world. Worldly engagement refers to the people one communes with but also things like the books one reads, or the music one hears. I argue that worldly engagement is a critical component of trans* philosophy because it permits philosophers to provide illuminations and confer intelligibility, but more importantly, it informs the kinds of knowledge that is produced.

The primary function of this chapter is to determine the three features distinguishing trans* philosophy as a framework. I demonstrate how these features challenge what it means to do philosophy by providing a necessary, critical intervention. I also make the preliminary case for the importance of testimony in theory production. My subsequent chapters each rely on a single tenet of trans* philosophy to provide a more in-depth analysis of how each one informs the discipline.

2.2 Philosophy's paradox

The final chapter of Judith Butler's book *Undoing Gender* (2004) titled, "Can the "Other" of Philosophy Speak?" is a short detour, and the argument Butler provides will be further expanded upon in chapter five. This detour addresses why I do not contend with whether or not trans* philosophy is philosophy. Butler is accredited as the founder of queer theory and is not without critique from trans* theorists (Bettcher, 2019). *Undoing Gender* (2004), however, was their first serious attempt at addressing trans* phenomena and is canonical within trans* philosophy. In it, Butler reveals their struggles as an academic who is deeply invested in philosophy but works outside the institutionalized discipline. They describe how this experience creates a paradox in the field.

The work Butler produces largely constitutes the meaning of "philosophy" in the larger discourse, and yet, they were exiled from the discipline and work in a comparative literature department. Butler argues that this experience exemplifies how philosophy created a spectral double with theory outside the institutionalized discipline. Like Butler, many feminist scholars create theory but do not formally belong to a department; such is the case for Nancy Fraser, Elizabeth Grosz, Luce Irigray, and Iris Marion Young.

There are even more instances for those doing trans* philosophy: Kate Bornstein, Leslie Feinberg, Jack Halberstam, Bernice Hausman, Janice Raymond, Gayle Salamon – the list could go on. Philosophy created a boundary delineating that these theorists are not philosophers despite those outside of academia recognizing their work as such.

One may respond to Butler's experience by asking, "Are feminism and trans* theories, then, philosophy?" Butler swiftly objects to this tautology – is philosophy philosophy? – by declaring that this question does not need answering. Instead, one should ask what the conditions were to make this question possible in the first place. What led philosophy to arrive at a juncture where it questions whether or not vast swaths of theoretical work count as philosophy? Butler responds by writing,

> Perhaps we should simply say that philosophy, as we understand the institutional and discursive trajectory of that term, is no longer self-identical, if it ever was, and that its reduplication plagues it now as an insuperable problem. (Butler, 2004, pp. 242-3)

The obsessive commitment to drawing boundaries around what counts as philosophy is problematic because it produces a paradoxical tautology. It leaves academic philosophy scandalized by the use of its name outside of its official boundaries.

While this tautology plagues the discipline, responding to it does not need to be frightening. In fact, "it may be that our current predicament threatens to do no more than to bring philosophy closer to its place as one strand among many in the fabric of culture" (Butler, 2004, p. 250). Philosophers can respond by engaging with theory produced both within and outside the formal institution.

This short analysis of philosophy's paradox establishes the importance of engaging with trans* philosophy; it is a means for returning philosophy to itself. Bettcher reiterates this sentiment when considering which literature trans* philosophy should engage. She asserts,

> If something like world-travel is an important practice in opening up one's experience–experiences that guide one's philosophical judgment–then it might also be that literature travel is likewise crucial. With whom are we speaking and why? (Bettcher, 2019, p. 663)

If traveling to another world permits one to become new through knowledge (Lugones, 1994), then literature travel is likewise essential. Philosophy has never been self-identical, and it is strengthened by crossing disciplinary boundaries and traveling to literature outside the institutionalized discipline. Trans* philosophy is advantageous as it crosses such boundaries to create new knowledges.

2.3 Trans* philosophy's starting point

This section formulates the primary distinction between trans* philosophy and other philosophies. Trans* philosophy, like all philosophy, must begin somewhere, and it starts by accepting that people are who they say they are. For example, when a trans* man claims that he is, in fact, a man, this is taken as true. The assertions trans* people make about their genders are explicitly taken from the beginning. Some might claim that validating trans* identities is "dogmatic" or possibly "not philosophical," but Bettcher provides two reasons for why this is not the case.

First, trans* philosophy's starting point is clarified when we look at feminist and queer theory's starting points. Feminist analysis does not dispute whether or not women should be subject to male domination. The premise that women should be free from male domination is its starting point. Likewise, Bettcher points out that it would be peculiar if leading queer theorists debated if it was sinful to be gay (Bettcher, 2019, p. 653). This is not the sort of question queer theorists asks. Trans* philosophy, similarly, does not quarrel over whether or not trans* people are the identities they assert.

Second, building upon this argument, we can think of how all strains of philosophy maintain starting points for accomplishing theoretical goals. Bettcher posits that questions about trolley carts are frequently asked within applied ethics, and it would be irrelevant to ask if one was merely hallucinating an idea of trolley carts or if an external world with trolley carts could even exist (Bettcher, 2019, p. 653). These sorts of questions are relegated to metaphysics rather than applied ethics. They would make it impossible for the ethicists to glean answers to the types of moral questions they aim to answer. Philosophers would not claim that the ethicists' work is dogmatic for not first fully grappling with metaphysical questions. That they seek answers to different sorts of quandaries is accepted.

In a similar vein, trans* philosophy's starting point is not dogmatic. A philosopher may choose to ask whether a trans* man is a man, but then they are no longer doing trans* philosophy; they are asking something metaphysical. Presuming the validity of trans* identities is a necessary methodological segregation for meaningful, philosophical inquiry about trans* phenomena to begin.

My theorizing starts from the point that trans* identities are valid, and as such, I do not provide a complete theory of gender. My work may hold profound implications for how we theorize about gender, but doing so is not my explicit aim. Now that I have established trans* philosophy's starting point, I turn toward my argument for the three components of trans* philosophy.

2.4 First tenet, illumination

Illumination is the process of answering the most pressing questions trans* people confront. It is also what makes trans* philosophy distinct from trans* studies or philosophizing about trans* issues. In this section, I will demonstrate how illumination is a non-normative approach to philosophy that provides a pertinent, critical intervention.

I first describe what a "normative approach" to philosophy entails by looking at Graham Priest's work, "What is Philosophy?" (2006). Priest proposes a commonly endorsed conception of philosophy as having two necessary components: one, philosophy is disruptive, and two, by its very nature, it leads to more perplexity. Bettcher shows how trans* philosophy provides a distinct, alternative framework that skillfully deconstructs these pervasive conceptions.

Priest's first component of philosophy is that it is necessarily disruptive because "anything is open to critical challenge and scrutiny" (Priest, 2006, p. 202). Philosophers use their intellectual queries to challenge and reject ideas that are typically taken for granted. According to Priest, there are two means for accomplishing this. On the one hand, a philosopher may utilize what are called "negative arguments" for problematizing and criticizing theories. Negative arguments are characterized as "X is bad because Y." On the other hand, they can rely on "positive arguments," which are the inverse, or "X is good because Y." Positive arguments are formulated to be criticized by negative arguments. From here, Priest ascertains that positive arguments serve the chief function of philosophy, that is, to make critical and negative arguments. The first normative conception of philosophy is that its ultimate function is to critique.

According to this account, the second component is that negative argumentation and critique complicate how people ordinarily think about the world, thus creating more perplexity. A philosopher's task is to ask critical questions that upheave common sense understandings of the world. Bettcher explains this second component by writing that "Even if philosophy isn't itself the source of perplexity, certainly it is our guide, the practice that strips back a seemingly coherent common-sense reality to reveal a seething cauldron of confusion" (Bettcher, 2019, p. 651). The normative approach considers philosophy as the pathway to perplexity.

In summary, Priest's normative account of philosophy argues that the discipline critiques basic as-

sumptions by prioritizing negative arguments, which leads to increased perplexity. The history of philosophy is rife with theorists following this template. One of the most salient examples is Foucualt's work on the prison. He dedicates the entirety of his book *Discipline and Punish* (1979) to analyzing history to disrupt how people think about the present.

Other prominent examples include Descartes' muddling of the relationship between mind and body, Kant's disruption to moral philosophy with the categorical imperative, and how Plato routinely uses dialogue to increase puzzlement. Priest's alluring account of philosophy has led to a more complex understanding of the world, yet Bettcher actively pushes back against it. She intervenes to demonstrate why trans* philosophy must remove itself from this normative paradigm of philosophy.

To demonstrate why Bettcher argues against this normative account of philosophy, I begin with Priest's second assertion that philosophy leads to perplexity. This assertion is based on the supposition that the world was comprehensible before we began doing philosophy (Bettcher, 2019, p. 651). If it were not for philosophy, one would be able to engage with the world and make sense of it. Trans* philosophy complicates this account because of its relationship to perplexity.

Trans* individuals are confronted daily with perplexity. I confront perplexity in my own life when wondering what it means to say that I am genderqueer. Which bathroom will I be safest in? How do I make sense of the violence my community endures? Why, Bettcher asks, "do people want to kill us" (Bettcher, 2019, p. 651)? What the fuck (WTF)? Trans* lives are "shot through with WTF questions. We live in the WTF" (Bettcher, 2019, p. 651). WTF questions are sweaty. They arise when everyday understandings of the world do not make sense because of our trans*ness. In my own life, they emerge when common sense ceases to feel ordinary.

Trans* people do not need philosophy to uncover perplexity in the world – it is already there in our everyday lives. How we engage with the world discounts Priest's argument that philosophy must reveal perplexity because trans* lives are chock-full of it. If trans* philosophy is meant to be accountable to trans* lives, then it does not need to generate more puzzlement. Instead, it needs to provide illumination. Bettcher comments on her departure from Priest by writing,

> I do not see the chief function of trans philosophy as negative or critical. I see it primarily as constructive, positive, illuminating, and orienting. I do not think here that philosophy is uniquely positioned to address WTF rather than, say, sociology or psychology or anthropology–precisely because the WTF is so all-embracing, so personal, indeed existential in nature. Or, in other words, I think the attempt to provide illumination in response to these WTF questions is necessarily philosophical. (Bettcher, 2019, pp. 651-2)

Illuminating answers to WTF questions is central to trans* philosophy, even if it only provides partial illuminations. Attempting to grasp the sweaty, perplexing questions inundated in trans* lives is an inherently philosophical project.

Trans* philosophy's attempts at illuminating answers to WTF questions does not mean the subfield will never lead to more perplexity. Indeed, illuminating phenomena often involves discovering new lines of inquiry. Following these potentially perplexing, new lines of inquiry, however, are always pursued with the intent of answering the original WTF questions. Further, the perplexity that may arise is not uncovered through negative argumentation in the way that it does in Priest's model of philosophy. The perplexity comes from a puzzling standpoint, urging the philosopher to discover illumination.

To bring the argument full circle, Bettcher returns to how illumination distinguishes trans* philosophy from philosophizing about trans* issues. Trans* philosophy, through illumination, provides necessary philosophical intervention. It undoes normative ways of conceiving philosophy and returns academics to the most foundational of philosophical questions: Must philosophy necessarily be critical and perplexing? Or can it be positive and illuminative? Doing this shows how philosophy is happening all around us; it is conducted inside philosophy departments, within Butler's literary work, and throughout trans* lives.

2.5 Second tenet, positive intelligibility conferral

I established how illumination distinguishes trans* philosophy from trans* studies, leaving us with the question, how is illumination accomplished? I propose that it is achieved by providing answers to WTF questions as well as conferring intelligibility onto trans* lives. To make this argument, I first describe what it means to confer intelligibility according to Judith Butler's article "DOING JUSTICE TO SOMEONE: Sex Reassignment and Allegories of Transsexuality" (2001). In it, they assert that conferring intelligibility grants the presuppositional norms necessary for personhood.

Next, I propose one way to confer intelligibility, which is by engaging with trans* narratives. Utilizing Jay Prosser's book *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (1998), I argue that narrative is imperative for how trans* people make sense of themselves. By engaging with these texts, theorists also enter the world of self-making, rendering trans* lives more intelligible. Because trans* philosophy is com-

mitted to illumination, granting personhood to trans* people is a chief way to reach this aim.

Butler forms an account of intelligibility as the presuppositional norms and practices necessary for granting personhood. Most crucially, these norms and practices are also necessary for granting love. Butler describes intelligibility as such:

> What a person is, what social norms must be honored and expressed for personhood to become allocated, how we do or do not recognize animate others as persons depending on whether or not we recognize a certain norm manifested in and by the body of that other. (Butler, 2001, p. 622)

Conditions of intelligibility are the requirements one must meet to be recognized as fully human. An example of one of these conditions is the recognizability of one's gender. Possessing a recognizable, coherent gender is presupposed as a social norm that "must be honored and expressed for personhood to become allocated" (Butler, 2001, p. 622).

Butler contends that conditions for intelligibility stem from norms determining what subjects we can be. In other words, what is or is not established as a norm governs one's intelligibility. This is better understood in relation to trans* people when asking specific questions, such as, "What counts as a coherent gender?"; "Whose world is legitimated as real?" or, "By what norms am I constrained as I begin to ask what I may become" (Butler, 2001, 621)? These quandaries reveal that certain norms govern our intelligibility and what kinds of people we may become.

Trans* folks are rendered unintelligible when our genders are regarded as incoherent. That is to say, our selves and our worlds are delegitimated when we assert "incoherent" genders, and we find ourselves continually restrained by gendered norms. The violence trans* people endure is a testament to our lack of intelligibility. We are beaten, harassed, abused; we are denied love. Because our bodies fail to conform to the prerequisite condition of intelligibility – having a coherent gender – we are not seen as fully human. It is in T4T spaces that we find refuge and love. It is in those spaces that we create our own norms for granting intelligibility and recognizing one another's subjecthood.

