

IF ARISTOTLE HAD COOKED: THE PHILOSOPHY OF SOR JUANA

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ABSTRACT: Drawing from a range of her prose, poetic, and theological work, this article focuses on four recurring themes in Sor Juana’s philosophy: a socially situated picture of knowledge production, the social construction of gender, a limited form of skepticism about revisionist theology, and the nature of obedience and self-control. Her treatment of these issues suggests a potentially systematic picture we might call *social fallibilism*, that is, the view that what we can know and do are dependent on somewhat fragile features of both agents and their social and material contexts. It is a prescient picture of human agency, where central features of it—including freedom and knowledge—are always relational in their realization, and chronically vulnerable to defeat.

Keywords: Sor Juana, knowledge, standpoint epistemology, gender, social construction, free will, freedom, self-control, theology

RESUMEN: A partir de una variedad de su obra en prosa, poética y teológica, este artículo se enfoca en cuatro temas recurrentes en la filosofía de Sor Juana: una noción socialmente situada acerca de la producción de conocimiento, la construcción social del género, una forma limitada de escepticismo sobre la teología revisionista, y la naturaleza de obediencia y dominio propio. Su tratamiento de estos temas sugiere una imagen potencialmente sistemática que podríamos llamar *falibilismo social*, es decir, una posición la cual lo que podemos saber y hacer depende de características un tanto frágiles de ambos agentes al igual que sus contextos sociales y materiales. Es una imagen que anticipa esfuerzos contemporáneos sobre la agencia humana, donde sus características centrales, los cuales incluyen la libertad y el conocimiento, son siempre relacionales en su realización y crónicamente vulnerable a la derrota.

Palabras clave: Sor Juana, conocimiento, epistemología del punto de vista, género, construcción social, libre albedrío, libertad, autocontrol, teología

Juana Ramírez de Asbaje (1648-1695), better known as Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, was a cloistered nun of the Order of Saint Jerome. She was also the most formidable intellect in the Americas during the 17th century. She is best known for her poetry, plays, and a handful of letters that set out the case for the education of women and her rights to intellectual freedom. Although the bulk of her writing was creative or religious, her interests spanned science, theology, philosophy, history, and music theory. This essay is an effort to come to grips with some distinctive theses in her work, and to untangle some contemporary interpretive issues about her philosophical commitments.¹

In what follows, I focus on four threads in Sor Juana's philosophical work: first, her account of the conditions of effective knowledge production; second, her views about gender and social construction; third, an interesting and surprising argument for limited skepticism about the possibility of revisionist theology; and fourth, her remarks on obedience and self-control. Together, these elements suggest distinctive and potentially systematic package of commitments that we might think of as *social fallibilism*, or the view that the kinds of things we know and can do are dependent on somewhat fragile features of agents and their relationship to social and material contexts. This is not a picture where knowledge, learning, self-control, and culpability are understood in terms of individualistic, atomistic, or intrinsic epistemic and moral powers; these central features of human life are always relational and chronically vulnerable to failure. Hers is also Christian picture, but one deeply indebted to Renaissance humanism, yet skeptical about the possibility of overturning traditional tenets of Catholic theology. It is a body of work that is striking in its prescience about contemporary themes in feminist philosophy, standpoint epistemology, and agency.

1. The Reply

A ready place to begin with Sor Juana's philosophical contributions is a letter she wrote to the bishop of Puebla, Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz. The letter

¹ As Paula Gómez Alonzo (1956) noted, while considerable attention has been paid to Sor Juana's contributions to poetry and literature, there has been substantial neglect of her philosophical views. Although this remains mostly true almost 70 years later, recent efforts to undo some of that neglect include Beuchot (1998: 125-137); Femenías (2005); Aspe (2018); Gallegos-Ordorica (2020); and the Project Vox Team (2021). In Mexico and Latin America more generally, there has been considerable neglect of the work of women philosophers. For a recent discussion of the astonishing erasure of women philosophers in Mexico, see del Rio (2018).

is her “Reply to Sor Filotea,” oftentimes known simply as *Respuesta*, and typically translated into English as “The Answer” or “The Reply.”

The context that led to Sor Juana writing *Respuesta* is a matter dispute among scholars. The disagreement is kept alive by both the limited information we have about the period, the oftentimes indirect manner of Baroque writing made more complicated by Sor Juana’s position as a nun, and the recent and (one hopes) ongoing discovery of more of Sor Juana’s writings (Cf. Paz 1988: 491-5, Soriano Vallès 2014: 49-52; Bénassy-Berling, 2017).

The uncontested facts are these: in 1690 Sor Juana offered some criticisms of an old sermon by a prominent Portuguese Jesuit, Antonio Vieira. Someone asked her to write up her thoughts on the issue, and this document was circulated among the lettered elite of Mexico City. Eventually, and without her permission, Sor Juana’s friend, Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz (the aforementioned bishop of Puebla), published Sor Juana’s critique of Vieira as the *Carta atenagórica*. That publication also included a pseudonymous letter by Fernández (under the name “Sor Filotea de Santa Cruz”) that praised Sor Juana’s work, while also recommending that she spend more time on theological matters and less time on her more secular writings. A few months later, in 1691, Sor Juana penned *Respuesta*. The argumentation in that letter overlaps with the arguments she made a decade earlier (1681) to another priest, Antonio Núñez de Miranda, when she dismissed him as her confessor (More 2016: 144).

One version of the story, amplified by Octavio Paz’s (1988) influential book *Sor Juana, or the Traps of Faith*, reads these events as the crucifixion of Sor Juana’s intellectual life, one that results in her abandonment of books and letters for more traditional cloistered life. On this telling, Sor Juana was caught between warring religious leaders in the Catholic Church, and was forced to renounce her worldly life, to sell all her books, and to cease to write. A few years later, she died during a pandemic while caring for her sisters in the convent.²

What is indisputable is that Sor Juana’s reply to Sor Filotea is a masterpiece of argumentation. Her extended defense of women’s right to education tends to be especially notable for contemporary audiences. Less obvious and less matters of scholarly discussion are a variety of epistemic theses that come up along the

² Subsequent discoveries and academic consensus suggest that things are not so neat as Paz’s narrative suggests. For example, Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz (the nominal villain in many versions of the story) wrote letters intended for Sor Juana that show no sign of anger at her reply. Other evidence makes it clear that they remained in contact for several years. This information was not widely available at the time Paz and others cemented the standard narrative about the last years of Sor Juana’s life and her “conversion” to a more traditional and non-intellectual form of religious life. For discussion, see Bénassy-Berling (2017: 128-130).

way (more about which, below). Throughout, she is keenly interested in the way social conditions can mitigate or enhance people's culpability, a theme to which she returns throughout her reply. It is a remarkable text from start to finish, an innovative account of knowledge, obedience, and the will that presents itself as an obedient apology all the while attacking the presumptions in the condemnation directed at her.

