

## Dr. Naomi Reshotko

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### **1 TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF, SUCH AS WHERE YOU WENT TO SCHOOL, HOW YOU BECAME INTERESTED IN YOUR MAJOR RESEARCH AREAS, AND HOW YOU FOUND YOUR WAY TO DU.**

My path to philosophy was circuitous. I began college as a dance major. It didn't take me long to decide that, as an artist, I would need good dance training, but also a broad education in the liberal arts. I kept on taking technique classes but dropped the dance major. Then I had a wonderful academic experience that is rare these days, but I wish were more common. I had no idea what to major in. I signed up for classes that seemed interesting. When I was in my anthropology class, I wanted to be an anthropology major. Then I'd go to my Hebrew language class and want to immerse myself in literature. While in my philosophy class, I wanted to talk and think about philosophy forever! Eventually the

life of a performing artist no longer called to me, but dancing is still my favorite activity.

### **2 WHY DID YOU BECOME A RESEARCHER? WHAT DREW YOU TO THIS FIELD? WHAT MAKES YOU GET UP IN THE MORNING?**

When I chose to major in philosophy it was because I felt a natural affinity for philosophical thinking. To quote one of my undergraduate students at DU, I realized that, 'I've been doing this my whole life, I just didn't know it had a name, and I didn't know you could major in it.' One of my first classes after Introduction to Philosophy was on Plato and Aristotle. That professor and his particular approach to metaphysics really resonated with me and permanently shaped my own foundational philosophical views. When it was time to graduate, I couldn't imagine not getting to continue to study philosophy, so I became a graduate student in philosophy and (after a lot of hard work) ended up with a Ph.D. It was never really a plan that I had. I just did what interested me and kept putting one foot in front of the other and got through the program.

### **3 WHAT ARE YOUR TEACHING INTERESTS? WHAT IS YOUR TEACHING PHILOSOPHY?**

One thing I love about teaching in our department is that I get to teach a wide variety of courses. I have a regular rotation of classes on Classical Greek philosophy, but I've taught classes as diverse as philosophy of biology and feminist ethics. No matter what I'm teaching, I think of the writings of the various philosophers that I use in my classes as (very fascinating) vehicles for opening my students up to a certain kind of inquiry and exploration that I think of as 'philosophical.' It involves isolating the commitments, arguments, hypotheses, and models in the stream of an author's written ideas. Sometimes these ideas are stated overtly and clearly, but many historical figures, like Plato, are trying to prod their readers to wake up and reassess their own assumptions as much as they are trying to convince them of any specific conclusions. So arriving at anything we want

to call ‘their conclusions’ is a complicated philosophical exercise that is wrought with controversy. That’s what makes the practice of reading philosophy so rich and engaging, but it also means you can’t just read a text from a disinterested point of view to ‘see’ what a philosopher thought and then figure out what you think about it—your own philosophical development interacts with your efforts at interpreting any text.

#### **4 HOW DO YOUR INTERESTS IN WHAT YOU TEACH IN THE CLASSROOM CORRELATE TO THE RESEARCH YOU DO?**

All of my publications to date have been on Plato’s psychology, metaphysics, or epistemology. Still, every class I teach—no matter how unconnected it might appear to be to these topics—contains a driving idea or framework that I have touched upon in my research. One example is the class I teach called, *Philosophical Perspectives on Perception and Reality*: We only read around 10 pages of Plato right at the beginning. However, I designed the course through my realization that the first third of Plato’s dialogue, the *Theaetetus*, contains a cycle of ‘experiments’ concerning theories of knowledge. These thought experiments compare what happens when we assume that what we come to know is part of the perceptible world versus what happens when we assume that it is unperceivable and not spatiotemporal. I think that this is the same cycle that Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume go through as they respond to each other in the Early Modern Period. So, I teach these Early Modern works to help my students understand a problem that everyone who tries to theorize about knowledge will confront. But it allows me to teach philosophers other than Plato as I communicate this idea to them, and they learn a lot of Early Modern philosophy in that class.

