

## **Canon Critique and Collective Memory**

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Our goal in this talk is to introduce and articulate a perspective on canon critique that is largely absent from current debates about how to teach and engage with the history of philosophy: that of collective memory. Inspired by the burgeoning interdisciplinary research field of Memory Studies, we propose that institutions and individuals who teach the history of philosophy are agents of collective memory, “memory makers” (Kansteiner 2002), who create, institute and shape collective memories connected to the history of philosophy. Among the advantages that we think this approach offers, we focus on its potential to enrich our understanding of normative considerations relating to the canon and its reform.

These normative considerations include both moral and epistemic desiderata for what counts as “successful memory” (Campbell 2014) in teaching the history of philosophy. Moral considerations are relevant here mostly because philosophy as a discipline and set of institutions is entangled in historical injustices, including the oppression of women, European colonialism, transatlantic slavery, and National Socialism. Building on discussions about the ‘ethics of memory’ (Waldron 1992; Margalit 2002; Blustein 2008, 2014; Altanian 2024), we examine how these entanglements create moral demands that directly bear on issues of canon reform. On the epistemic side, we distinguish between “accuracy” (Blustein 2008; Campbell 2014), i.e. memory’s being faithful to the past, and “productivity” – the potential of memories and mnemonic artefacts to foster epistemic agency. While the demand for accuracy supports an inclusive canon, didactic choices that are epistemically productive invite classroom communities to ask new questions, revise habits and certainties, and engage with transformative narratives.

To illustrate this perspective, we use examples from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Aimé Césaire and Angela Davis.