Part of what makes *Respuesta* such a fascinating document is that Sor Juana carefully avoids framing any of her claims as revolutionary. Where she is innovative, she intentionally characterizes her innovations as extensions of a tradition—frequently Catholic, but often pre-Christian and classical. Moreover, she cautiously avoids claiming that she knows anything, insisting, instead, only that she is an enthusiast of learning: “I do not wish to say . . . that I have been persecuted for knowing, only for loving knowledge and letters” (2016: 107).

Her reply opens by explicitly accepting Fernández's admonition that she direct more of her time to studying spiritual matters. However, she immediately turns to justifying her long history of attention to those profane matters he directed her to avoid. First, she notes that apart from a single poem—“First Dream”—her writing has always been at the request of others. Second, she insists that her impulse to write and to study is a powerful God-given inclination—an impulse oriented toward some proper end. Her efforts to suppress that inclination have been to no avail.

Her effort to signal that she is obeying Fernández's command, and not at fault for having acted otherwise, is presumably bound up in the significance of her status as a nun. In the New Spain of Sor Juana's day—especially after the Council of Trent—the idealized image of a nun involved “holy” or “blessed” ignorance. This picture of religious life was coupled to a view according to which nuns were to be absolutely faithful to commands by church authorities. Indeed, in a doctrinal guide authored by Sor Juana's sometimes confessor, the Jesuit Antonio Núñez de Miranda, nuns were directed to “renounce [their] own will and freedom” (cited in More 2016: 133 n. 2).

This historical context explains why Sor Juana goes to such lengths to illustrate her efforts to suppress these impulses, and to show that she acted on them in a quasi-pathological way. These are not inclinations that she sought. On the contrary, she had “asked Him [God] to dim the light of [her] understanding, leaving only enough for [her] to obey His Law.” Why would she ask for such a thing? Her reply: “anything else is too much in a woman, according to some; there are even those who say it does harm” (2016: 95). One harm was clear: by her lights, attaining fame for her writing did not even entail the customary rewards. Instead, her success as a woman turned her into a special target (2016: 105).

A large portion of *Respuesta* is autobiographical, but its function is to illustrate the scope and depths of her intellectual drive. Because she is at pains to paint her intellectual ambitions as a divinely inspired drive, it is important to her to illustrate that her intellect is in fact well-suited for these studies. Thus, the barriers she encountered in her studies play a dual role: (1) they show that she is apt for learning, as evidenced by the fact that she has learned so much despite these barriers, and (2) they show that this was not a matter of some one-off poorly considered choice, but instead, a fundamental feature of how she was constituted. The import of these recurring features will figure in several aspects of what follows.

2. The Social Epistemology of Education

One of the remarkable features of Sor Juana's reply to Fernández ("Sor Filotea") is the picture she paints of the social conditions on knowledge production and transmission, and how far the situation in New Spain was from that ideal. She uses her own experience as an illustration of the problems, but a good deal of her account can be read as identifying issues that continue to matter for educational inequality today.

First, as a woman who was denied access to formal education, her education was limited to what she could wrest from her books, on her own. As she put it, "I learned how difficult it is to study those soulless characters without the living voice and explanations of a teacher" (97). Unguided reading proved to be a poor substitute to formal instruction, she thought.

Second, the denial of formal education didn't just mean that she lacked informed guidance about what to read and about the meaning of texts. It also meant that she lacked peers with whom to confer about the various subject matters she sought to learn and with whom to practice and develop intellectual skills.

Third, it is easier to learn if one has a room of one's own. She had little interest in a marriage and the convent seemed to provide a better place to pursue her interests. Even so, the ordinary demands of convent life were hardly conducive to efficient learning (102). Freedom from interruption matters.

Fourth, material conditions of effective knowledge transmission require access to the relevant texts. Her own haphazard education reflected the accidents of which books were available, and not her interests or what might have been a more sensibly organized education (100).

Despite the disadvantages she faced with respect to the social and material conditions conducive to learning and producing knowledge, she did think that she had made an important discovery. In formal and speculative areas (as opposed to the technical arts), spreading out one's efforts and attentions across

subject matters has important advantages, “for one subject illuminates and opens a path in another by means of variations and hidden connections . . . so that it seems they correspond and are joined with admirable unity and harmony” (101). Consequently, a narrow education produces an impoverished understanding. Her own case, she says, is that knowledge of diverse disciplines has what we might now think of as a kind of network effect: the more subjects she learned, the more she could readily learn new subjects.

The more general implication, though, is that one achieves a better understanding of God’s creation by ranging widely over it. This thought has echoes of the Ignatian injunction to “find God in all things.” Sor Juana—well familiar with Jesuit thought in the 17th century—returns to this theme in several places. In perhaps the most paradigmatic passage in this spirit, she notes that even when she was prohibited from book learning for a time, she found that she still could study the world, and that her “book was the entire mechanism of the universe” (108). Everyday life provides plenty of opportunities for reflection about topics as diverse as the origin of the varieties of intelligence, the variations in tempers, the nature of optical perspective, whether there are patterns in the way tops move, and the recurring presence of geometric shapes in nature (108-9).

All of this is a prelude to one of the most interesting aspects of Sor Juana’s discussion: the effects of an epistemic world structured by gender. As Sor Juana sees it, there are things that men cannot and will not know, because gender roles partition the possibility of certain kinds of knowledge. The way institutions of knowledge production and knowledge dissemination are structured along gender lines means that we are doing a poor job of learning and teaching all that there is to know, and thus, we do violence to our own understanding of the world (and correspondingly, God’s construction of it).