#### **5 DESCRIBE YOUR CURRENT RESEARCH IN LAYMAN’S TERMS. IN OTHER WORDS, DESCRIBE THE VERY BASICS OF THE FIELDS YOU STUDY AND TEACH AND THEIR COMMON APPLICATIONS.**

I am about to publish a book in which I caution those who want to understand Plato’s view of knowledge that they must first understand how Plato thinks about all of the kinds of ‘beliefs’ we have that fall short of knowledge. I put ‘beliefs’ in quotes because I am really analyzing what Plato refers to using the Greek word ‘*doxa*’ and part of my argument is that it is not really the same thing that we refer to as ‘belief’ in English. Now I am starting a new project that I hope will help people outside of philosophy who want to talk about things like race and gender as ‘socially constructed.’ I think my background in metaphysics will allow me to

give other researchers ways to analyze when a social construction is useful, when it is dangerous, and when it is dangerous as currently constructed but might be usefully constructed in a different way.

#### **6 CAN YOU SHARE A TURNING POINT OR DEFINING MOMENT IN YOUR WORK AS A RESEARCHER?**

I am at a turning point right now. I am disturbed by the way our country is dealing with race and gender. I think people are right to say that race and sex are socially constructed. However, after making this claim, I see that many people don’t really know how to follow up on that realization. I want to give those who engage in research that informs public policy and education tools to continue the conversation that they start when they point out that something like race is a social construction. Not all social constructions are harmful. We seem to think that social constructions like laws and high school diplomas can enhance our lives. When a social construction is harmful, it is possible that we need to restructure it rather than abandon it. My thinking and research on this subject will be very different from what I have done in the past, but it is informed by my work on Plato’s Metaphysics and Epistemology.

#### **7 TELL ME WHAT YOU LIKE TO DO WHEN YOU AREN’T WORKING ON RESEARCH.**

As I mentioned earlier, I love to dance. Since the pandemic started, I mostly have to dance in my house. I also have been a yoga practitioner for two decades. I used to teach yoga regularly and even trained others to teach yoga, which was great experience for reflecting on teaching in general. I brought as many insights from teaching yoga into my DU classroom as I brought from the philosophy classroom into the yoga studio. I love to hike. I also try very hard to get around with walking, my bicycle, and public transportation. I derive satisfaction from figuring out how to avoid using my car. I love reading fiction, going to live theater, and listening to live and recorded music.

#### **8 WAS THERE EVER AN OUTCOME IN YOUR RESEARCH THAT WAS UNEXPECTED, OR DID YOU EVER ENCOUNTER A SURPRISING SETBACK? HOW DID YOU REACT AND ADAPT?**

The book that I am about to publish has only around one third of the content of my original manuscript. I feel very good about what it is in it, but I feel a loss at not publishing all of the parts that I had to leave out. I have come to accept that some of it would take a whole second lifetime to get into shape for publication. Also,

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while the central ideas that won't be published are part of my philosophical identity, some of the background research that I would have to include to make them acceptable to journals and presses in my field is not something to which I want to devote time. I'd rather turn my energies toward new ideas at this point even though I think these other ideas that won't get published are very important.

### **9 IF YOU COULD GO BACK IN TIME AND GIVE ADVICE TO YOURSELF BEFORE YOU BEGAN YOUR CAREER, WHAT WOULD IT BE?**

Really my only regret is that I didn't study Latin in High School. It would have set me up better for learning the languages that I needed for Classical Greek philosophy.

### **10 WHAT IS THE MOST FRUSTRATING, AND MOST REWARDING ACTIVITY, RESPECTIVELY, IN YOUR DAY-TO-DAY WORK?**

I find both teaching and research very rewarding. I also love to write and to edit my own writing. Unfortunately, I don't love reading philosophy (or any non-fiction) as much as I wish I did given how much of it I need to read. While my mind devours fiction easily, non-fiction requires a kind of focus and concentration that demands hyper-attention and consumes more energy than anything else I have to do for work.