Asking what a coherent gender is, what makes one's world legitimate, or what norms constrain us are all WTF questions. Without being explicit, Butler shows why trans* people ask WTF questions in the first place; it is because we grapple with what it means to exist in the margins of intelligibility. In other words, trans* people ask "WTF?" in response to experiences that threaten our status as intelligible, lovable humans. For trans* philosophy to illuminate answers to these questions, we must move trans* lives from

the margins of intelligibility to the center.

2.5.1 Engaging with narrative to confer intelligibility

There are many ways for trans* philosophy to confer intelligibility, and the method I focus on in this thesis is engaging with trans* people's narratives. I focus on this form of engagement because of its capacity to redress epistemic oppression, which I will argue for in the following chapter. Additionally, it demonstrates the value of pre-theoretical sociality among trans* phenomena and how taking trans* narratives seriously leads to new illuminations.

To illustrate how engaging with trans* narrative confers intelligibility, I analyze Jay Prosser's term "the body narrative," which is how the "body and narrative work together in the production of transsexual subjectivity" (Prosser, 1998, p. 105). I highlight how Prosser's engagement with trans* autobiographies establishes new norms, leading to intelligibility conferral. In this chapter, I do not argue that Prosser's insights are necessarily correct. Rather, I use his work to exemplify how implementing trans* narratives is a means for conferring intelligibility.

Second Skins (1998) draws on the autobiographies of fifty trans* people between 1954 and 1996. By reading them, Prosser determines that trans* autobiographies do not begin when their stories are formalized into a book. Instead, Prosser posits that trans* autobiographies begin in the clinician's office. By telling their stories to psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, and doctors, trans* people gain recognition as a subject with a particular gender. Historically and currently, involving medical institutions is required for trans* people to gain access to essential medical and social interventions.

That many trans* autobiographies begin at the clinician's office is no mistake because, for Prosser, narrative is how trans* people create coherent genders. Contending with his own narrative, Prosser writes, "I was a woman, I write as a man. How to join this split? How to create a coherent subject? Precisely through narrative" (Prosser, 1998, p. 101). Narrative is what makes interventions accessible and provides him with a coherent sense of self. Prosser states, "Narrative does the body's work" (Prosser, 1998, p. 103).

Reading trans* autobiographies, where narrative coexists with the body to produce gender, leads Prosser to think of body narratives as having three components. First, "narrative is not coextensive with performativity (Prosser, 1998, p. 103)." One may perform their gender in a way that does not coherently align with the narratives they tell about their body for a myriad of reasons, but most poignantly, because

narrative is a diachronic recounting of a series of experiences over time. Second, body narratives are bound to realization. That is to say, in the telling of body narratives, trans* people are pursuing a telos for their gender (Prosser, 1998, p. 103).

Third, body narratives imply "an interlocution between author and reader, a dialogics of interpretation (Prosser, 1998, p. 103)," which gives them meaning. Body narratives allow trans* people to recount gendered experiences, bind these to a telos, and, crucially, have another subject interpret and apply meaning to them. These three aspects of the body narrative are apparent in trans* experiences at the clinic, leading Prosser to theorize that body narratives are crucial for forming trans* subjectivity.

The theoretical insights Prosser uncovers were made possible because of his engagement with trans* autobiographies. Interestingly, his work grapples with one of the most prescient of WTF questions, known as the truscum vs. tucute debate. This debate asks, must a trans* person experience gender dysphoria and medical interventions to be considered trans*, or do they simply have to identify as being trans*? Truscums argue that trans* subjectivity is a medical condition. Tucutes argue that trans* identity is a feeling of misplacement in one's assigned gender. Put otherwise, Prosser was the original tucute proponent.

Engaging with trans* autobiographies helped Prosser establish the norm that narrativizing feelings makes one unequivocally trans*. Establishing norms required for trans*ness confers intelligibility. Moreover, his illuminatory work enriches how we think of gender. It was key in establishing a culture that primarily sides with the tucutes. Implementing narrative into theory production is a means for conferring intelligibility and highlights its value for gleaning new illuminations and building stronger theory.

2.6 Third tenet, pre-theoretical sociality among trans phenomena*

Engaging with narrative can confer intelligibility and provide illumination. This assertion, then, leads to the question: Whose narrative counts in our conceptual analysis and why? On what is trans* philosophy founded? To answer, I return to Bettcher's work. She argues that theorizing about questions embedded in our everyday lives always begins with worldly perception, and who philosophers commune with impacts the theory. So, if trans* philosophy is going to say anything meaningful about WTF questions, it must come from a place of pre-theoretical sociality among trans* phenomena. Trans* phenomena refer to people but also to our culture that can be found in things like literature, music, podcasts, or films.

Bettcher postulates that philosophers focusing on questions in the every day have "*ipso facto* deployed their worldly perception" (Bettcher, 2019, p. 655). Philosophers must exist in the world and also lack *a priori* knowledge. As hard as philosophers may work at being objective, we are still informed by the inherited social world. Additionally, the work of philosophers is not typically data-driven or entirely empirical. It follows that perceptual experiences impact conceptual work. As such, "This forces the embarrassing admission that a single person's worldly perception appears to be playing a rather conflated methodological role in much of what passes for philosophical research" (Bettcher, 2019, p. 655). Individual researchers have a prominent role when theorizing about questions involved in everyday life.

Similarly to how philosophers impute identities by categorizing large groups of people, we are left with two solutions. One choice is radically altering philosophy by grounding our conceptual analysis in empirical data. The other is to simply own up to the fact. Bettcher proposes we take the second route (Bettcher, 2019, p. 655). Pursuing this option makes us, at the very least, more honest, but it is also functional. When philosophers allow the world to guide their reflections and openly cultivate a practice of doing so, their approach to philosophy becomes "particularly well suited to addressing WTF questions that are often so deeply personal in character" (Bettcher, 2019, pp. 655-6). Being entrenched in the world and allowing it to guide one's philosophy is a practical way to identify illuminations.

One might object that engaging with trans* phenomena is counterproductive to illumination because our lives are already inundated with the WTF. How can immersing oneself in the WTF provide answers to the WTF? Bettcher acknowledges this objection by writing,

> Although the perplexing character of the everyday may make a good starting point in the quest for illumination, it's tough to rely on one's chief source of confusion as one ground for philosophical judgment about what seems right/wrong, im/plausible, and un/important. Trans philosophy needs to proceed from pre-theoretical sociality among trans people–whatever form that takes–standing in a relation of resistance to the prevailing mainstream world of WTF. What else does one have to draw on that could provide the worldly perception necessary for life-affirming, rather than suicidal, philosophical illumination? (Bettcher, 2019, p. 656)

In this quote, I read Bettcher as asserting that WTF questions come from the lack of intelligibility granted to trans* people. Being cisgender is the dominant way of existing in the world; this gives rise to norms that push trans* people to the margins of intelligibility and consequently gives rise to WTF questions. Being trans* is not necessarily a precursor to the WTF, but the norms thrust upon us are. Entering T4T spaces where intelligibility is readily granted makes it possible for illuminations to develop.

Bettcher finds that trans* philosophy is benefited by pre-theoretical sociality. I take her argument one step further, asserting that it is necessary for locating illuminations. Those writing trans* philosophy must produce theory both from and with trans* phenomena in order to offer meaningful illuminations. This is because trans* phenomena are where intelligibility is readily found. Otherwise, the role of the individual researcher becomes over-enlarged. It opens them up to the possibility of producing damaging theories that create more perplexity and reduce trans* intelligibility. As I will show in the next chapter, philosophers have epistemic privilege, and pre-theoretical sociality keeps this privilege in check. If trans* philosophy is to provide illuminations and confer intelligibility, then the world one engages with must include trans* phenomena.

I return to the truscum vs. tucute debate to make this argument more concrete. Prosser was formative to this debate because of his pre-theoretical sociality among trans* people. He personally understood the experience of being trans* and also worked with trans* body narratives, allowing worldly perception to guide his philosophy. Not engaging with trans* phenomena creates a lack of nuanced knowledge within the philosopher. Prosser's work reflected the valuable insights produced by trans* people because he remained actively committed to theorizing with rather than about trans* people.

Additionally, permitting worldly engagement to drive one's philosophy creates distance between the philosopher and the discipline's literature. This dissuades the philosopher from participating in cottage industries or producing greater perplexity. It gives the philosopher permission to rely on narrative as a source of knowledge, which, as I have shown above, confers intelligibility and creates richer theory. Worldly engagement does not have to impede but, in fact, propels philosophical inquiry.

Trans* philosophy is grounded in pre-theoretical sociality among trans* phenomena. Worldly engagement, informed by the knowledge trans* people produce, is integral to providing illuminations and conferring intelligibility. I argued that trans* narratives count in conceptual analysis because they are functional for achieving the goals of trans* philosophy, but also, they reduce the individual's over-enlarged methodological role. This is just one piece in the puzzle for why trans* narratives are crucial to theory production.

2.7 Conclusion

I began this chapter with a case for why philosophy should loosen its grip on what is ordinarily

considered philosophy. It ends the discipline's tautological practices. Then, I set up the three components of trans* philosophy, arguing that it skillfully undermines commonly held assumptions about the discipline. Trans* philosophy aims to illuminate and confer intelligibility, achieved through worldly engagement. These three aims are neither unanimously held nor entail justifying norms. However, they are what allows the subfield to intervene in normative ways of conducting philosophy, and they strengthen the discipline as a whole.

My thesis abides by trans* philosophy's framework and, as such, provides an intervention in the discipline. The structure of the argument will not mirror the setup of the three tenets; instead, I first show how conferring intelligibility through the implementation of trans* narrative combats epistemic oppression. Second, I demonstrate that being illuminative rather than critical leads to formative insights in producing theory. Third, I further the case for why worldly engagement makes philosophy more relevant and honest. My project is constructivist. It creates positive arguments for the value of trans* philosophy and intervenes in normative ways of conducting philosophy.

3
Conferring Intelligibililty Redresses Trans* Epistemic Oppression

3.1 Introduction

Trans* people grapple with WTF questions surrounding knowledge production, especially within academia. Here are a few noted by scholars: Why does queer theory incorporate trans* people as objects of research but don't encourage or allow their participation in academic spaces (Pérez and Radi, 2016; Namaste, 2009)? Even worse, for trans* subjects who produce academic knowledge, why are they not perceived as bearers of legitimate knowledge but as objects of analysis (Stryker & Whittle, 2006; Bettcher, 2009; Namaste, 2009; Raun, 2014)? How does trans* knowledge come to be discredited on account of infantilization, pathologization, devaluation of moral integrity, and identification with patriarchal threats (Stone, 2006)? Why is it routine to talk about us but not to us? WTF?

These questions emerge at the nexus of trans* people's epistemic oppression. Epistemic oppression refers to the exclusion from knowledge production because of a marginalized identity. In this chapter, I rely on Kristie Dotson's work "Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression" (2014) to argue why this is the case. I adapt her ideas on how to redress this oppression within the context of philosophy and argue that by aiming to confer intelligibility onto trans* lives, trans* philosophy disrupts practices of epistemic oppression.

My argument diverges from Dotson's in two important ways. First, her primary focus is describing three forms of epistemic oppression and demonstrating why one is irreducible to the epistemic system rather than social or political systems. I narrow in on how trans* people experience the three forms of epistemic oppression. Whether or not epistemic oppression is irreducible to the epistemic system is unimportant to my argument here; my focus is on how conferring intelligibility redresses epistemic oppression, regardless of its irreducibility. Second, Dotson lays out an argument for redressing epistemic oppression within an entire culture, but I use this argument to look specifically at redress within academic philosophy.

I will describe the three forms of epistemic oppression, which Dotson refers to as first, second, and third-order epistemic oppressions. First-order epistemic oppression refers to inefficiencies of shared epistemic resources; second-order epistemic oppression occurs when the shared epistemic resources are insuf-

ficiently representative; and third-order epistemic oppression takes place when the epistemological system is inadequate at capturing a certain knower's knowledge (Dotson, 2014, p. 134). Here, an epistemological system is a structure for generating a body of knowledge that grants justified belief. This structure includes things such as schemata, logic, or hermeneutical devices. First, second, and third-order epistemic oppressions are oppressive because they prevent particular groups from fully engaging in their epistemological system.

I pair Dotson's work with trans* testimony to show specific and enduring instances of trans* epistemic oppression. Trans* people endure first-order epistemic oppression when being misgendered, second-order epistemic oppression when language does not fully capture their experiences, and third-order epistemic oppression through institutional erasure within the medical field. What makes these orders distinct is what is required for redress (Dotson, 2014, p. 116).

Importantly, I provide a positive argument for how philosophers can attempt to dismantle each form of epistemic oppression. Philosophers redress first-order epistemic oppression by lowering their default credibility; second-order epistemic oppression by lowering their default credibility and changing the epistemic system's prevailing schemata; and third-order epistemic oppression by lowering credibility, changing schemata, and revolutionizing one's epistemic system (Dotson, 2014, p. 132). Each order is increasingly challenging to confront, but crucially, I show how conferring intelligibility confronts trans* epistemic oppression within every order.

3.2 What enables epistemic oppression?

I briefly laid out some definitions, which I will now return to in greater detail. Epistemic oppression is the "persistent and unwarranted infringement on the ability to utilize shared epistemic resources that hinder one's contributions to knowledge production" (Dotson, 2014, p. 116). In other words, epistemic oppression stops an individual from engaging with the epistemological system as a legitimate knower. Epistemic exclusion is "an unwarranted infringement on the epistemic agency of knowers" (Dotson, 2014, p. 115). Here, epistemic agency is one's capacity to use shared epistemic resources amongst a group of knowers.