Here’s how Sor Juana puts it:

And what could I tell you, señora, about the natural secrets I have discovered when cooking? Seeing that an egg set and fries in butter or oil but falls apart in syrup; seeing that for sugar to remain liquid it is enough to add a very small amount of water in which a quince or other bitter fruit has been placed . . . what can we women know but kitchen philosophies? As Lupercio Leonardo so wisely said, one can philosophize very well and prepare supper. And seeing these minor details, I say that if Aristotle had cooked, he would have written a great deal more. (110)

The force of this point is hard for the modern reader to miss. More than simply putting herself in a tradition with Aristotle, she is pressing the claim that in a world ordered by gender, the unity of knowledge becomes fractured by gender. In a world in which gender structures access to knowledge, everyone is made an inferior knower, unable to escape this partitioning of knowledge.

Do things have to be that way? No, she thinks, at least not to the extent to which it was in her time. More epistemically egalitarian arrangements were possible. She argues that women could be given a more prominent role in a variety of intellect-dependent domains. We would be better off, she thinks, if “older women were as learned as Leta” (115). She recognizes that in her social context, people might have protested that there is scant evidence that, apart from Sor Juana herself, women were readily capable of developing their intellects in this way. So, she offers a veritable catalog of classical and Christian women who achieved success in law and learning.

The persistent fact of a gendered world and the restriction of education to men caused ongoing damage to the transmission and achievement of knowledge. It also put terrible psychological burdens on women subjected to this regime. She notes that the most hurtful attacks on her learning and intellect were not from open enemies, but from those who earnestly thought that “she will surely be lost, and at such heights her own perspicacity and wit are bound to make her vain” (103). It was friends and those who genuinely wished her well who sowed the most doubt about the value of her studies, and the supposedly virtue-destroying effects of them. It is not quite gaslighting in the contemporary sense of the term—that is, the manipulation of a person by implying their sanity is in doubt—but the reactions she encountered are part of a family of agency-corroding social attitudes that invite their targets to self-doubt.

An important part of the picture is Sor Juana’s commitment to the idea of the rationality of women. In *Respuesta*, the case for women’s rationality and suitability for education is made largely by appeal to other instances, thereby implying a buried history of women’s contributions.

However, Sor Juana’s broader picture of the intellect is that its rational powers are not sexed, even if bodies and social worlds are. This idea appears in several places throughout her work. It is a widely recognized feature of the structure of “First Dream,” in which the narrator’s intellect is effectively unmarked by the gendered pronouns of Spanish. This changes at the end of the poem, when the narrator is waking up, with the pronoun becoming female as the mind and body re-integrate. It is also made explicit in her earlier letter to Núñez de Miranda:

But who has forbidden women from private and individual study? Do they not have rational souls just as men? Why should they not also enjoy the privilege of enlightenment through letters? Is her soul not as capable of divine grace and glory as his? If it is, why is hers not also capable of receiving learning and knowledge, which are lesser gifts? What divine revelation, what Church policy, what reasonable verdict could have made such a severe law only for women? (2016: 148)

She sounds this note towards the end of her letter to Fernández, arguing that there was no crime in her critique of Vieira's sermon because (a) the Church does not forbid her expressing her opinion, (b) Vieira was in conflict with established Church authorities, and most relevant to our purposes, (c) "Is not my understanding, such as it is, as free as his, for it comes from the same soil?" (119).

3. The Social Construction of Agency

Although *Respuesta* is perhaps Sor Juana's most explicit defense of women's right to learn and the social epistemology of intellectual life, we would be remiss to neglect some of her other remarks on the social construction of psychological dispositions, and the way social expectations create a double-bind for women.³ Although these views surface in some of her prose writings, they are most visible in her poetic work. Redondilla 92 is justly regarded as a highlight on this score. (Her poetry, it is worth noting, is frequently untitled, apart from the form and number it was given in her collected works.)⁴

³ For present purposes, we can hold that something is socially constructed if its status or nature is defined or produced by social practices, social meanings, or norms and expectations about the thing in question.

⁴ Those familiar with the history of Western philosophy will already know that philosophy can be found in diverse genres and forms of expression. Sor Juana's intellectual milieu and modes of expression are obviously different from our own, but effective all the same. The challenge for the contemporary reader is not that one can't do philosophy in letters and in poetry, but rather, that Sor Juana used all the forms of expression available to her as occasions for philosophy. For example, translator Michael McGaha has observed that Sor Juana's theater works—typically understood as primarily artistic and not philosophical—are exceptionally difficult to translate precisely because they are "a theater of ideas rather than action . . . [for example,] *Pawns of a House* contains numerous scenes that can best be described as staged debates in which the various characters flaunt their command of Aristotelian and Scholastic reasoning as they attempt to score points off one another" (2007, xi-xii).

We'll limit our attention to three ideas in this poem: (1) the thought that social expectations create real dispositions in people; (2) the idea of a pervasive double-bind in women's gender roles; and (3) in the case of gender our norms for how we assign culpability reflect social power, and not the underlying moral faults.

First, she identifies the role that the expectations of men play in the construction of women's dispositions and behavior [English translation from Grossman; pp. 20-22; Spanish from *Obras Completas I* (2009: 320-322)]:

O foolish men who accuse women with so little cause, not seeing you are the reason for the very thing you blame:	Hombres necios que acusáis a la mujer sin razón sin ver que sois la ocasión de lo mismo que culpáis:
for if with unequaled longing you solicit their disdain, why wish them to behave well when you urge them on to evil?	si con ansia sin igual solicitáis su desdén ¿por qué queréis que obren bien si las incitáis al mal?
...	...
The audacity of your mad belief resembles that of the child who devises a monster and then afterward fears it.	Parecer quiere el denuedo de vuestro parecer loco al niño que pone el coco y luego le tiene miedo.
....	...
Love them for what you can make them or make them what you can love.	Queredlas cual las hacéis o hacedlas cual las buscáis.

We don't know the exact date of the composition of the poem, apart from the fact that it was written in the second half of the 17th century, which is to say, more than a century before Wollstonecraft, Harriet and John Stuart Mill—among other canonical English-language figures—began to articulate a systematic defense of feminism.⁵ The implication of these passages is clear: women's putative nature is the product of male-produced social expectations, specifically, the dual expectations of sexual access and upright morals.

⁵ In the spirit of Sor Juana's emphasis on there being a long-standing but buried history of women intellectuals, it is worth noting that any more complete history of feminist thought in Europe would need to include Mary Astell (an English contemporary of Sor Juana's) and Christine de Pizan in the 14th century.

Central to Sor Juana's diagnosis is the idea that women are faced with a double-bind. No matter what they choose—chastity or sexual activity—they will be condemned by their suitors.

