

E-MAIL CONTRIBUTIONS**An historical anecdote about unanticipated consequences**

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Mary Midgley, the philosopher, recently had her 80th birthday. Getting into philosophy is about as hard as getting into physics. Her generation of English women philosophers did not get into feminist philosophy per se, but her example and her personal support to other women have always been exemplary.

Midgley read Greats at Oxford in 1938. At her birthday party she explained that there were almost no men - as they were organising themselves to go to war. But there were some rather interesting women such as: Iris Murdoch, G.E. Anscombe, Philippa Foot and Midgley. Midgley said that the advantage of the situation was that they were able to have serious conversations without the "usual", and she smiled. I think we all filled in the polite gap with "showing off".

The historical record is very clear that nation state war is an effective way to remove barriers to women entering and contributing strongly to science, but I have never before heard of four such powerful women together entering such a hostile subject. All of whom are significant figures in their field.

Clearly these are the conditions in which womens' talents can flower. However as Midgley reflected, nation state war is a rather extreme way of getting women in..

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