Agency is necessary for participating in knowledge production and revising collective epistemic

resources. Sharing and modifying collective epistemic resources takes many shapes. For example, one uses epistemic resources for productive communication and making one's experience intelligible to oneself and others. Epistemic oppression is the continual, systemic process of repeated epistemic exclusions. The oppression trans* people face, while historical, social, and political, also takes an epistemic hue as the knowledge we produce is routinely excluded from collective epistemic resources (Radi, 2019, p. 44).

Dotson uses Plato's imagery in the "Allegory of the Cave" (1997), referred to as the Allegory, to elucidate what epistemic oppression entails. The Allegory shows how three features of epistemological landscapes enable oppression: knowers are situated, epistemic resources are interdependent, and epistemological systems are resilient (Dotson, 2014, p. 123). I will explain the Allegory and detail how it highlights these three essential traits.

The Allegory portrays a group of prisoners who have spent their entire lives inside a cave "fixed in the same place, with their necks and legs fettered, able to see only in front of them" (Cooper, 1997, pp. 515-6). There is a fire behind the prisoners, casting their shadows onto a wall, and behind them is a pathway for "mobile persons" to tend to the prisoner's needs. According to Plato, the prisoners see some of the shadows produced by the mobile persons but never their physical bodies. The prisoners create a language derived from the shadows, containing restricted views based on how their bodies are fettered (Dotson, 2014, p. 123).

First, it shows that knowers are situated. Gaile Pohlhaus describes this situatedness in her work, "Relational Knowing and Epistemic Injustice" (2011). When a knower is routinely in distinct social relations, they then create "particular habits of attention that may attune the knower to others' habits of attention or not, depending upon one's social vulnerability … Social position has a bearing on what parts of the world are prominent to the knower and what parts of the world are not" (Pohlhaus, 2011, p. 3). The prisoners, having never experienced anything outside the cave, only know the shadows before them. So long as they are fettered, they will never know what another embodied person looks like. Thus, knowers are socially situated. In the same way that one's body impacts one's vision, so too does one's social positioning impact one's attention, which impacts what they come to know (Dotson, 2014, p. 123).

Second, the Allegory demonstrates that knowing is interdependent (Dotson, 2014, p. 121). How we arrive at knowing something depends upon collective epistemic resources. Knowing requires the mind, including experiences such as receiving stimuli, forming judgments, and using language. Each of these is fil-

tered through shared concepts or epistemic resources. Pohlhaus suggests that these epistemic resources are pertinent "for making sense of and evaluating our experiences" (Pohlhaus, 2011, p. 4). What falls outside the purview of this language, such as words to describe another person's body, is unknown to the prisoners. Their knowledge relies on shared epistemic resources and, as such, is interdependent. Dotson concludes that since knowing is interdependent, it impacts how one knows what one knows (Dotson, 2014, p. 123).

Third, epistemological systems are resilient. Resilience is "the magnitude of disturbance that can be absorbed before the system redefines its structure" (Gunderson, 2000, p. 426). Epistemological systems are generally stable, and we rely on this stability. Otherwise, communication would not be possible. Suppose one prisoner were to catch a glimpse of a mobile person's body and describe this experience to the other prisoners. In that case, Dotson proposes that the knowledge may be too revolutionary to be incorporated into the system (Dotson, 2014, p. 123). Because of the epistemological system's resiliency, challenging the system questions its very foundation, which is destabilizing. An epistemological system's resilience constitutes the conditions of possibility for both what and how we know.

The Allegory demonstrates how the situatedness of knowers impacts what they can know, the interdependence of epistemic resources impacts how they can know, and the resilience of epistemological systems informs both how and what they can know. This, in return, permits oppression to endure. Now that I have accounted for epistemic oppression, I turn to Dotson's characterization of first, second, and third-order epistemic oppression and my argument for how conferring intelligibility onto trans* lives combats these oppressions.

3.3 First-order epistemic oppression

First-order epistemic oppression occurs when there are inefficiencies in an epistemological system (Dotson, 2014, 123). This means there are inefficient ways of knowing within the collective epistemic resources that erode the epistemic agency of trans* people. Returning to Dotson's use of the Allegory clarifies what this means. Inside the cave, suppose negative prejudices against prisoners on the left develop, reflected in the interdependent epistemic resources – those on the left experience severe, negative prejudices from prisoners in the center and right.

As a consequence, their epistemic credibility is diminished. That is to say, the knowledge the left-sided prisoners produce is, as a default, perceived as less reliable because of their status as left-sided prisoners

(Dotson, 2014, p. 124). They experience a breach of epistemic agency because their knowledge is routinely and unjustifiably regarded as less credible.

Left-sided prisoners are seen as less credible because of credibility's contrastive nature. One can only be deemed credible because others produce knowledge that is judged as more, less, or equally credible. Though the prisoners on the left produce truthful knowledge through shared epidemic resources, their testimony is granted less credibility because of their marginalized identity status. In contrast, prisoners in the center or on the right benefit from the privilege of being conferred greater credibility.

What characterizes the left-sided prisoners' experience as epistemic oppression is that it compromises their "ability to contribute to knowledge production" through an "unwarranted devaluation of credibility and the creation of epistemically disadvantaged identities" (Dotson, 2013, p. 125). Their identity status leads to a lack of credibility, preventing them from fully contributing to the epistemological system thus making the experience oppressive.

3.3.1 Illuminatory case study of misgendering

Trans* people routinely experience first-order epistemic oppression when being misgendered. To misgender is to use incorrect pronouns or gendered categories to describe another person. This experience happens in many settings, from interpersonal interactions to institutions that fail to account for one's gender. One might posit that misgendering is simply a hurtful encounter. However, the structural role language plays, and its specific impact on individuals with a marginalized identity characterize it as epistemic oppression.

For example, when stating, "I am a woman," a trans* person is producing knowledge about her gender. If the woman making this statement is misgendered, her knowledge was not fully incorporated into the epistemological system. Trans* people are judged, whether intentionally or unintentionally, for their capacity as knowers of their gender. The knowledge they produce is deemed less credible on account of their marginal status.

In Dotson's language, how trans* people know their genders is deemed inefficient within the epistemological system, and this, in turn, erodes their agency. In the article "Misgendering As Epistemic Injustice: A Queer STS Approach," researcher Konstantinos Argyriou (2021) refers to this as structural, hermeneutical marginalization. Those who misgender may not intentionally be oppressive. However, it is still

categorized as oppressive because trans* people are "deprived of the social resources that legitimize gender and are forced to the margins" (Argyriou, 2021, p. 75). Trans* people are judged as uncredible producers of knowledge surrounding their genders, and consequently, this knowledge is inefficient within the epistemological system.

One might further contest that misgendering is not oppressive if one defers to being corrected afterward. To the person who misgenders, it was a minor linguistic accident, swiftly remedied. Misgendering, when done to a trans* person, could not be more disparate of an emotional experience. It hurts because, as Eva Simone Hayward writes, "misgendering conveys that we do not exist" (2017, p. 191), and this erasure is an "attack on ontology, on beingness" (Hayward, 2017, p. 191). Misgendering is oppressive not only on epistemic grounds but also on ontological ones. It erases one's knowledge and how one is in the world.

To further this case, Hil Malantino asserts that ontological attacks can easily become a "justification for harm; it is a way of marking trans populations as subhuman—thus expendable, disposable, dismissible, even killable" (Malantino, 2020). The consequences of a mundane misstep reverberate throughout trans* lives. First-order epistemic oppression's effects can be drastic for trans* people. Such is the case in Vikki Thompson's life. Thompson, a trans* woman, was misgendered and sent to a men's prison. She publicly warned that she would kill herself if sent to a men's facility, and at age 21, this became her reality. Thompson was found dead in her prison cell (BBC News, 2015). First-order epistemic oppression can be a matter of life or death for trans* people.

Now, I turn to how philosophers can confront first-order epistemic oppression. Dotson notes that this form of oppression is distinct because of what is required to remedy it; first-order epistemic oppression requires altering how credibility is allocated (Dotson, 2014, p. 126). As seen in the above examples, trans* people endure an unevenly distributed amount of credibility, which is ineffective and creates differentials in epistemic power. An effective epistemological system considers legitimate knowledge credible, equitably distributing epistemic power.

That trans* people's knowledge about their very own being is not incorporated into the epistemological system is ineffective. Therefore, the conferral of credibility needs to be more efficiently distributed within the instituted social imaginary. I am not suggesting that credibility assessments must be entirely removed. There are justified reasons to grant another person less credibility. However, I suggest that the conferrals be more judiciously distributed, corresponding to an appropriate amount of credibility. This

practice guarantees that genuine knowledge is incorporated into the epistemological system.

Reforming instituted social imaginaries about who is more or less credible does not require changing the epistemic system. It demands a shift in epistemic power as well as the social, political, and historical foundations of that epistemic power (Dotson, 2014, p. 126). Philosophers are conferred great deals of credibility given their years of training and the prestige of professorship. This credibility is due, but not at the expense of trans* people being conferred less credibility. For philosophers, confronting epistemic power means lowering their credibility and raising the credibility of trans* people by taking their claims seriously.

This process is a challenging task. Dotson explains why it is challenging yet pertinent to remedy first-order epistemic oppression. She writes,

> Attempts to convince those who are relatively more epistemically powerful to relinquish some of their power might be warranted as a first line of address. One could also pursue another option entirely of attempting to lessen the effect of faulty credibility assessments by redistributing epistemic power according to changes in the environment of inquiry. What is important to note is a major factor one has to grapple with is the social and historical landscape of epistemic power. (Dotson, 2013, p. 126)

Labeling epistemic oppression as first-order does not mean it is easy to remedy, but that epistemic power must shift so that credibility is more equitably distributed.

Relinquishing epistemic power is incorporated into trans* philosophy's foundation through its second tenet, the conferral of intelligibility. I return to the example above of misgendering to show why this is the case. As a nonbinary person embedded in a starkly binary world, I have never been correctly gendered when first encountering a stranger. The knowledge I produce – that I am outside the gender binary – has not been granted credibility in the instituted social imaginary. In other words, my status as a trans* person reduces the credibility of the knowledge I produce, which ineffectively leaves out legitimate knowledge in the epistemic system.

Even when strangers defer to my correction, the initial moment of misgendering demonstrates an inherited, cisbinary worldview. That is to say, the concept of "nonbinary" has not yet been sufficiently and structurally conferred credibility. For my experience to be rendered intelligible, it is a prerequisite that my knowledge be granted credibility. When those doing trans* philosophy confer intelligibly, they are, by extension, also conferring credibility. They take seriously the knowledge produced by trans* people, granting credibility and allowing trans* people to render their significant social experiences intelligible.

Trans* philosophy affirms that, yes, I am nonbinary. It shifts norms of epistemic power to confer

credibility. One prime example of this is in Robin Dembrofff and Daniel Wodak's work, where they argue for the erasure of gender-specific language in English (Dembroff and Wodak, 2020). Dembroff and Wodak grant credibility to the assertion that gender is not binaried and work to make this assertion intelligible within the entire English language. Trans* philosophy challenges the distribution of epistemic power by conveying that trans* knowledge has a place within our shared social imaginaries. It affirms that trans* people are credible and intelligible knowledge producers, consequently confronting first-order epistemic oppression.

3.4 Second-order epistemic oppression

Where first-order epistemic oppression stems from inefficiencies, second-order epistemic oppression stems from epistemic resources' insufficiencies (Dotson, 2014, p. 127). This means that the shared epistemic resources are themselves limited. Dotson elaborates on her rendition of the Allegory to establish why this is the case. Suppose the left-sided prisoners saw shadows that were obscured from the center and right-sided prisoners. Because epistemic resources have been contingently shaped around their credibility deficit, the left-sided prisoners cannot sufficiently communicate this experience to others (Dotson, 2014, p. 127).

The marginalized prisoners cannot fully capture their experience of the shadows since the shared epistemic resources and instituted social imaginaries were created to reflect the experiences of the more credible prisoners. Consequently, some of the left-sided prisoner's experiences are obfuscated by collective epistemic resources (Dotson, 2014, p. 127). The fullness of their experience is limited because they must use the collective language and assumptions to communicate. What makes this second-order epistemic oppression is that there is initially first-order epistemic oppression, the unjust lowering of credibility, and then consequently, the epistemic resources are lacking.

Dotson does not suggest that the left-sided prisoners lack the language to describe the shapes they perceive. Rather, she suggests that the language does not adequately describe the shapes in a way that the larger epistemic community can comprehend (Dotson, 2014, p. 127). Their experience is nonsensical to those partaking in the dialogue. Therefore, the left-sided prisoners are barred from fully participating in knowledge production. Insufficient epistemic resources continually undermine their epistemic agency, qualifying this experience as epistemic oppression (Dotson, 2014, p. 129).

3.4.1 Illuminatory case studies of restrictive concepts

Trans* people also confront second-order epistemic oppression. By the nature of this oppression, it is challenging to use collective epistemic resources to convey why this is the case. Nonetheless, I assert that trans* people endure this oppression when attempting to communicate our experiences of gender to cis people. Author Juliet Jaques expresses this challenge in her book *Trans: A Memoir*. She shares,

> I wasn't sure if wearing women's clothing made me a "cross-dresser," which seemed the least loaded term, or "transvestite", or "transsexual." I didn't much like any of those labels…. The word [transvestite]… felt sexual in a seedy, lonely way – the kind of thing featured on Suburbia Uncovered shows on late-night television. It was not a word I wanted to apply to myself. "Transsexual" wasn't accurate either. You needed to be someone who'd been through some medical process to alter your body, right? I hadn't, and didn't plan to: they're not like me either, I thought. (Jacques, 2015, p. 14)

Jacques struggled to find sufficient epistemic resources to communicate her gender to others. She understood that she experienced gender in a particular way. However, when trying to convey this to others, she felt that the resources at her disposal did not fully capture her experience.