You think highly of no woman, no matter how modest: if she rejects you she is ungrateful, and if she accepts, unchaste.	Opinión, ninguna gana; pues la que más se recata, si no os admite, es ingrata, y si os admite, es liviana
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This fact gives the lie to the way operative social norms assign guilt. Women bear the entirety of moral condemnation for whatever they choose. In contrast, men are largely left untouched by condemnation.

Who carries the greater guilt in a passion gone astray: the woman, beseeched, who falls, or the man who begged her to yield?	¿Cuál mayor culpa ha tenido en una pasión errada: la que cae de rogada, o el que ruega de caído?
Or which one merits more blame although both deserve our censure: the woman who sins for pay, or the man who pays to sin?	¿O cuál es más de culpar, aunque cualquiera mal haga: la que peca por la paga, o el que paga por pecar?
But why are you so alarmed by the guilt you plainly deserve?	Pues ¿para qué os espantáis de la culpa que tenéis?

This situation is manifestly unjust. Men have created the double-bind and they enforce it. Although men are the ones paying for prostitution, women are the ones who pay the social costs. Given that men enjoy greater social power, the putatively condemnable choices of women are in an important sense morally rigged choices. Although all prostitution is condemnable, the bulk of the guilt should be placed on men who create the demand and social conditions under which prostitution flourishes.

Although Sor Juana is focused on the specific case of women in 17th century New Spain, the basic structure of her analysis generalizes: we should be alert to social circumstances in which subordinated populations face choices in which all options are stigmatized; and in such cases, we do well to direct our attention to the social expectations and conditions that produce forced choices between stigmatized options.

Sor Juana is not interested in denying all agency in women: she is prepared to find fault in the behavior of women. Even so, that fault is mitigated in socially subordinated populations when the guilt-producing conditions are knowingly produced by a dominant population, or where the culpable behavior is a product of persistent enticement.

The idea that social practices and social expectations produce self-fulfilling prophecies about people's capacities is an interesting and important one. Sor Juana's focus is on gender, but the idea taps into an old debate about the nature of human beings and how they are made—a debate that, in the Latin American context, is at least as old as the Las Casas/Sepúlveda debate. Sor Juana doesn't stop with the observation that expectations can produce capacities, though. Instead, she notes the possibility that we can do better, that we can improve ourselves by focusing less on the condemnation of individuals and more on the social practices that make people that way: "Love them for what you can make them/or make them what you can love" [Queredlas cual las hacéis/o hacedlas cual las buscáis (322)].⁶

Stepping back from the details, Sor Juana's anticipation of later feminist thought is expansive. It includes a defense of women's education, a strong commitment to the fundamental rationality of women and the social construction of women's manifested dispositions, an emphasis on the need for social conditions that enable learning, sensitivity to the epistemic costs of a gendered world, the idea of something akin to gaslighting, and the thought of a buried history of women's contributions.

⁶ There is more to say about these themes in Sor Juana's work, and more places where her poetry has manifestly philosophical content. In particular, "First Dream" offers an especially rich and suggestive account of the intellect, and the knowing power of the human mind, but the complexity of that work exceeds the scope of this essay. Several readers have found passages in "First Dream" especially suggestive of Cartesian skepticism, mechanistic philosophy, and aspects of Descartes' *Discourse on the Method*, and if that is right, this would complicate the standard narrative about when, how, and the extent to which the Catholic parts of the Americas came to wrestle with philosophical modernity. There is reason to think that Sor Juana's friend, Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, had some familiarity with Descartes' works (Cf. Paz 1988: 123). However, Descartes' texts weren't formally permitted in New Spain, and a nun subject to the Inquisition may not have kept such books even if she had access to them. Whether and to what extent Sor Juana was familiar with the work of Descartes is unclear, with commentators sharply diverging on this issue and its influence in her work. Aspe (2018: 54, 75, 88) and Leonard (182-183) are cautiously optimistic about Descartes' influence on "The Dream"; Paz (1988: 375) and Gaos (1960: 65) are dismissive; others (More 2015) are undecided.

4. The Limits of Theology

Feminist elements in Sor Juana's thought are comparatively familiar and important themes in her work. However, the contemporary literature has mostly ignore an intriguing set of theological theses to which we now turn. The first thesis concerns the demandingness of theology on human knowledge and its apparently impossible to satisfy conditions; the second concerns the nature of freedom within contexts where that freedom can and will be misused. We begin with the theologian's plight.

Sor Juana is skeptical about the quality of most then-contemporary theological work. An oft-cited passage in Sor Juana's reply to Sor Filotea turns a traditional argument against women's study (that they are insufficiently learned and virtuous) into an argument that interpretation of Scripture shouldn't be pursued by most men either. She remarks that the interpretation of Scripture by men is akin to putting "a sword in the hand of a madman" (113). Worse, the fact that men are educated makes them more confident and prone to error. Better that they remain ignorant, she thinks, because "a fool becomes perfect (if foolishness can reach perfection) by studying his bit of philosophy and theology and having some idea of languages, making him a fool in many sciences and many languages" (113).

This bit of pointed skepticism directed at the male theologians of her day is not an isolated remark. She objects that people don't approach philosophy and theology in a suitably circumspect fashion. Work on these topics is too often propelled by ego and ambition and done without sensitivity to one's epistemic shortcomings. She notes that "if all of us . . . would take the measure of our talent before studying and (what is worse) writing . . . how little ambition would we have left and how many errors would we have avoided and how many twisted intelligences would we not have in this world!" (114). However, carefully woven throughout the text is a suggestion of a much more interesting and subtle critique of theology. To see how that critique goes, we must return to the beginning of *Respuesta*.

Recall that the initial task of *Respuesta* is to explain why she hadn't spent more of her time working directly on theological matters. Here's what she says: "I proceeded, always directing the steps of my study to the summit of sacred theology, as I have said; and to reach it, I thought it necessary to ascend by the step of human sciences and arts, because how is one to understand the style of the queen of the sciences without knowing that of the handmaidens?" (98). She goes on to argue that logic, rhetoric, physics, arithmetic, geometry, architecture, history, and law, as well as foreign customs, the early Church fathers, music, astronomy, and the mechanical arts, are all necessary preliminaries to the study of theology.

