

(in parenthesis)



This worksheet focuses on **Mary Midgley's** article ***Ring and Books***. In it she discusses the relationship between certain approaches to philosophy which have dominated its history, the men who have largely been responsible for that philosophy, and the social factors which may have influenced those men—and thereby, the philosophy.

The result, she argues, has been a somewhat distorted sense of philosophy. How then could changes in social factors, and more particularly, the presence of women in and around philosophy, change philosophy for the better?

"I wrote it because I had suddenly been struck by the fact that nearly all the famous philosophers whose lives we know about were lifelong bachelors. Aristotle and Mill are exceptions and there are a few others, but among these exceptions three – Berkeley, Hegel and G.E. Moore – married late, after they had finished their serious philosophical work. None of these philosophers, therefore, had any experience of living with women or children, which is, after all, quite an important aspect of human life. I wrote [this] article drawing attention to this statistic and asking whether it might not account for a certain over-abstractness, a certain remoteness from life, in the European philosophical tradition..."

(Mary Midgley, *Owl of Minerva*)

"Philosophers did not want the human soul to be mixed up in the world of objects, as it must be to make knowledge possible. They were too sensitive about its dignity. This bias seems to me perfectly certain. And after stating it, I would like to make several scandalous suggestions about how it might have been corrected. People leading a normal domestic life would not, I believe, have fallen into this sort of mistake. They would have taken alarm at the attitude to other people which follows from Descartes' position."

(Mary Midgley, *Rings and Books*)

Questions For Discussion:

What do you think Midgley means by the "...the adolescent philosopher in all of us"?

What connection is Midgley trying to develop between "adolescence", abstraction, and solipsism?

Midgley presents two images of experience: one, in which the knower and the known are like two towers; the second, experience is a countryside which contains and builds both. What do you think Midgley is trying to convey with these images? Do you think images are a good way to convey ideas?

Do you think a "normal" "domestic" life is one way, or even the only way, to correct the problems Midgley highlights?

How do different kinds of experience determine what counts as "philosophy"?

Bibliography

Midgley, M. (2005) *Owl of Minerva*. Routledge: Oxford.

Rings and Books link: [here](#)



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