When trans* people are conferred less credibility, the knowledge we produce is not incorporated into the social imaginary. Then, the particular experiences we endure because of our identities are not captured by the epistemic resources at hand, undermining our epistemic agency. Jacques' inability to rely on shared epistemic resources highlights Dotson's account. However, Dotson's argument for second-order epistemic oppression fails to explain the full extent to which trans* people endure this oppression.

We are conferred less credibility, have lacking epistemic resources, and have our agency undermined. However, as a consequence of these experiences, our identities are also shaped by the resources that are accessible to us. The epistemic resources at hand inform how we perceive ourselves. To clarify this argument, I turn to author Julia Serano's autobiography. In it, she discloses her complicated relation to trans*ness because she had to relate to it through insufficient epistemic resources. Serano recounts,

> And maybe I was born transgender – my brain preprogrammed to see myself as female despite the male body I was given at birth – but like every child, I turned to the rest of the world to figure out who I was and what I was worth. And like a good little boy, I picked up on all of the not-so-subliminal messages that surrounded me. TV shows where Father knows best and a woman's place is in the home; fairy tales where helpless girls await their handsome princes; cartoon supermen who always save the damsel in distress; plus schoolyard taunts like "sissy" and "fairy" and "pussy" all taught me to see "feminine" as a synonym for "weakness." And nobody needed to tell me that I should hate myself for wanting to be what was so obviously the lesser sex. (Serano, 2007, pp. 273-4)

Serano experienced herself as a woman from a young age, but in our patriarchal world, she could not understand why she had this desire. This accounts for why Serano knew she was trans* at age 11 but did not transition until age 34; her understanding of herself was informed by the epistemic resources she had at her disposal.

What distinguishes Jacques and Serano's experiences as second-order epistemic oppression is that they were given epistemic resources – the words cross-dresser, transvestite, transsexual, sissy, fairy, pussy – to express themselves to their wider epistemic community. Nevertheless, these resources limited their expression; Jaques' and Serano's lowered default credibility barred them from fully engaging in the production of epistemic resources, and therefore, the resources they relied on were insufficient.

Like first-order epistemic oppression, second-order epistemic oppression is unique because of what is required to redress it. However, redress for second-order epistemic oppression requires more significant effort because epistemic power must first be shifted by conferring greater credibility to trans* people. Then, knowledge producers must contend with how their existing epistemic resources operate and must be motivated to significantly revise them (Dotson, 2014, p. 129). The social imaginaries, such as how prisoners think about shapes on the wall or how people think about gender, must be altered. Dotson contends that confronting second-order epistemic oppression requires reform and an epistemic revolution (Dotson, 2014, p. 129).

Furthermore, Dotson writes that forming alternative epistemologies is one way to combat second-order exclusions but that this "does not necessarily lessen the impact of second-order epistemic oppression when one is still required to utilize insufficient, dominant, shared epistemic resources" (Dotson, 2014, p. 129). The confrontation and alteration of epistemic power is also required.

Trans* philosophy is iconoclastic in confronting and altering epistemic power by conferring intelligibility. Talia Mae Bettcher's work "Trapped in the Wrong Theory: Rethinking Trans Oppression and Resistance" (2014) epitomizes how trans* philosophy redresses second-order epistemic oppression. In it, Bettcher relies on trans* literature and personal experience, thus conferring credibility and intelligibility.

She argues that the prevailing narrative trans* people use of being "trapped in the wrong body" assumes dominant meanings of gender and forecloses resistant ones. Bettcher, as a young trans* woman, relied on this narrative as an epistemic resource. Appealing to innate gender identity "is responsive to trans oppression" (Bettcher, 2014, p. 398). It provides trans* folks a way to establish their gender identities and

helps us make sense of and communicate our discomfort with the genders we were assigned at birth.

However, this resource also "undercuts trans women by naturalizing sexist gender differences" (Bettcher, 2014, p. 398). The "trapped in the wrong body" account was a valuable epistemic resource for Bettcher early in her transition, yet it also reinforced dominant, sexist ways of doing gender. In other words, this epistemic resource is insufficient because it reinforces a particular expression of gender. It relays that for trans* women to be "real" women, they must conform to a normative expression of womanhood.

This insufficient epistemic resource demonstrates that responding to trans* oppression requires radical departures from dominant ways of knowing and doing gender. Bettcher exposes how the epistemic resource of being "trapped in the wrong body" is insufficient, and through this exposure, she creates space for trans* epistemology to revise that resource. Bettcher proposes that rather than supposing trans* people have an incorrect body, we ought to expand our understanding of what kind of body a man or a woman can have (Bettcher, 2014, p. 403).

Second-order epistemic oppression endures when trans* people's epistemic resources are lacking, as is the case for the "trapped in the wrong body" account. Trans* people were conferred less credibility and did not fully participate in creating such resources, leading to this lack. Trans* philosophy centers trans* epistemology to uncover the insufficiencies, making space for trans* people to revise those resources.

3.5 Third-order epistemic oppression

First-order epistemic oppression emerges from inefficiencies, second-order epistemic oppression from insufficiencies, and third-order epistemic oppression is derived from the epistemological system's inadequacies. Inadequacies refer to how collective, dominant epistemic resources cannot capture one's experience (Dotson, 2014, p. 130). I will return to Dotson's depiction of the Allegory to explain this in greater detail.

The prisoners routinely engage with the mobile persons who feed them but recall that the prisoners cannot turn from left to right, only experiencing the mobile person's shadows and sounds. In Dotson's rendition, suppose the mobile persons always feed the prisoners from the right side. As a result, the prisoner on the furthest left is the only one to never hear noises directly to their left. The furthest left-sided prisoner has a unique understanding of the cave, and eventually, this understanding leads them to perceive that they are fettered in place. The rest of the prisoners remain unable to detect this feature. Integrating the furthest

left-sided prisoner's knowledge into the epistemological system would be radical (Dotson, 2014, p. 130).

Dotson notes that the prisoner to the furthest left may have their testimony "rejected as nonsensical;" they might be labeled as a "liar with dangerous ideas" or "might even invoke ridicule and laughter" (Doston, 2014, p. 130). In this case, the left-sided prisoner's knowledge is not incorporated and does not impact shared epistemic resources. Incorporating their knowledge would revolutionize the persisting epistemological system; however, the system is highly resilient, and the community is unwilling to alter it. This prisoner's epistemic agency is hindered; they are labeled incapable of producing serious knowledge (Dotson, 2014, p. 130).

3.5.1 Illuminatory case study of trans medical erasure*

Capturing how trans* people experience third-order epistemic oppression is challenging because our epistemological system fails to incorporate trans* knowledge. However, looking at trans* people's interactions with medical systems brings some clarity. Healthcare providers often do not possess knowledge about trans* issues, with many going so far as to assume that such knowledge does not exist (Bauer et al., 2009, p. 352). Furthermore, most hospitals lack policies for accommodating trans* people, and again, those hospitals are unaware that such policies are needed (Freeman, 2018).

Both on the personal level with individual healthcare providers and on the structural level with hospitals, there is a failure to uptake trans* knowledge in the epistemological system. By not enacting policies based on trans* knowledge and not even knowing that such policies need to be incorporated, medical institutions enact third-order epistemic oppression. They do not confer the credibility or epistemic power necessary for trans* people to inform the epistemic resources used in hospitals, and they are unaware that the epistemological system is unrepresentative of trans* people.

Building upon this, I turn to nonbinary musician Rae Spoon, who writes about their battle with cervical cancer. Spoon describes the information they were given access to in the hospital and reflects,

> The section on Cervical Cancer mentioned women and girls over ten times with no mention of any other genders that may have a cervix. Their 2011 guide for all newly diagnosed patients "Taking It Step By Step: A Guide For Women Diagnosed with Gynaecological Cancer" said it covered all aspects of the patient journey, but made no mention of transgender, gender non-binary, Two-Spirit or any other gender variant people. The Cervical Cancer section used the words women and female for the potential patients with no other gender referenced. Part of my treatment for anxiety is investigating if my thoughts are catastrophic. Mine were, but so was the reality of finding those words. (Spoon, 2020)

Trans* embodiment does not reflect normative ideals or dominant medical discourses and is discounted. Engaging with a medical system that does not incorporate their knowledge led Spoon to write, "I contemplated not going. I calculated the slow suicide of refusing treatment against the torment of being invisible" (Spoon, 2020). For Spoon, death felt like a better option than epistemic oppression.

What makes experiences like Spoon's a third-order epistemic oppression is how the epistemological system is inefficient, insufficient, and inadequate. The hospital misgendered them in pamphlets, did not provide epistemic resources for Spoon to fully express themself, and failed to recognize that Spoon was producing knowledge that needed to be included. Trans* people's lack of credibility and epistemic power because of identity status leads to the knowledge we produce not being uptaken in the epistemological system.

Thus, what is needed to remedy third-order epistemic oppression is an alteration in how epistemic credibility is distributed, how the epistemic resources function, and how those resources are then incorporated into the epistemological system. Dotson explains that ending third-order epistemic oppression requires people to "be aware of their larger epistemological systems, that is, what orients one's instituted social imaginaries, so as to possibly change them or shift out of them entirely" (Dotson, 2014, p. 131). This arduous task makes third-order epistemic oppression persistent and challenging to dismantle.

Comprehending how trans* philosophy confronts third-order epistemic oppression requires an understanding of what makes changing the epistemological systems's structure challenging. Dotson uses the concept of "epistemological resilience" to explain this. Epistemological resilience has two components; it is responsible for maintaining stability and is able to withstand a certain magnitude of disturbance before changing (Dotson, 2014, p. 132).

The system's resilience is what hinders one from becoming aware of the epistemological system's limitations. This, in turn, reinforces the notion that the epistemological system is competent in its current state. Dotson explains that resilience makes confronting the system challenging since people

> must be open to radical conceptual revolutions in the face of, quite possibly, profoundly insufficient shared epistemic resources. But they must also, and this is the hardest part, grapple with the resilience of their epistemological systems to grasp what portions of their overall epistemic lifeways are thwarting robust uptake of the testimony of the fettered person on the farthest left. (Dotson, 2014, p. 132)

Grappling with the epistemological system's resilience requires confronting the limitations of one's own thought practices. Confronting third-order epistemic oppression requires more than an alteration to epistemic power. It also requires a confrontation with the epistemological system.

Trans* philosophy does not aim to create new concepts; however, conferring trans* intelligibility is constitutive of the discipline and is often generative of new epistemic resources. Such resources make trans* lives more intelligible. When trans* people lack requisite concepts to make our experiences intelligible, to ourselves or others, we work towards creating new epistemic resources. Given philosophers' relative epistemic power, they are positioned to utilize these epistemic resources to confer intelligibility.

To give a related example, think of nonbinary people or trans* men who are pregnant. Gestating folks are nearly always perceived as "mothers," from how they are portrayed in the media to the way medical experts are trained. Alternative language that gestating people have proposed is "birthing parent"." This is a simple phrase to replace "mother" for creating a safer, more inclusive world for trans* people. It unravels particular conceptions of reality and the epistemic system by incorporating the knowledge birthing parents produce about their subjectivity. The claim that one does not need to be a woman to give birth is already accepted as true in trans* philosophy. Consequently, those doing trans* philosophy confront epistemic resilience.

Put otherwise, trans* philosophy is uniquely positioned to confront the epistemological system's resilience. WTF questions not only grapple with why trans* lives are rendered unintelligible; they also question why certain aspects of our embodied selves are inexplicable through the language we were given. The epistemic resources we rely on were already always there; we did not choose them. However, when trans* people recognize that this prefabricated system does not conform to our lived experiences, we become open to questioning the foundation of that system.

This is not to claim that challenging an epistemological system is easy for trans* people. Instead, I claim that the unique social positioning that leads us to continually ask "WTF?" offers a particular vantage point, an openness to undoing the epistemological system that has systematically failed to incorporate our knowledge. As such, trans* philosophy is a robust tool for confronting third-order epistemic oppression.

3.6 Conclusion

Recall that epistemic oppression is the "persistent and unwarranted infringement on the ability to utilize shared epistemic resources that hinder one's contributions to knowledge production" (Dotson, 2014, p. 116). What makes this possible are the three features of epistemological landscapes: a knower's situatedness impacts what they can know, an epistemic resource's interdependence impacts how a knower can know, and the resilience of the epistemological system informs how and what they can know (Dotson, 2014, p. 123).

First, second, and third-order epistemic oppression endure because of ineffective epistemic resources, insufficiently representative epistemic resources, and inadequate epistemological systems. I demonstrated how trans* people experience all three forms of epistemic oppression and how trans* philosophy's second tenet, the conferral of intelligibility onto trans* lives, works to redress these oppressions.

Trans* philosophy redresses first-order epistemic oppression by conferring trans* people greater degrees of credibility. Credibility and intelligibility are interdependent projects. Second-order epistemic oppression is combatted by conferring credibility and heightening trans* people's epistemic power, allowing them to revise epistemic resources. These actions make trans* people more intelligible to themselves and their community. Third-order epistemic oppression is confronted when WTF questions venture into the unknown and open one up to altering the epistemological system. Additionally, creating and incorporating new epistemic resources makes trans* lives more intelligible. When philosophers undertake the second tenet of conferring intelligibility, they challenge normative ways of knowing.