Here's the upshot, though, of her explanation of her study of so many subject matters that are not theology:

[theology] is the book that encompasses all books, and the science that includes all sciences, which are useful for its understanding: even after learning all of them (which clearly is not easy, or even possible), another consideration demands more than all that has been said, and that is constant prayer and purity in one's life, in order to implore God for the purification of the spirit and enlightenment of the mind necessary for comprehending these lofty matters; if this is lacking, the rest is useless. (100)

Of special interest to us is her parenthetical remark. The remark suggests the *impossibility* of learning all the things required to pursue theology. This is striking. The tacit but seemingly inevitable conclusion—one that is generally unremarked upon—is that it may not even be possible for *anyone* to undertake theology, and that to the extent to which one has failed to master the subordinate sciences, one is likely to have an impaired understanding of theological matters.

Interestingly, this tacit conclusion dovetails with aspects of her poem “First Dream,” which was written no more than two years before (recall: it was the only work Sor Juana claims to have written purely for herself). “First Dream” recounts a disembodied dreamer’s efforts to secure knowledge via intuition and the method of discourse. Neither approach succeeds. When the intellect gazes at the entirety of creation, that creation “appeared clear and possible/to the eye but not the understanding, which/ (stunned by a glut of objects, its power far exceeded by their grandeur)/retroceded, a coward” (55). Later, she maintains that “if before/a single object knowledge flees, and reason,/a coward, turns away; . . . /it fears it will understand it/ badly, or never, or late,/ how could it reflect on so fearsome and vast/a mechanism, its weight/terrible, unbearable . . .” (62).

Although commentators disagree about how far these skeptical threads extend, the ending of the poem appears intentionally ambiguous. Daybreak illuminates the physical world “with a more certain light” than could be secured by the vaulting ambition of intuition and discourse’s efforts at foundational metaphysics and theology (66). Her picture seems to be that foundational knowledge of the sort aspired to by philosophers and theologians encounters a complexity that outstrips the human ability to know.

Skeptical threads aren’t limited to her reply to Sor Filotea or “First Dream.” Consider Ballad 2:

All people have opinions
and judgements so multitudinous,
that when one states this is black,
the other proves it is white.

. . . . A proof is found for everything,
a reason on which to base it;
and nothing has a good reason
since there is reason for so much.

. . . .
there is no one who can decide
which argument is true and right.

Since no one can adjudicate,
why do you think, mistakenly,
that God entrusted you alone
with the decision in this case?
(transl. Grossman 2016: 6-7)

Todo el mundo es opiniones
de pareceres tan varios,
que lo que el uno que es negro,
el otro prueba que es blanco

Para todo se halla prueba
y razón en que fundarlo;
y ni hay razón para nada
de haber razón para tanto

. . . .
no hay quien pueda decidir
cuál es lo más acertado

Pues, si no hay quien lo sentencie,
¿por qué pensáis vos, errado,
que os cometió Dios a vos
la decisión de los casos?
(2009, pp. 10-11)

Read together, these passages cast new light on another passage in *Respuesta*. At the outset of her reply to Fernández, immediately after explaining why she had focused on profane matters (because the stakes were laughter or mockery, as opposed to the attentions of the Inquisition), she goes on to note that her critics have maintained that she has “no aptitude for being correct” (94). In the sentence that follows, she suggests that on artistic matters there is no possibility of getting things right or wrong, but then, quoting canon law, she cryptically notes that *no one is obliged to undertake impossible things* (95).

One way of reading that passage is that she is simply saying that it is impossible to be right or wrong about artistic matters. That’s not obviously true, though, and it isn’t clear why avoiding heresies in art is an impossible command to fulfill. The passage is ambiguous, though. A different reading emphasizes that the stakes are her suitability for theological reflection, and that her erroneousness in art is even more so in theology. This remark is in keeping with her rhetorical inclination to turn gendered expectations back on themselves. She can hardly be condemned for not pursuing what is impossible for a woman to do. However, this reading suggests that she may be making a more oblique gesture to an argument that she repeatedly implies but never directly asserts, namely, that she cannot be obligated to do *theology* because there is something impossible about it. This is something notably stronger than a declaration of

epistemic humility. It suggests a kind of task, or perhaps a kind of achievement, that is in some deep way closed off to her.

We can't be confident that this is what she is intending to imply. The structure of baroque writing, norms of indirectness, her particular social position, and her explicit concerns about the Inquisition all weigh against her making a direct and radical an assertion of this kind. Yet, the components of this radical idea are a recurring theme in her work, and the shape of it does not seem to be the weaker idea that theology is merely difficult for her and her contemporaries to do. Repeatedly, she emphasizes the impossibility of mastering the knowledge required for people of her time to do theology at all.

So, is Sor Juana rejecting the possibility of doing any theology? Maybe, but there is ample reason to think that, on pain of contradiction, this cannot be what Sor Juana has in mind. After all, it is hard to say what the *Carta atenagórica* is, if not a work of theology. There, and in *Respuesta*, her defenses of classical theological views—and especially of early Church fathers, seem earnest. So, perhaps her claims about the impossibility of contemporary contributions to theology are best construed as claims that *we*, as opposed to those earlier figures, cannot contribute to a *revisionist* theology. That is, that contemporary philosophers and theologians cannot revise or significantly add to established theology, at least not without first succeeding in the apparently impossible task of learning all the subordinate forms of knowledge.

Why, then, were early Church fathers, and a handful of exceptional theologians in prior ages capable of doing original, foundational theology? Given that the impossibility of so doing seems to depend on the impossibility of mastering its prerequisite knowledge, those prior figures either had to be able to do the impossible or they had some basis for bypassing the knowledge requirement that burdens theology in Sor Juana's time. Perhaps it was a matter of proximity to the age of Christ, their exceptional virtue, or some revelatory gift. Perhaps it was sheer luck in imperfectly warranted human reasoning that only the Church and its tradition could eventually come to recognize as true. Sor Juana never says.

Sor Juana's skepticism about theology was not skepticism about knowledge in general. Sor Juana seems confident about the knowing powers of the human mind, and the value of studying the natural world. But the book of nature is too big for any one person to read in a lifetime. Thus, theological innovation must remain elusive. The most we can hope to do is to recover forgotten aspects of the tradition (as she does in her genealogy of women's role in the Church), or, more cautiously, to realize the full force of already existing insights, as we are about to see in her *Carta atenagórica*.