Dotson's work led me to think about how the epistemic standards of traditional philosophical practices can facilitate oppression. Philosophy has historically contributed to trans* oppression by unjustifiably lowering our epistemic credibility and power by not including the knowledge we produce. Sandy Stone, a pioneer in trans* philosophy, writes about the importance of epistemic agency in theory-making. She writes,

> The people who have no voice in this theorizing are the transsexuals themselves. As with males theorizing about women from the beginning of time, theorists of gender have seen transsexuals as possessing something less than agency. . . . Transsexuals have been resolutely complicit by failing to develop an effective counter-discourse. (Stone 2006, p. 229-30)

Stone is not the only one to express this sentiment. Amy Marvin, writing on the history of trans* philosophy, notes that "Before the development of trans philosophy by trans people, philosophical writing largely treated them as an afterthought or footnote" (Marvin, 2019). As trans* philosophy develops, we are developing an effective counter-discourse by incorporating trans* knowledge.

This chapter argued for how trans philosophy's second tenet sets the subfield apart from practices of epistemic oppression. The three tenets, however, work in interrelated ways to combat epistemic oppression. Conferring intelligibility confers credibility, grants trans* people more epistemic power, and restores epistemic agency. Trans* philosophy's third tenet, pre-theoretical sociality among trans* phenomena, also engages in epistemic justice by permitting trans* people to create their own discourse; this argument will be more fully developed in chapter five. Illuminating answers to WTF questions pushes the boundaries of what is ordinarily considered knowable. Trans* philosophy's three tenets are separate but interconnected. They distinguish the subfield from ordinary philosophical practices and effectively address trans* epistemic oppression.

4
Centering Trans* Epistemology Leads To Illumination

4.1 Introduction

Trans* philosophy redresses epistemic oppression by centering trans* narratives. Furthermore, I argue that this practice also informs knowledge production by leading to new illuminations. To make this case, I look at a subfield of philosophy, prison studies. I rely on trans* experiences in prison and Perry Zurn's work "Waste Culture and Isolation: Prisons, Toilets, and Gender Segregation" (2019). Together, they illuminate the notion that prisons operate according to an eliminative logic, that is, according to a set of isolative techniques for setting apart trans* people who are rendered social waste. My central claim is that marginalized epistemologies destabilize dominant ways of knowing and enrich theory production.

In this chapter, I will detail the three separate but interconnected components of the eliminative logic, driven by trans* testimony. First, the eliminative logic purifies the social center. This section builds upon the work of Mary Douglas, Julia Kristeva, and María Lugones. Second, cleansing the social center is made possible by iteratively segregating trans* people from society and, further, once again after they are imprisoned. Third, these carceral practices of isolation render trans* people as thinly relational, making their isolation in the second component permissible.

Trans* prisoners share experiences of being deemed impure, enduring isolation, and being made relationally thin, indicating that prisons are eliminative spaces. However, I am not creating a functional argument for how prisons operate. I argue that trans* epistemologies are informative and challenge dominant ways of knowing. For philosophers to center trans* epistemic agency and incorporate this knowledge in theory production would fundamentally alter how prisons are perceived. My claim is that this is a valuable, illuminatory practice.

Before beginning this argument, I want to note that this chapter contains descriptive images of violence done to trans* people, including instances of rape.

4.2 Trans* bodies rendered impure

The first component of the eliminative logic is the purification of the social center. In this section, I refer to "the social body," which denotes a collection of human beings who, together, create civil society. Purifying the social center relies on the assumption that there is a clean social body to be maintained. Zurn conceives of prisons as an institution offering the social body a means to retain its cleanliness, which is accomplished by physically removing the sordid. On this account, prisons remove marginal peoples' bodies from the social body.

One might contend that many prisoners, regardless of their gender, may feel as though they have been rejected from society. What uniquely positions trans* testimony of this experience is first the heightened degree to which one endures rejection. Second, this rejection is accomplished through the eliminative logic. That is, rejection occurs because trans* bodies have been rendered impure and relationality thin, and additionally, trans* people in prison experience a doubling-down of isolation through the prison and a second time within the prison. The merits of trans* epistemology will become increasingly clear throughout the chapter.

Trans* prisoners' reflect on how their imprisonment is wedded to their status as garbage, waste, and trash (Dillon, 2015). S.K. offers a dejected critique when she states, "I definitely do not feel like I am part of society." (Forder, 2015). Testimonies of being removed from the social body are profuse among trans* prisoners, and the quantity of these narratives suggests they are much more than personal reflections. Removal from society, they contend, is a core feature of imprisonment. The social body sloughs off its rejects through social ablution practices.

When trans* epistemology is centered, it demonstrates that the social center is made clean, innocent, and refined by excising trans* people from the social body. Below, Zurn relies on the work of feminist theorists to further parse out why this is the case. Mary Douglas, Julia Kristeva, and María Lugones provide theories of purity and impurity, explaining why trans* people profess that prison is a waste place. All three theorists assert that eliminative spaces exist to control and enforce norms, but not that they do not require complete segregation. I will now explain the first component of the eliminative logic – purifying the social center – by providing an exegetical account of their theories and expounding upon them by incorporating trans* epistemology.

4.2.1 Mary Douglas and eliminability

In her book *Purity and Danger: An analysis of concept of pollution and taboo* (2005), Mary Douglas argues that what is ordinarily considered eliminable is not requisite but contrived from a contingent symbolic order. In other words, what we label as waste is not inherent in the thing itself; the label is subject to change. Being conferred the status of garbage is derivative of multiple things, including communication, relationality, ideology, and law. Trans* people, according to Douglas's account, are labeled as waste not because they are inherently so but because they are conferred this status (Douglas, 2005, p. 4).

To clarify this, Douglas provides an example of borders between nation-states. These demarcations are ordinarily considered eliminable, meaning they create an understanding of what a state is and is not. Borders exist because of a nation-building process, one that did not necessarily have to be constructed as such. Zurn writes that they

> Are the byproducts of a culturally constructed divide between form and formlessness, what is endangered and what is endangering. Here in these marginal spaces, a disruptive power lurks, which must be harnessed and contained by careful rites. (Zurn, 2019, p. 676)

Borders are clear distinctions that states construct to delineate between what is eliminable and what is not. Prisons are similar to borderlands in this way. They did not necessarily have to be constructed how they have been, but they are a separate, designated space for distinguishing groups of the population (Zurn, 2019, p. 676).

Zurn implies that prisons are socially constructed spaces for dividing "eliminable" members from the social body and that careful rites are necessary for the symbolic order to be contingent. Borders and prisons are controlled through rituals that enforce organization, making segregation possible. These liminal spaces both share a ritual at their entry points. At borders, this entails immigration control where passports are checked, questions asked, and possessions searched. At prisons, one must show proof of ID, explain why they are visiting the prison, and endure body searches. These rituals assert order and are vital in separating one space from another despite a lack of contingent necessity. Rituals actualize segregation and eliminability.

Incorporating trans* experience within prison showers highlights Douglas's theory that elimin-

ability is derivative of a contingent symbolic order. Trans* prisoners are rendered impure and are eliminated from the social body through imprisonment. Then, they are made eliminable again inside the prison walls through more rituals. J.P. discusses her routine ritual of segregation when showering. She says,

> All the trans prisoners in Parkhurst have single cells, but in Albany, there are none within cell washing facilities, so you have to use the communal showers. They give us a sign to put on the door. It reads 'Do Not Enter Shower. In Use By Transgender Person.' (Forder, 2015)

R.D. reiterates this experience when claiming, "I shower on the wing, and they have arranged for me to do it at separate times to the others" (Forder, 2015). Trans* prisoners contribute to Douglas's account by showing how they are conferred eliminability multiple times, first through rituals surrounding imprisonment and then again through rituals in the shower room.

Trans* bodies are not inherently eliminable, but according to Douglas' and Zurn's accounts, they are made eliminable by rituals reinforcing a contingent symbolic order. That is to say, trans* people are made eliminable through enforced, ritual segregation reliant upon a symbolic contingent order. Trans* testimony of experiencing prison as a waste place and undergoing segregation within the shower bolsters this illumination.

4.2.2 Julia Kristeva and abjectification

Next, I turn towards Julia Kristeva's work in *Powers of Horror: an essay on abjectio*n (1982), where she theorizes about the feeling of horror one experiences when the limits between self and other are threatened (Kristeva, 1982, p. 1). She coins this as "abjection". I will explain abjection in greater detail by looking at her example of refuse, and then, I will turn towards trans* experiences of being abjected.

Abjection occurs in transitional spaces when the distinction between self and other is blurred or threatened. It is the reaction of horror one has to a breakdown in meaning from the loss of distinction between self and other. Additionally, abjection is how one establishes oneself as a self. Put otherwise, it arises in instances of potential incorporation or exclusion of the other, reinforcing the understanding of oneself as a self (Kristeva, 1982, p. 3). Abjection happens when there is room for either incorporation or exclusion because then there is a breakdown in our sense of self. This breakdown is so threatening that

one must repel, repulse, make the existence, or distance oneself from that which is abject (Kristeca, 1982, p. 6). One feels horror from these experiences, distances oneself from the abject, and thus establishes the self as such.

Refuse is a prime example of an abjection (Kristeva, 1982, p. 3). It is a part of the body and life, yet it may cause horror and disgust because it is abjected as a means for separating life from death. Refuse is made abject because it threatens our sense of self – is that object a part of me, or is it other to me? To answer this question, we render refuse as abject and establish a sense of self. Kristeva describes how the "in-between," "composite," or "ambiguous" has the potential to be abjected because it disturbs "identity, system, and order" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). Refuse obscures the boundaries between self and other, and is made abject as a result.

There are no limits as to what can be regarded as abject. Although Kristeva never explicitly wrote on abjection in relation to gender, her theory is evident in trans* people's experiences. We threaten a fundamental boundary of the self for many people, the borders between the gender binary; thus, we are constructed as abject. Horror, the emotion arising in response to something abject, is the intense feeling of fear, shock, or disgust (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). I often identify horror on the faces of people trying to discern my best friend's gender. Is it a boy or a girl? Whether their horror displays itself as fear, shock, or disgust, it communicates that she is abject.

Trans* testimony of sexual violence in prisons brings forth this concept. Once something has been made abject, a person must distance themself from the abject. A means of creating distance from abject humans is to perceive them as objects. Trans* people undergo what I call abjectification; we are conceived of as abject, so consequently, we are objectified. Trans* prisoners endure abjectification daily as their bodies provoke feelings of disgust, and yet, they are targeted more than any other prison population for sexual assault (Grant et al., 2011, p. 168). Their bodies become objects for use.

The United States National Transgender Discrimination Survey anonymously relayed two trans* prisoners' experiences. The first commented that she "only" received verbal harassment and threats of rape. However, she painfully shares, "I watched a trans woman arrested with me experience physical and sexual assault from the police that night as well as extensive verbal harassment and humiliation" (Grant et al., 2011, p. 166). The second testimony is also painful to bear witness to. She states,

> I was arrested one day regarding something minor. Due to my gender being marked as male, I was put in with the men. Within 15 minutes, I was raped by three different men. My mother even called and warned the officers NOT to put me in with the general population as I would be an easy target. When I got out, I tried to seek help from Victims Services but was denied. I was also discouraged from trying to press charges on the men. (Grant et al., 2011, p. 168)

There are many consequences to being made abject. Being turned into an object is one way I have identified here. It is among one of the most horrific ways abjection manifests itself in trans* lives and is also a devastatingly common experience.

These narratives call attention to how trans* people endure a double-bind of abjection, similar to their experiences of contingent eliminability in the shower. Trans* people are first abjected from the social body; they are removed and put at a distance. Then, they undergo it again through abjectification. Kristeva's work lays out the concept of abjection, but trans* testimony propels her theory. It illuminates how abjection is persistently endured.

Where Douglas explains the rituals surrounding purity and impurity for establishing its contingency, Kristeva explains the emotional impulses of purity and impurity. Like Douglas's theory, abjection is not inherent in the things themselves but is derived from a contingent symbolic order. Rendering something abject makes its eliminability permissible (Zurn, 2019, p. 676). This secures one's sense of self and, on a larger scale, maintains a falsely conceived notion of a pure social body.

4.2.3 María Lugones and the logics of purity/impurity

In her work "Purity, Impurity, and Separation," (1994) Lugones enriches our understanding of the divide between purity and impurity by analyzing how identities are constructed and organized. She delineates between a logic of impurity and a logic of purity, emerging from how we make sense of the social body. I will explain these logics and then show how trans* prisoners embody this theory.

The logic of purity proposes that there is a separation between members of the social body, or in Lugones' words, that "the social world is complex and heterogenous and each person is multiple, non fragmented, embodied" (Lugones, 1994, p. 463). The social world comprises separable subjects that form homogenized categories that can be controlled. For example, according to the logic of purity, humans can be neatly identified as cisgender or trans*gender.

In contrast, the logic of impurity suggests that social subjects are variable and lack clear distinctions from one another. Lugones describes the social world according to the logic of impurity as "complex" and "multiple" (Lugones, 2003, p. 473). This logic suggests that the categories trans*gender and cisgender are misrepresentative of the social world. People cannot be easily organized strictly according to these identities because the identities have never been uniform. Bodies are fluid and not easily categorizable. This is strongly evidenced by the process required to define trans* in this thesis. After much research, I landed on a definition that potentially includes people who are ordinarily thought of as cisgender and excludes others who are often thought of as trans*gender.

Lugones asserts that the social body often functions according to the logic of purity, even when bodies threaten this state. She draws upon the experiences of *mestiza/o* people to demonstrate how those holding multiple identities are made relationally flat. A *mestiza/o* is a racialized person from Latin America who has European and Indigenous ancestry; it literally translates to "mixed person". When living in a society that operates according to the logic of purity, one comes to be perceived as representing the whole of one's identity, and simultaneously, one's multifacetedness is stripped away and viewed as singular (Lugones, 1994, p. 475). This is an effect of being rigidly contained within a single identity category.

For example, when *mestiza/o* people speak, they are perceived as speaking on behalf of all *mestiza/o* experiences. Their complex identities and relations are neatly bound into the singularity of one racial category. They are homogenized (Lugones, 1994, p. 475). Lugones contends that this reduction is relentless and hinders the *mestiza/o's* ability to build community or make sense of their multiple cultures. To be made relationally flattened or thin is to be perceived as having no social needs or relational depth. "The *mestiza/o* is, then, made inherently cultural and yet without relation, beholden to a community and yet absolutely insoluble" (Zurn, 2019, p. 677), Zurn elucidates. *Mestiza/o* people's identities, through the logic of purity, are constructed as singular and relationally flattened.

Trans* people are also closely bound to the logic of purity. Our bodies often do not conform to the normative ideals of the gender binary. We sully the notion of simple and separable identity categories, and it is this sullying that renders us both universal and singular. When we speak, like the *mestiza/o*, we speak on behalf of all trans* experiences, and this universalization leaves us relationally thin.

Lugones argues that the logic of purity renders people whose identities are not easily constructed or organized as functionally separable (Lugones, 1994, p. 468). That is to say, trans* people threaten the easily constructed identities of the contrived gender binary and are removed from the social body for the binary's continual purity. What makes this separability possible is that we are made relationally thin. Through her work on conceptualizing the logic of purity, Lugones brings together the interconnectedness of the eliminative logic's three components.

When I read Lugones, I think of Cece McDonald, a Black trans* woman incarcerated for self-defense. She was charged with manslaughter after protecting herself against a racist, trans*phobic assault. How Lugones and McDonald structure their arguments is drastically different. The former uses academic language to write about logic; the latter speaks fiercely and intimately about her life. Nevertheless, the theory these two produce closely mirrors one another.

McDonald continually mentions how her experience is not the defining experience of all trans* people. In spite of this, public media often portrays her experience as just that. She also rejects being made relationally thin. Instead, she wants "To have rights and a voice. To be able to walk in this world, not afraid and actually feel like a human being and not a shadow in a corner" (McDonald, 2017). McDonald expresses that she does not want to be subject to the logic of purity.

Douglas, Kristeva, and Lugones provide accounts of purity and impurity, together demonstrating how prisons function as a holding space for the impure. Propelled by the experiences of trans* prisoners, this section illuminates how the eliminable is contrived from a contingent symbolic order, that what threatens the limits between self and other is abjected, and finally, eliminability and abjection are enforced through the logic of purity. These movements suggest that the discursive "impure" attaches itself to bodies, and the individual bodies, in turn, are excised from the social body (Zurn, 2019, p. 677).

Trans* people are made eliminable, experience abjection, and suffer the consequences of the logic of purity. Arriving at this juncture is a radical approach to conceiving purity and impurity, made possible by centering trans* narrative. In the following two sections, I continue to highlight how each component of the eliminative logic provides insightful illuminations.

4.3 Enduring iterative segregations

According to Zurn, the distinction between purity and impurity is "sanctified through iterative segregation" (Zurn, 2019, p. 676), both through and within prisons. In this section, I establish the normative justifications for trans* isolation; segregation is purportedly necessary to protect trans* prisoners and women. Then, I show how trans* epistemology contests these justifications. Trans* prisoners are not actually protected by isolation, but rather, endure further harm. Additionally, Zurn contends that iterative segregations are implemented to protect the ideals of womanhood and regulate trans* people's gender. This alternative epistemology builds upon Douglas, Krsisteva, and Lugones to deepen the understanding of the eliminative logic.

The previous section argued that centering trans* epistemologies illuminates how prisons purify the social center by excising trans* people from the social body. After this initial segregation, trans* people experience further isolation within prisons. This is accomplished through single-cell housing units, solitary confinement, and segregated bathrooms. Trans* experiences demonstrate that the social body first abjects them through imprisonment and then again within the prison through a doubling-down of ritualized segregation (Zurn, 2019, p. 677).

A recent report form the Federal Bureau of Prisons in the United states collected data from trans* people between 2017 to 2022, and showed that solitary confinement is commonplace for trans* prisoners; they are two to three times more likely to be placed in solitary than cisgender inmates (BOP, 2023). Tahj Graman, a trans* man placed inside a woman's prison, shares his story. He tells his interviewer that the threat of solitary confinement was constant. Often, solitary was threatened as a punishment for his refusal to wear a bra, have long hair, or shave his religious beard (Riloff, 2023). These "offenses" never led Graman to be placed in solitary, but what did, was the four times he reported being sexually assaulted. He shares, "I eventually stopped reporting it because they would place me in solitary confinement each time" (Riloff, 2023).

Although solitary confinement is an egregious form of isolation, complete isolation does not need to be present for the eliminative logic to function. Daily routines, such as where one is housed or when one is allowed to shower, are also sites for segregation. They enforce the status of trans* people as abject. Moreover, they confront trans* people with their status as eliminable through refined rituals of segregation and control. As Douglas notes, iterative, not total, segregation is a ritual of segregation.

Segregating trans* prisoners through single housing units, solitary confinement, and private bathrooms is justified as necessary for maintaining security and order (Zurn, 2019, p. 673). The prison guards dealing with Graman professed that solitary confinement protected him from sexual abuse. In reality, he was never protected from sexual assault occuring; the harm he suffered was perpetuated through solitary. Furthermore, proponents of segregating trans* people argue that, in the case of trans* women incarcerated inside women's prisons, segregation protects cis women from trans* women. Trans* epistemology complicates this second justification.

Segregation is justified on the grounds of protecting women, but this stance is hard to uphold when analyzing trans* experiences in prison. I will show why this is the case. First, trans* men housed in women's prisons are typically labeled as "sexual predators" who must be segregated to protect cis women (Law, 2009, p. 204). However, this justification for segregation is complicated when looking at trans* women's experience. Trans* women housed in men's prisons are often segregated because their femininity signals vulnerability, which needs protecting.

Simultaneously, however, trans* women are punished for their femininity. This is accomplished through V-coding, where trans* women are placed in cells with sexually aggressive cis men (Zurn, 2019, p. 671). Additionally, it is punished by denying them access to normatively feminine things such as long hair, hormone therapy, or gender-affirming clothing (Mogul et al., 2011, pp. 228-29). So, while trans* women's femininity allegedly needs protection, it is also punishable. This contradiction exposes how justifying segregation on the grounds of protecting women is a facade. Prisons have a vested interest in protecting a particular type of woman, namely cis women. In other words, segregation protects the ideals of womanhood.

Zurn furthers this argument, asserting that isolating trans* people serves the function of safeguarding the gender binary. He writes, "isolation is utilized in order to control these misfitting bodies, which jeopardize the clarity of the gender binary and are perceived to uniquely threaten one side of that binary: women" (Zurn, 2019, p. 673). Protecting ideals of womanhood means punishing those who threaten gender norms. Returning to the earlier theories of purity, it is not hard to see why iterative segregations safeguard the pure social body from trans* people's gender transgressions.

The elimative logic expresses itself in the lives of trans* prisoners through iterative segregation.

While it is normally justified on the grounds of protecting trans* people and protecting women, trans* epistemology presents an alternative approach. It contends that segregation functions to protect ideals of womanhood and safeguard the gender binary, all in the name of securing a pure social body. These illuminations were made possible by incorporating trans* epistemology into theory production.

4.4 Thin relationality

Next, I turn towards the last component of the eliminative logic, thin relationality. This component makes the eliminative logic, sanctioned through iterative segregations, possible. In this section, Zurn describes what thin relationality entails, how trans* people are constructed as relationally thin, and moreover, how this makes them vulnerable to the eliminative logic. I provide trans* testimony to endorse his argument. Zurn concludes with a critical illumination – combatting the eliminative logic's detrimental effects requires rendering trans* people as relationally thick. I draw parallels between making someone relationally thick and conferring intelligibility to highlight how Zurn's project aligns with trans* philosophy's tenets.

Relationality refers to how people are connected to one another. The language "thin" refers to the limited nature of these relations. Zurn describes trans* people who are made relationally thin as "unrelatable, solitary folks who, while belonging to the highly stereotyped and stylized category of "the transsexual," nevertheless have little to no need to belong either to their own community or to the world at large" (Zurn, 2019, p. 681). Trans* people's relationality and intersubjectivities are flattened. They are perceived as individualistic people who are capable of withstanding the damaging effects of isolation. According to Zurn, iterative segregations are predicated on the idea that trans* people are already isolable (Zurn, 2019, p. 673). Presuming their isolability rests on their thin relationality.

Another component of thin relationality rests upon Lugone's concept; trans* subjectivities are flattened when made to represent the whole of "the" trans* experience, also known as representational totalization. Someone's singular experience is viewed as characteristic of every other trans* experience. Additionally, the focal point of the trans* experience is often narrowed in on our oppression, death, or genitals (Zurn 2019, p. 681). Western media flattens trans* people, portraying us as entertaining stories and categorizing us as deviant. Zurn relays this back to trans* prisoners. He writes that trans* prisoners

> Are treated more as objects and less like humans with feelings, histories, and communities. This is a structural condition of incarceration uniquely tuned, here, to gender transgression.

> When trans and gender-nonconforming prisoners, therefore, are isolated, it is of a piece with their presumed lacuna of relationality. (Zurn, 2019, p. 682)

Being rendered relationally thin is how prison systems justify their isolative practices. Trans* prisoners are isolated based on the presumption that they are immune to the harms of such practices.

Isolative practices are damaging to relationality. Lisa Guenther's seminal work on solitary confinement shows that isolative practices are damaging for two reasons. First, it denies the prisoners' relationality. They are barred from connection. Second, in reducing the prisoner's capacity for relationality, isolation erodes their psyche (Guenther, 2013, p. xv). Zurn suggests a third damaging effect of isolation: "The isolated person is reduced to a thinly relational subject prior to isolation" (Zurn, 2019, p. 681). Status as a trans* criminal reduces them as relationally thin even before they experience isolation through incarceration. Criminalized trans* people are already treated less as persons and more as things.

How trans* people discuss their relationality within prisons is a testament to this. A.M. poignantly draws the comparison between prison and the trash bin when stating, "I often think prison is like a dustbin with a bin liner in it, but the liner has a split in it and some things fall out and get caught in between. I think I apply to that" (Forder, 2015). She perceives herself as dirt and, even further, as dirt that does not even get funneled into the vacuum. She is entirely separate; she is perceived as a relationally thin object. Sharing this sentiment, prisoner K.F. shares a challenging aspect of isolation. She tells the interviewer,

> Every wing tried to get rid of me, so I moved around the jail from wing to wing, sometimes only being in a cell long enough to unpack my things before I was moving again. . . . It was like a repeat film, I was moved from wing to wing as they too didn't know what to do with me. (Forder, 2015)

K.F.'s experience of segregation through relocation exemplifies thin relationality. She is deemed isolable and consequently faces continual relocations without regard for her social needs. The eliminative logic in prisons renders trans* prisoners as relationally deficient. They are not granted full participation in the social body as complex and relational beings.

In alignment with trans* philosophy, Zurn leaves his reader with an important illumination. To address prison's contemporary isolative practices, reconceptualizing trans* people as relationally thick is required. He contends that revitalizing trans* people's relationality "equips us to deconstruct the tactics and institutions that target those already deeply marginalized in our society" (Zurn, 2019, p. 682). There are two means for accomplishing this revitalization.

The first step is to appreciate trans* people as deeply relational beings. This beckons a move away from representational totalization and recognizing the vibrancy and variance in trans* life. It also requires the conferral of intelligibility, understanding that trans* lives are lived, and hence, are livable, regardless of the lack of intelligibility our lives possess. We are not merely sexual predators, murder victims, or the occasional sensationalized celebrity. We live in a community with a rich history of creative world-building. Zurn beautifully writes, "A thick relational lens unearths, appreciates, and reimagines how trans people live, how we love, and how we lead" (Zurn, 2019, p. 682). Conceiving trans* people as relationally thick is related to trans* philosophy's tenet of conferring intelligibility.

The second step is to recognize how deeply relational prisons already are. They are spaces where love, friendship, and family are largely forbidden but obstinately present. For example, most prisons enforce abstinence policies, yet sex and intimacy are ordinary aspects of imprisonment (Kunzel, 2008). Behind prison bars exists a world brimming with meaningful relationality.

Attributing thin relationality to trans* people makes us vulnerable to the practices of social ablution. Appreciating our deep relationality and understanding the prison as an already a relational space helps reconceive trans* people as relationally thick. According to Zurn, this reduces our vulnerability to the eliminative logic (Zurn, 2019, p. 682)

4.5 Conclusion

Zurn centers trans* testimony, making the case that prisons operate according to an eliminative logic with three separate but interrelated components. First, creating a contingent symbolic order based on abjection and the logic of purity renders trans* people as social waste. Second, purifying the social body is sanctioned through ritual segregations of trans* bodies, which consequently protect ideals of womanhood and the gender binary. Lastly, purifying the social center is possible by rendering trans* people as thinly relational.

Trans* philosophy's first component, illumination, is evident throughout Zurn's work. He addresses two pressing WTF questions: Why are trans* people disproportionately imprisoned, and why do we face greater violence within the prison system? He illuminates that prisons function as an eliminative space, and he does so through positive argumentation. One does not need to concur with Zurn's findings to acknowledge how incorporating trans* epistemology leads to illumination.