5. Love and Freedom

An important reason for thinking that Sor Juana doesn't reject the possibility of all theology is her own efforts at it in a lengthy letter known as the *Carta atenagórica* (originally published in 1690).⁷ The prominence of the *Carta* in the secondary literature on Sor Juana tends to derive from its role in her life story. It was the *Carta atenagórica* that led to the Bishop of Puebla, Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz's publicly urging Sor Juana to focus less on worldly things, and more on theology, which in turn provoked her penning *Respuesta*. Despite the relatively narrow focus of the issues in the *Carta*, and its central relevance to interpretive questions about Sor Juana's views on theology, the letter contains a good deal of interest even to philosophers who are indifferent or worse to theological matters. Among the rewards are an interesting discussion of freedom, an intriguing account of the moral psychology of being oriented to the good, and her identification of a distinctive notion of "negative" benefits.

The letter concerns competing views about the greatest demonstration of God's love for humans, and the central concern of the letter is a critique of a sermon given by the then-prominent Jesuit priest António Vieira. Throughout, Sor Juana comes across as measured and incensed in equal measure. According to Sor Juana, Vieira's nigh unforgivable error was in holding that the greatest demonstration of Christ's love [a *fineza*, in the language of the time] was not his death, as St. Augustine held, but his physical presence that followed his death. (The basis of Vieira's claim was that Christ's resurrection happened only once, but his presence in the Eucharist—and thus, the ending of his absence—is continuously performed in the Catholic mass.) She implies that God is using her, a woman, as a special instrument to punish Vieira, because he had the temerity to think he could do better than Augustine, Aquinas, and Chrysostom on the question of what most demonstrated God's love (2005: 244).

Sor Juana opens with a distinction in two metrics for how to measure the greatness of a demonstration of love: "The first (*a quo*) concerns the one who demonstrates love; the second (*ad quem*) the one who receives the demonstration of love. The first measures the greatness of a demonstration of love based on the cost to the lover, the second based on the benefit that accrues to the beloved" (223). On her account, Christ's death is of maximal significance as a demonstration of his love on both fronts: it is the costliest to him and of the greatest benefit for us. It is not enough for Sor Juana to go after Vieira's central

⁷ There is disagreement about whether the *Carta atenagórica* or "Athenagoric Letter" has this title as a reference to Athena (the Greek goddess associated with wisdom and just warfare) or instead, Athenagoras, an early Christian and anti-Pagan apologist. For discussion, see Wray (2017: 137 n. 1)

claim, she also takes issues with various secondary claims, including Vieira's assertion that Christ sought to love without desiring corresponding love from us in return. She thinks this claim is textually indefensible (233-237), and she insists that although Christ didn't need our love, he did demand it (239). The central issue then becomes the question of why Christ would demand that we reciprocate his love even if he doesn't need to be loved by us.

Sor Juana's position on this point is subtle, and it has been misunderstood by some commentators. For example, Octavio Paz suggests that the problem of why Christ wants his love reciprocated is rooted in "an impenetrable mystery," namely, the dual nature of Christ, as both man and God (1988: 393). Paz thinks that it is the human part that needs love to be reciprocated, and he goes on to assert that Sor Juana's reasoning is "more subtle than solid" (393). He concludes that, in the end, "Sor Juana does not answer the terrible question: why does Christ desire to be loved by man?" (394). In his judgment, Sor Juana comes to a contradiction no better than the one she objects to in Vieira.

Paz's reading of the *Carta* mischaracterizes several important features of the *Carta*. For example, Sor Juana explicitly rejects Paz's framing of the issue, namely that the difficulty is in reconciling the dual nature of Christ. Instead, she maintains that "Christ's love is very different from ours" (2005: 239), and she regards it as a central task of the *Carta* to explain how. Paz asserts that Sor Juana avoids answering the question of why Christ wanted his love for humans to be reciprocated. However, she's explicit about her answer: "Christ wants both the love he has for us and the benefit of our love for him all for our sakes" (240). It is a selfless love because Christ receives nothing from it. In contrast, humans receive benefits from loving Christ. Her argument for this claim is an intriguing bit of moral psychology.

First, Sor Juana thinks there is an important good for human-to-human relations that flows from loving God. If humans love God, then they will be called to respect his precepts, including the requirement that people love each other *as God loves them*—that is, with infinite love (240). So, the Christian injunction to love one's neighbor as oneself gets additional motivational force that is parasitic on the Christian's prior of love of Christ.⁸ At the same time, her picture seems to be that this fact—about how the love of a fellow human is a product of an antecedent love of God—helps amplify or reinforce the Christian's love for God. The result is a kind of reverberating, multi-lateral, mutually reinforcing commitment to others and to God.

Second, and perhaps more centrally, Sor Juana thinks that "loving [God] is our supreme good" (240). This is what makes it possible for God's wanting us to

⁸ This has also been emphasized in unpublished work by Sofia Ortiz-Hinojosa.

love him be selfless. Although Sor Juana doesn't put it exactly this way, the idea is roughly analogous to a parent wanting her child to love her, not out of the parent wanting to be loved, but out of a concern for how destructive it would be for the child to not be in a healthy, loving relationship with a parent. Finally, and importantly, the injunction to love God provides a master norm about how orient one's psychology. On her picture, obeying that norm enables one's achievement of the good, even though humans are free to disobey the norm.⁹

One might protest that if God loves us, but doesn't need us to love him, then why does he bother with the command to love him? Why couldn't he just make us so that we necessarily love him, and each other, if that love is so important? Here, free will makes its foreordained entrance. It is a distinctive power of humans, but more importantly in this context, it is a mark of God's love for humans. On this point, Paz rightly characterizes Sor Juana's commitments: "The love of God does not deny but intensifies human liberty: because of his love of man, God has made man free" (394). As she understands it, free will is "the power with which we can choose to do good or evil" (240).¹⁰ The only way God can respect the freedom he has given us, Sor Juana thinks, is to allow us to choose evil. However, it would be cruel to do this without providing us with

⁹ Notice that one can go in for a secularized version of this view, according to which the highest human good is found in the moral law, such that our acting out of love for the moral law has benefits for us quite apart from whether the moral law is indifferent about us. One might insist that such a view has all the same benefits without the theology: love for the moral law produces in us a deeper commitment to our fellow human beings, so love for morality can provide a unifying and enabling feature for the possibility of moral equality. Perhaps Kantian ethics can be understood as animating by something like this thought. Notice, though, that secularizing the view plausibly comes at a cost to motivational efficacy. Love for a concrete person is typically more inspiring and motivating than love for an imperative or other bit of abstracta.