Additionally, Zurn confers intelligibility in two primary ways. He grants trans* prisoners greater credibility and epistemic agency by allowing them to fuel his theory production. He also argues that combating eliminative practices necessitates the reconceptualization of trans* people as relationally thick. To make another relationally thick is to grant them the necessary norms for personhood. Zurn is also engaged with pre-theoretical sociality among trans* phenomena given that he himself is trans*, he is actively in community with trans* prisoners, and he incorporates trans* literature. Zurn's work captures the three aims of trans* philosophy by providing positive illuminations to WTF questions, conferring intelligibility, and being engaged with trans* phenomena. Although highlighting intelligibility conferral and worldly engagement was not this chapter's goal, I point it out to strengthen the case for trans* philosophy's value.

This chapter demonstrates how centering trans* epistemologies radically impacts theory. The trans* testimony Zurn relies on is not merely demonstrative or supportive of his theory, but rather, testimony is the driving force. Trans* insights into prisons that build the epistemology. Zurn poignantly writes, "Patient attention to the details of a given experience illuminates it, breaking the crust of perceptual habit and redirecting one's gaze toward its subterranean or peripheral elements" (Zurn, 2019, p. 674). Trans* philosophy's patient attention to trans* experience strengthens theory.

One might contend hat Zurn is not doing trans* philosophy because he upheaves ordinary conceptions of the prison and creates greater perplexity. This statement presumes that conceptions of the prison are already unitary and comprehensible. However, for many trans* people, WTF questions about the prison are profuse. Zurn's theory does lead to new, perplexing questions. For example, are individuals responsible for eliminating trans* people? How can we know that elimination is causally linked to the prison? Should our communities rely on the criminal legal system? WTF? When we return to Bettcher it is clear that trans* philosophy may create more perplexity but it builds positive arguments to chisel away at these perplexing questions. Zurn's theory destabilizes one conception of the prison in order to illuminate another.

5

Worldly Engagement Informs Disciplinary Boundaries

5.1 Introduction

Thus far, I have established trans* philosophy's three tenets. I argued that conferring intelligibility confronts epistemic oppression. Then, I demonstrated how granting epistemic agency by centering trans* narrative leads to illuminations. Now, I will analyze trans* philosophy's last tenet, pre-theoretical sociality among trans* phenomena, otherwise referred to as worldly engagement.

In this chapter, I take a purposeful turn from my structured argumentation. I overview Foucualt's thought practices to show how he defined philosophy as a way of life, meaning a unison of *logos* and *pragmata* where philosophers employ the theories they produce in their daily affairs. Foucault does not provide an all-encompassing theory of philosophy, nor do I. However, Foucualt's thought practices offer trans* philosophy a platform to clarify what is meant by "worldly engagement." I argue that, first, it means centering subjugated knowledges by engaging with them, and this must be undertaken before theorizing begins. Second, worldly engagement urges philosophers to expand whose knowledge counts in theory production to those outside of academic walls.

To make this argument, I rely on Ladelle McWhorter's work, "The Abolition of Philosophy" (2016). She analyzes Foucualt's career, starting with his discontentment with philosophy and ending with his reconceptualization of the discipline. I will explain this movement in his thought practices. Then, I use his narrative to establish how trans* philosophy has a distinct way of conducting worldly engagement and, moreover, what this has to offer the discipline.

5.2 Foucault's discontentment with philosophy

Foucault spent 13 years of his academic career disparaging philosophy, expressing a deep disdain for professional philosophers. He thought their primary job was distancing themselves from reality. McWhorter contends that one could read Foucault as childishly exaggerating his professional difficulties, being cynical, or perhaps implementing a maneuver to advance his politics (McWhorter, 2016, p. 23).

However, reading him with careful attention shows why these suggestions are not the case. Foucault eventually concedes his position, embracing the title of philosopher by reconceptualizing the discipline. This move from disdain to acceptance signals something important: philosophy does not have a stable definition.

In this section, I explain Foucault's discontentment, rooted in his belief that philosophy is incapable of creating change and maintains disciplinary power. I will first examine how Foucault positioned himself in opposition to philosophy through his activism. Then, I describe his critique of philosophy, specifically his harsh appraisal of political philosophy's focus on sovereignty. Foucault's analysis remains useful for trans* philosophy today as it shows the importance of worldly engagement.

Foucault engaged in political activism throughout his academic career. He helped develop the *Groupe d'information sur les prisons*, or Prison Information Group (GIP), in 1970, an organization aiming to disseminate knowledge about the harsh conditions of French prisons. While engaging in this work, Foucault became increasingly upset with academia. McWhorter summarizes his comportment towards the discipline: "The university as an institutional apparatus is just a machine for social and political reproduction without deviation; it is entirely conservative, not the site of real change" (McWhorter, 2016, p. 24). Academic philosophy, Foucault contests, depends on conserving the social and political order to maintain its status within that institution.

In contrast, for Foucault, the GIP was a site for real change. It was democratically established, existing outside any formal institution, and their work was driven by the lived experiences of prisoners and their loved ones. "This activism is embodied, living work as opposed to the bloodlessness of written production," McWhorter writes about the GIP; "it operates outside institutions intent on social control and conservative reproduction, rendering it free to seek genuine change" (McWhorter, 2016, p. 25). Foucault's discontentment with philosophy and emphasis on political action illustrate his main concern with academic philosophy – it fails to engage with the world. Philosophy is not conducive to creating real change because its theories are not grounded in reality (Foucault, 1988, p. 12)

As his career progressed, Foucault narrowed his criticism onto political philosophy's engagement with sovereignty. He maintained that philosophers analyzing sovereignty, even though democracy had long been established, have "not cut off the head of the king" (Foucault 1984, p. 117). Political theorists

distract themselves and others from contending with disciplinary power, a form of power particular to neoliberal states where individuals internalize larger power structures. As a result, disciplinary power leads subjects to discipline themselves according to norms (Foucault, 2003, p. 36).

Foucault asserted that political philosophy's focus on sovereignty was out of touch with reality and reinforced disciplinary power, effectively opposing political resistance (McWhorter, 2016, p. 25). He wrote that disciplinary power "cannot be described or justified in terms of the theory of sovereignty. It is radically heterogeneous and should logically have led to the complete disappearance of the great judicial edifice of the theory of sovereignty" (Foucault, 2003, p. 36). According to Foucault, sovereignty has not disappeared within philosophy, which permits disciplinary power to conceal its operation and flourish. One does not have to agree with Foucault's conception of power to take his concerns seriously. Through critique, he uncovers how philosophy, as an institutionalized discipline, is concerned with maintaining its status within the institution for its longevity. So long as philosophers need to be gainfully employed, they will be invested in keeping the discipline institutionalized.

Foucault is not a solitary radical in forming these critiques. John Stuhr has proclaimed, "There is little life in most professional philosophy today. Philosophy now exists in limbo, alive but comatose" (Stuhr, 1997, p. 45). My undergraduate professor, David Hildebrand, wrote, "Philosophy's relevance is disappearing" (Hildebrand, 1999, p. 377). Hildebrand made this statement the year before I turned one, and by my estimation, it has only continued to be true in the decades since. Lee McIntyre provides an emotionally charged critique:

> Over the last 20 years, income inequality in America has grown to unsustainable levels, genocide has devastated Rwanda and Serbia, modern slavery exists in Sudan, child prostitution is rampant in Southeast Asia, and 9/11 brought terrorism to American shores. Yet to look at the history of the philosophy of language, mind, science, metaphysics, epistemology, or even ethics, one would hardly know that. (McIntyre, 2011)

Foucault, Stuhr, Hildebrand, and McIntyre's critiques span over forty years, and they are but a small cacophony of the discontent. The fear that philosophy is becoming obsolete is neither new nor localized.

Foucault's strong discontentment with academic philosophy can be distilled into two problems. First, philosophers' theories are unactionable because they are not engaged in the world. Second, philosophers reinforce disciplinary norms because they are invested in maintaining institutionalized status. Trans* philosophy's third tenet, worldly engagement, directly combats Foucault's first qualm. As for the second

one, I will demonstrate in the section below titled "Centering subjugated knowledges" how trans* philosophy also works to confront this problem.

5.3 Foucault's reconceptualization of philosophy

Foucault eventually reconceives philosophy as an ethical and political practice, leading him to end these critiques (McWhorter, 2016, p. 30). This section describes Foucault's shift in thought practices, and I argue this shift demonstrates how the definition of philosophy is malleable.

Toward the end of his career, Foucault developed an interest in ancient Greek philosophy (McWhorter, 2016, p. 29). He focused many of his 1983 lectures, *The Government of Self and Others* (2010), on Plato. In one class, he claimed that both Plato and himself thought, "the reality of philosophy is not, is no longer, anyway, is not merely *logos*. . . The reality of philosophy, the reality of philosophizing, that to which the word philosophy refers, is a set of *pragmata* (practices)" (Foucault, 2010, pp. 227-8). Philosophy, for Foucault, no longer meant studying only the nature of reality. Rather, it was also a set of practices – a toolkit he could contribute to and people could implement to create real change. The reality of philosophy was also the practice of philosophy. Foucault found in Plato a conception of the discipline that counteracted his greatest gripe. Philosophy did not need to be mere *logos*; it could be logos accompanied by *pragmata*.

This development assuaged Foucault's first concern that philosophy was unactionable. He conceived of the philosopher's job as one dedicated to finding and living out truths. In his account, philosophers shape their lives in accordance with truth, even when it is unwelcome. McWhorter neatly summarizes Foucault's view that philosophy "must be not just a professional activity but a way of living every day. Philosophy must be ever self-transforming, a care of oneself amid the political realities in which one lives" (McWhorter, 2016, pp. 30-1). With this reconceptualization, Foucault began describing himself as a philosopher.

5.4 Centering subjugated knowledges

McWhorter contends that Foucualt's transformation failed to combat his second concern; philosophy still reinforced disciplinary norms (McWhorter, 2016, p. 32). That is to say, philosophers can still be guided by disciplinary power even when enacting their theories as a way of life. Foucault tackles this concern by also considering philosophy as a means for centering subjugated knowledge. Below, I will show how his political failures led to this thought practice and how this is a valuable tool for conceptualizing trans* philosophy.

In Foucualt's view, the GIP had failed. Little was known at this time about what it was like inside French prisons, and the group sought to make this knowledge accessible by allowing prisoners to speak for themselves. The GIP's manifesto proclaims, "We shall not find the information [we are seeking] in the official reports. We are asking for information from those who, somehow, have an experience of the prison or have a relation to it" (Lawlor, 2014, p. 395). The organizers focused on pamphleteering, press conferences, and interviews to accomplish this.

The GIP's work had produced the very thing Foucault thought political action sidestepped: *more talk* (McWhorter, 2016, p. 32). He wanted to fundamentally alter how prisoners' knowledge was produced by ending the indignity of speaking on behalf of them. Creating more dialogue was not the aim. This failure led Foucault to theorize about his role in "the insurrection of subjugated knowledge" and how this is crucial to philosophy's project.

Three years after the GIP's dissolution, Foucualt's lectures at the Collége de France provide insights into how he was thinking about knowledge production. He spoke,

> In recent years we have often encountered, at least at the superficial level, a whole thematic: 'life, not knowledge,' 'the real, not erudition,' 'money, not books'. . . It appears to me that beneath this whole thematic, through it and even within it, we have seen what might be called the insurrection of subjugated knowledge. (Foucault, 2010, p. 51)

One may initially read Foucault as providing a wholesale rejection of knowledge, but as he continues to speak, it becomes clear that he is rejecting a particular kind of knowledge. He opposes knowing that it is produced by institutions; he does not reject subjugated knowledges. Foucault embraced ways of knowing, learning, conceptualizing, and synthesizing that have been historically marginalized by institutions and disciplinary power.

Foucault continued his lecture by delineating two forms of subjugated knowledges. First, there is knowledge that is deemed insufficient because it is naive, inadequately rigorous, or unscientific. This, for example, is often how trans* prisoner's knowledge comes to be subjugated. The other form of knowledge is that which has been concealed through obscurity, sometimes unintentionally and other times intentionally, as in the case of specific archives (McWhorter, 2016, p. 33). This was the case for French prisoner's

knowledge.

Both forms of subjugated knowledge are subordinate to what is considered known and unquestionable. They are subjugated through suppression and concealing the role of an epistemic system. That is to say, epistemic systems hide that truth is not unequivocally known but must be collectively established as legitimate knowledge. Foucault theorized about how knowledge is produced and how this process is always located within power relations, informing what comes to be accepted as truth. Subjugated knowledges are concealed because this process of knowledge production is denied, and through this denial, the already-known sustains itself as truth.

Foucault started to see his work in academia as a means for questioning "already-known" knowledges (McWhorter, 2016, p. 33). His work couples together the voices of prisoners with archival material to facilitate a "counter-network of force relations," and importantly, it created "a history of the present that is itself effective at bringing into question the unquestionable" (McWhorter, 2016, p. 33). In his survey of the GIP, Leonard Lawler neatly summarizes Focualt's work.

> Although the GIP documents constantly state that they are not trying to raise the inmates' consciousness (FDE1a, 1044), and although Foucault constantly says that the GIP is not providing the inmates with knowledge (FDE1a,1289), the GIP in fact gave the inmates and their families a new way of relating to themselves. The GIP not only was a relay for the inmates' voices but also a relay for thinking. In this way, the GIP was a success in the unification of theory and practice of philosophy and politics. (Lawler, 2014, p. 398)

Foucault's philosophy facilitated the counter-production of subjugated knowledges, and unlike his political work, this production destabilizes institutions. It undoes taken-for-granted knowledges by centering subjugated knowledges.

Foucault's sense of philosophy as a way of life emerged, and then when his attempt at embodying this failed through the GIP, he came to recognize the value of his intellectual work in its own right. His academic work was his political work, both *logos* and *pragmata*. He used his training in philosophy to "make available knowledges of struggles subjugated in obscure archives for an alliance with the knowledges voices by those whom the dominant knowledge regime discredits'' (McWhorter, 2016, p. 34). Foucault recognized that he was not merely producing more talk; he produced subjugated knowledge to undo ordinary thinking.

In this way, trans* philosophy confronts Focualt's second concern that philosophy reinforces disciplinary power. Trans* philosophy's worldly engagement locates subjugated knowledges, that is, trans*

knowledge that is conferred less epistemic credibility. It then heightens the epistemic power of trans* people by incorporating the knowledge they produce. This, in return, confronts disciplinary power.

5.5 Trans philosophy's future*

The first time I read McWhorter's analysis of Foucault's relationship to philosophy, I wondered what relevance it had for trans* philosophy. I was drawn to his understanding of philosophy as a way of life but also skeptical. Some philosophers would do a great deal of harm by living out their theories. Additionally, I was unsure whether his use of subjugated knowledges aligned with trans* philosophy. After all, Foucault's books implement subjugated knowledges to problematize normative ideas and create perplexity. As I continued my research into trans* philosophy, epistemic oppression, and prison studies, it became increasingly clear that Foucault's thought practices have much to offer. In this section, I parse out what exactly that is. I will address these two concerns and argue that Foucault's lessons are useful for the future of trans* philosophy and our conception of worldly engagement.

My first concern was that some philosophers would do harm by enacting their theories. Foucault argues that philosophy must be enacted in the world, but how could I endorse that stance during the times a philosopher's engagement harms trans* people? For example, could I support Kathleen Stock in enacting her theories? For those who are unfamiliar, Stock is a trans* exclusionary radical feminist, arguing that trans* identities are legal fiction and trans* women ought to be barred from entering specific spaces, such as toilets. She actively lives out this philosophy by participating in UK politics. Stock opposed the Gender Recognition Act, which would have allowed trans* people to self-identify as their genders without undergoing medical intervention (Stock, 2021).

This concern delineates a fundamental difference between Foucault's philosophy and trans* philosophy: the point of engagement. Foucault supports engagement *after* theorizing, but for trans* philosophy, *pre-theoretical* engagement is pertinent. Engaging beforehand grants trans* people epistemic agency. Additionally, it helps build more robust theories. This is strongly evidenced by how Stock produces blatantly incorrect knowledge about trans* people and relies on logical fallacies to do so (Zanghellini, 2020). If she were pre-theoretically engaged, then the theories she produced might be representative of trans* lives. Lived experiences inform trans* philosophy because, without it, we remove trans* epistemic agen-

cy.

What was initially unsettling in Foucault's conception of philosophy became fruitful grounds for conceptualizing the value of worldly engagement. Trans* philosophy does not prescribe moral imperatives. Alternatively, it is engaged with how and where knowledge is produced. Worldly engagement is a tool for accessing subjugating knowledges that upheave normative ways of knowing. Centering subjugated voices, as Foucault does, leads to nuanced theories that are not replete with disciplinary power. Most importantly, however, it lowers the philosopher's default credibility, restoring trans* people's epistemic agency.

My second concern was Foucault's aim in implementing subjugated knowledges. He sought to problematize through disruption and perplexity. Again, this difference helps trans* philosophy clarify the purpose and value of worldly engagement. Centering subjugated knowledges is fundamentally destabilizing because it challenges dominant ways of knowing and tests the epistemological system's resilience. However, trans* epistemologies are destabilizing in the pursuit of illumination. As previously argued, what may initially appear perplexing is pursued to answer WTF questions. Therefore, centering trans* epistemologies may cause disruptions and unravel ordinary ways of thinking, but it also weaves together an understanding of the world that is coherent with trans* experiences. We disrupt so we can build and illuminate.

Foucault has a different point of engagement, and he seeks to disrupt; however, his emphasis on centering subjugated knowledges is in deep alignment with trans* philosophy. His work reminds me of Bettcher when she writes that answering WTF questions allows trans* philosophy to open itself up to the "critical assessment and possible rejection of prevailing theoretical models, political frameworks, and taken-for-granted assumptions that impede our capacity to shed light on the WTF" (Bettcher, 2016, p. 652). Trans* philosophy uses subjugated knowledges, found through worldly engagement, to illuminate and confer intelligibility, and it does not shy away from challenging existing theories.

Using Foucault's thought practices clarifies the meaning and value of trans* philosophy's worldly engagement. Trans* philosophy implements logos and pragmata through worldly engagement, and it rids itself of disciplinary power by centering subjugated knowledges. However, it departs from Foucault in that worldly engagement occurs before theorizing and centering subjugated knowledges is always pursued for

illumination.

5.6 Conclusion

Choosing Foucault to argue for the value of worldly engagement was a peculiar but intentional choice. The argument could have been made through standpoint feminism or varying theories on epistemic justice. However, Foucault offers something unique – he challenges ordinary, taken-for-granted practices within philosophy. He identifies how centering subjugated knowledges challenges institutional knowledge, and at the heart of this thesis lies a challenge for philosophers. Foucault urges philosophers to take seriously the knowledge produced by trans* individuals, allowing trans* epistemology to inform theory production.

My second chapter began with Judith Butler's plea to end philosophy's paradox, "is philosophy philosophy," by embracing trans* philosophy within the discipline. I read Foucault as furthering this argument. His reconceptualization of philosophy similarly revitalizes the profession from academic obscurity. As Jack Halberstam, the creator of low theory, writes, "Knowledge practices that refuse both the form and content of traditional canons may lead to unbound forms of speculation, modes of thinking that ally not with rigor and order but with inspiration" (Halberstam, 2011, p. 10). In a world where funding is hard to come by, and the value placed on the humanities is dwindling, ending obscurity is beneficial. Producing philosophy from a place of worldly engagement enhances the discipline.

Foucault, however, does something more radical than Butler. He argues for salvaging philosophy by thinking about how philosophy is already happening outside academia. Perhaps philosophy's tautology is better combated by accepting that philosophy cannot and should not be confined to the academy. Along these lines, Jack Halberstam ponders,

> This is not a bad time to experiment with disciplinary transformation on behalf of the project of generating new forms of knowing, since the fields that were assembled over one hundred years ago respond to new market economies and the demand for narrow expertise, as Foucault described them, are losing relevance and failing to respond either to real-world knowledge projects or student interests. . . Do we really want to shore up the ragged boundaries of our shared interests and intellectual commitments, or might we rather take this opportunity to rethink the project of learning and thinking altogether? (Halberstam, 2011, p. 7)

Halberstam, Butler, Foucault, and I are not claiming that philosophy must be eradicated from educational institutions. We are raising questions about the future of philosophy and urging academics to consider

expanding their understanding of the discipline.

Philosophy might flourish if we loosen our grip. Butler shows how the field has created a tautology by not embracing the work of queer, feminist, and trans* philosophies. Focuault's work argues that holding onto established knowledges, as in the case of sovereignty, hinders our capacity to produce meaningful theory. Halberstam suggests that embracing philosophy outside the discipline is functionally beneficial.

Trans* philosophy's tenet of worldly engagement shows how the boundaries separating philosophers from other knowledge-producers detracts from philosophical knowledge. The subfield takes seriously the knowledge produced by trans* people so as to meaningfully inform the world, rid itself of disciplinary power, and support the discipline's longevity.

6

Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

Foucault boldly professed that he was uninterested in his work's academic status because his only concern was personal transformation (Foucault and Rabinow, 1997, p. 131). I suspect this statement was not entirely honest, but perhaps this suspicion is because it is untrue for me. Still, I kept Foucault's quote next to my computer in the months spent writing this thesis; after all, this project is the product of my many transformations.

This thesis emerged from curiosities around gender and the prison but came to contend with philosophy. I originally wanted to challenge prison's gendered power dynamics, only to find the power dynamics most presciently needing to be challenged were those closest to home: in academia. I had to confront whose testimony mattered in theory production, and why. Asking this led me to contend with the most foundational and indispensable of philosophical questions: what is trans* philosophy, and how does this subfield impact the ways philosophy is conducted?

I argued that trans* philosophy has three central tenets: to illuminate answers to WTF questions, confer intelligibility onto trans* lives, and accomplish this through worldly engagement. Each of these impacts how philosophy is conducted. Conferring intelligibility confronts epistemic oppression, illumination builds more dynamic and stronger theory, and worldly engagement makes philosophy more honest and relevant. These tenets are separate but deeply interconnected.

In line with trans* philosophy's most central tenet, this thesis provides positive, illuminatory arguments, and each chapter illuminates trans* philosophy's importance. First, I demonstrate what trans* philosophy entails and how it is distinguished from trans* studies. Second, I show how trans* people endure first, second, and third-order epistemic oppression and how philosophers can redress this. Third, I reveal how taking trans* testimony into account strengthens our theory, as is the case for prison studies. Fourth, I articulate the impact engaging with the world has on theory production. Formulating positive arguments is a non-normative approach for a master's thesis, but it conveys how generative illumination can

be. Throughout this thesis, I weave together a narrative that trans* philosophy matters not only to trans* people but also to the discipline.

To conclude, I will analyze three objections to my argument. I focus on objections related to incorporating trans* knowledge in theory production because these are the criticisms most frequently confronted. After responding to theses objections, I briefly note places where there is room for further research. Then, I finish by capturing one final, salient illumination.

6.2 Three potential objections

The first objection is, why degrade the work of academics by calling trans* testimony philosophy? To answer this, I rely on the rich history of feminist philosophers engaged in the work of reclamation. This objection brings to mind Mary Ellen Waithe's question, "Might we come to a different understanding of the nature of philosophy itself as a result of an acquaintance with women's thought" (Waithe, 1991, p. xviii)? Here, Waithe is reconsidering whether women have been historically engaged in the same discipline as men. She suggests that the answer is no. Despite this, women's alternative ways of doing philosophy offer the discipline a deeper understanding of itself. Perhaps their work does not degrade but enriches. Likewise, including trans* testimony transforms the boundaries of philosophy, but it does not degrade the work. My focus on trans* testimony indexes an epistemology for breaking open alternative forms of thought. Trans* testimony alters the discipline, exceeding its current state in all of its epistemically oppressive theorizing.

Along similar lines, another objection one might pose is that if we consider trans* testimony philosophy, then does that mean everything else goes? My response is swift and concise, as this is a false dilemma. People forming this objection are committing one of the most mundane of logical fallacies: the line-drawing fallacy. Including trans* testimony does not mean there are no boundaries for who counts as philosophy. I am simply urging the institutionalized discipline to expand the boundary a bit further to those outside of academic walls.

The final objection is one I had to personally wrestle with during my research process; how does an identity category guarantee access to particular knowledge? I have come to accept that it does not. Identity categories are but a linguistic label applied to groups of bodies that are subjected to the logic of purity. In reality, identity categories can never fully capture the lived experiences of the people placed inside them. What guarantees access to particular knowledge is experience and empathy.

6.3 Areas for further research

My work sets the groundwork for a trans* epistemology, but it does not fully address the extent to which trans* knowledge can inform thought practices. A trans* epistemological framework is overwhelmingly absent in academia, and acknowledging the value of trans* knowledge in theory production is just the beginning. I envision a future where there are robust debates surrounding trans* epistemology in higher education, because, as Susan Stryker says, "Epistemological concerns lie at the heart of the transgender critique" (Stryker, 2006, p. 8). These future debates must refelct trans* people's range of lived experiences, especially incorporating trans* knowledge that is not curtailed or adjusted to conform to a cisgender framework.

Another research area I hope to see broadened is the theoretical interstices of trans* philosophy and prison studies. Feminist, queer, and race theorists have developed a great body of work in relation to the prisons, but a particular trans* vantage point needs to be further developed. There remains work to be done. Some questions that have yet to be fully developed are: how do prisons produce gender? Do they have a vested interest in safeguarding the gender binary, if so, why? What are the disciplinary mechanisms at play when policing the gender binary? These are of but a few questions in relation to trans* epistemology and prison studies that have yet to be fully pursued, and trans* thought practices have a great deal to offer.

6.4 Final illumination

I want to end this thesis with where it began – in T4T spaces. I had the immense privilege of attending a guest lecture by Mathea Slåttholm Sagdahl in the Spring of 2022, where she introduced me to trans* philosophy. She described it as a subfield that matters because it informs thought practices in every crevice of the discipline, from epistemology and ontology to metaphysics, axiology, and political philosophy. After the lecture, I reached out to Mathea, asking her to be my thesis advisor. I knew that successfully pursuing trans* philosophy required support from someone who comprehended trans* knowledge. Mathea agreed, despite being employed at a different institution than me at that time and being offered no monetary compensation.

If prefigurative politics is a group's creation of spaces that reflect a future they strive for, then Mathea and I are doing prefigurative philosophy. She is the only trans* person in a Norwegian philosophy de-

partment with a permanent position; I am the only trans* graduate student (who is out) in that department and among the first in the country to pursue trans* philosophy. Mathea and I have both become genders so many philosophers told us we could not be; we carved out spaces for one another in an institution that has historically been hostile to our existence. We strive for a future that embraces trans* philosophy, and when Mathea and I are together, that future is palpable.

The theory I produced perspicuously began with pre-theoretical sociality among trans* phenomena. Through the many narratives I relay, it conferred intelligibility onto trans* lives. Interwoven are many illuminations, but perhaps the most salient is the one I received from Mathea: trans* philosophy matters.

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