¹⁰ The Kirk Rappaport translation has *free will* characterized as "the power to desire or not to desire to do good or evil," omitting the Spanish construction's implication that free will is a further thing ("with which" or "con que") that has this power, as opposed to free will just being that power. ["Dios dio al hombre libre albedrío con que puede querer y no querer obrar bien o mal" (1957: 431)]. Another reason to not render this in terms of a power to desire is that the use of 'querer' in Sor Juana's context had a different connotation than the English-language 'desire'. There, 'querer' implies mediation by reason or the intellect, in a sense that suggests that it is closer to 'judge' or even 'intend'. I've rendered it as "choose" to signal the idea that what is happening here is understood as rationally mediated, and not there mere product of appetite or desire as understood in the sentimentalist tradition. Thanks to Clinton Tolley for convincing me of the foregoing.

guidance about how to secure that good. That is why he gives us the injunction to love him.

So, Sor Juana's argument doesn't leave us with a "contradiction" (394) or an "impenetrable mystery" (393), as Paz wrongly asserts. Instead, she offers a careful story about how an injunction to love God is entirely explicable in terms of human goods and how they are structured given the fact of human freedom.

There is one more element of this letter for us to consider: Sor Juana's original positive view at the end of the *Carta*. She argues that the greatest gift or demonstration of God's love for us is what she calls *negative benefits*, or "the benefits that he omits bestowing" (2005: 244). She is careful to frame this not as a competitor to the view of Augustine (or what she regards as the correlative views of Aquinas and Chrysostom). Those are views about God in the person of Jesus, whereas her proposal is about God as God, "continual and everlasting" (244). This distinction is important for understanding why Sor Juana doesn't think she conflicts with Augustine, Aquinas, and Chrysostom. Recall: she roundly condemned Vieira for thinking he could do better than them. They were offering an account of the person of *Christ's* demonstration of love; exploiting Catholic distinctions between trinitarian persons and the nature of God as singular substance, Sor Juana's account is of God the creator's *fineza*.

Sor Juana's view is that when God withholds greater benefits from us, it is because (1) we will use them to our own detriment (245); (2) we would be ungrateful (245); and (3) perhaps more generally, we would have trouble reciprocating (244). As she sees it, "God represses the torrents of his immense generosity, restrains the sea of his infinite love, and holds back the flow of his absolute power. . . . [I]t takes more effort for God not to grant us benefits than to grant us benefits. As a result, it is a greater demonstration of God's love to suspend them than to grant them, since God refrains the generosity of his nature, so that we not be ungrateful" (2005: 245). She goes on to argue that there is textual support for thinking God is concerned to limit our opportunities to commit greater sins, and that it is beneficial to not grant us benefits when they will be used badly (247). In short, God does us the favor of not spoiling us.¹¹

This way of reading the *Carta* conflicts with the picture advanced by Virginia Aspe (2018) in her recent book on Sor Juana's account of freedom.

¹¹ What is this gift's cost to God? Recall that the greatness of a demonstration of love is based, in part, on the cost to the lover and not just what accrues to the beloved (223). Sor Juana's is unclear on this point, although her framing of this in terms of the effortfulness of not giving benefits, and God "restraining the sea of his infinite love" suggests that she thinks there is a kind of cost there. So, roughly, it is costly to the parent to not spoil the child. Thanks to Joseph Martinez for raising this question.

According to her reading of Sor Juana, “the greatest [demonstration] of love that God has bestowed on man is freedom” (2018: 78; Cf. 106). Aspe is surely right that freedom is central to a good deal of Sor Juana’s thought. Moreover, her discussion of Molinist influences in “The Dream” is instructive, suggesting a libertarian picture of free will that rejects important forms of divine foreknowledge. However, the argument of the *Carta* maintains that God is choosing conditions that *enable us* to use our freedom well. That’s the point about negative benefits: it is a gift of providing us with conditions where we are less prone to use our freedom poorly. It is not the claim that God is ensuring that we have free will (as opposed to not having free will).

Aspe seems to understand the idea of negative benefits as the idea of freedom-ensuring non-interference (2018: 84, 93-4). For Sor Juana, though, the issue isn’t the preservation of our freedom. She takes freedom as a given and characterizes it in a way that makes it hard to see why benefits (of a positive or negative way) would affect that freedom. As we’ve seen, for Sor Juana, free will is the power with which we can choose to do good or evil (see n.10 for translation details; Sor Juana *Obras* IV, 794; Cf. 2005: 240). That power would not go away if God intervened to bestow any number of greater gifts on human beings. So, the gift of negative benefits can’t simply be the gift of free will.

What then are the negative benefits? They are strategic withholding of some goods, for example, greater good health and the graces God gives others, as in her examples. What makes the negative benefits significant is precisely that, *given our freedom*, the greater benefits that we desire would both be ill-used and unappreciated. Either would be sufficient to make us worse off, morally speaking. (Notice that if Aspe is right about Sor Juana’s Molinism, God would know this because he would know all future contingents.) So, Sor Juana’s picture is better understood as holding that our disposition to badly use our freedom requires explicit guidance (e.g., in the injunction to love God, as in Christ’s demonstration) and it requires some withholding of benefits to our choice-making dispositions (e.g., in not giving us all the benefits we could want).

Sor Juana’s account of negative benefits is, so far as I know, an original one within the intellectual tradition in which she worked. For those interested in questions about philosophical theology, it offers some tantalizing possibilities for making use of this argument in other contexts. Examples may include the possibility of novel ways to address the problem of evil and novel ways of addressing the problem of divine hiddenness (roughly, the puzzle about why an all-loving and all-powerful God would leave room for human doubt). In either case, one might imagine a defense that leans on the idea that an infinite loving being interested in the welfare of humans might provide negative benefits—

benefits of non-intervention—precisely because of awareness about how we use our freedom.

6. Self-control

We have seen how Sor Juana had a complex picture of the social dimensions of agency and the nature of freedom. How do these things interact with possibility of self-control and a nun's commitment to obedience? In a recent essay, Sergio Gallegos-Ordorica (2020) argues that Sor Juana's discussion in *Respuesta* relies on a distinction between a general ability of having control, and the successful exercise of that ability such that one is a self-controlled person. He goes on to argue that Sor Juana has the general ability of being self-controlled, but is not in fact a self-controlled person because, in relevant circumstances, she fails to manage her motives contrary to her better judgment (2020: 6-7).

This is a suggestive picture of Sor Juana's discussion in *Respuesta* but it raises new puzzles. One can possess a general capacity, without it being exercised, manifested, or successful in its performance in each instance. A person might be able to speak Nahuatl, but not do so now, out of reluctance, or on account of being asleep, or because her mouth has been anesthetized for oral surgery. None of these conditions speak against the more general ability to speak Nahuatl. However, the evidence for having a capacity is usually found in occasions of successful exercise. If we read Sor Juana as *never* exercising that capacity—she is not a self-controlled person, on Gallegos-Ordorica's reading—it is puzzling what the basis is for ascribing to her the general capacity of self-control.

A second and more serious concern has to do with the scope of one's putatively general ability for self-control. How long or often must one be successful at self-control to be self-controlled? What is the range of conditions in which one must exhibit such self-control? Can one be self-controlled with respect to some drives or impulses and not others? Does context matter for self-control? Does it come in degrees? The example Gallegos-Ordorica gives as evidence of Sor Juana's lacking self-control is that, even when sick and forbidden to study, she would engage in stressful thinking that exhausted her more than reading would (2000: 6). Putting aside the fact that this is an example of when she is ill, the text is unclear about whether we should understand her case as one of, for example, excessive thoughts, or instead, paradigmatically controlled and sustained theoretical efforts. Her books might well have served her as a distraction from her illness and the effects of her thinking. Yet, reading the kind of work we know her to have read, this activity is not obviously an example of an uncontrolled behavior, either.

This much is plausible: Sor Juana has a complex picture of self-control, and we can concur with Gallegos-Ordorica's emphasis on the distinction between

the possession of a general ability and its successful exercise. Given her remarks on gender and the social construction of abilities, though, I submit that we do better to see Sor Juana as having a view according to which self-control is (a) *ecological* and in which (b) it is fine-grained or contextual, rather than it being a cross-situationally stable general ability (that is, one that functions identically for a wide range of motives and contexts). The ecological idea is this: whether and when someone is in control is a composite function of both the person and the environment. There is no cross-situational or global self-control. Control exists in some kinds of contexts and not others. The granularity point is that self-control is about control with respect to a given psychological drive or an impulse. Putting the two ideas together, self-control is always relative to a drive or set of drives, in a circumstance.

This sort of picture allows us to make better sense of Sor Juana's focus on the circumstances of learning and knowledge production, as well as her interest in the social construction of agency. Context matters for the kinds of agents we are, and for the possibility of self-control. Some circumstances undermine the possibility of self-control (with respect to particular desires), whereas others enable it. This picture also makes sense of Sor Juana's recurring emphasis on her omnipresent thirst for learning and need for reflection. As we will see, unless conditions are right, she cannot realize her nature, and this matters for what she is obligated to do.

Recall that one of several ideas in *Respuesta*—is the idea that her impulse to learning was God-given and fundamental to her nature: “God gave me this inclination, it did not seem to be against his holy law or the obligations of my state—I have this mind, even if it may be evil, it made me what I am; I was born with it and with it I must die” (149). (This idea is also prefigured in her early letter to the Jesuit Antonio Núñez Miranda.) *Inclination* is here a technical notion, roughly an “incipient action or movement that will have a certain outcome unless something intervenes” (Hoffman 2012: 161). In Aquinas, it is characterized as involving a love for that thing.

That her inclination or drive for learning is omnipresent, cross-situationally stable, and persistent throughout the entirety of her life suggests it is a part of her God-given character, and not a perversity of her will that involves the rejection of her God-given nature. The “necessity” of which she acts is not some localized error and it is not weakness of will. It is part of her essential and persistent nature, an organizing aspect of her psyche, for which the autobiographical elements of *Respuesta*—included her various efforts to protect and cultivate this drive even when costly—are offered as evidence (2016: 110).

What is more, Sor Juana has been careful to put this drive in the service of others, using her intellectual and creative powers almost always at the behest of

others (More 2015: 129-131). She thus makes good on both her obligations to her God-given nature and her role as a nun. So, rather than suggesting a picture where she is not self-controlled, Sor Juana implies that (a) nurturing of her intellectual and creative powers required considerable control across a range of contexts hostile to that control, and (b) her judicious employment of her talents has itself been a matter of controlled submission to the duties of a nun. Rather than being culpable for a lack of control, the implication is that she has been remarkably self-controlled: her will has been dedicated to the correct ends as both a knower and a nun despite persistent incentives to choose badly.

* * * *

At the outset, I claimed that reflections on four threads in Sor Juana's work—her account of knowledge production, social construction, skepticism about revisionary theology, and her account of self-control—jointly suggest a distinctive and potentially systematic package of commitments that we can think of as *social fallibilism* about agency and epistemology. Social fallibilism is the view that the kinds of things we can know and do are dependent on somewhat fragile features of both agents and their social and material contexts.

To be sure, it is open question of whether Sor Juana thought of herself as offering anything like a systematic account of the major fields in philosophy. So far as we know, she never claimed to produce such thing, and in what survives of her texts there is no systematic treatise that endeavors to pull together all of these philosophical threads. Still, it is striking that she is not simply a metaphysician, or an epistemologist, or an ethicist, or a philosophical theologian. Instead, she offers a richly integrated account of all these things. Her ecological picture of agency informs the social epistemology, and it also threads through her analysis of gender, theology, and education. As we have seen, in her world, men impair women's freedom, and this impairment comes at a cost to the collective attainment of knowledge. In turn, our impoverished understanding of the world has implications for the possibility for revising traditional theology. However, what theology we can gives us an account of negative benefits, which makes clear the fragility of our agency, which in turn gives us grounds for critiquing the shortcomings of the social world we have built for ourselves. Everything is connected.

If these thoughts are right, then Sor Juana's work can be reconstructed in a relatively systematic way. Her distinctive commitments plausibly hang

together, and that there is reason to think of it as both distinctive in its own context and illuminating more generally.¹²

¹² My thanks to Sergio Gallegos-Ordorica, Sofia Ortiz-Hinojosa, Dan Speak, and Clinton Tolley for sometimes copious feedback at various stages. Thanks too to audience members at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, where a version of this paper was presented as part of 2019 Gaos Lectures, and to audiences at UC San Diego, especially the outstanding Filo-Mex Reading Group. I am particularly grateful to the editors of this journal for the opportunity to publish this work here.

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