

## Introduction

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*Whether we like it or not, we are within philosophy, surrounded by masculine-feminine divisions that philosophy has helped to articulate and refine. The problem is whether we want to remain there and be dominated by them, or whether we can take up a critical position in relation to them, a position which will necessarily involve the deciphering of the basic philosophical assumptions latent in discussions about women.*

*Michèle Le Doeuff<sup>1</sup>*

### I

I begin the introduction to this anthology with the same quotation from Michele Le Doeuff's "Women and Philosophy" with which I began the introduction to this book's sister volume about Plato and Aristotle. I do this since I believe that Le Doeuff captures well the situation of the feminist reader of the history of canonical Western philosophy. The feminist reader realizes that canonical Western philosophy has contributed to the production of the hegemonic system of interrelated gender differences. At the same time, it is far from obvious to her or him whether her or his thinking can become free from the influences of this system. Nonetheless, she or he takes a critical position toward this system in the hope that her or his work will contribute to a process of liberation.<sup>2</sup>

As I noted in the introduction to the Plato-Aristotle volume, the contribution of the feminist critique is not unproblematic because of the many ways in which it may reinscribe just what it attempts to criticize and deconstruct, hence, in the final analysis, contribute to the philosophical production of gender differences. This might be clearer when thinking somewhat differently about what it is that anthologies like this do.

Some time ago I saw a new anthology of readings of the Western philosophical canon, and looking at the contents, realized that

all the essays were both about and authored by men. What that made perfectly clear to me is the extent to which the study of the history of canonical Western philosophy has been and to a great extent still is a form of male-bonding.

Every essay in this anthology, like every essay in its sister volume, has been written by a woman. If this anthology functions somewhat analogically to an anthology of essays by men, then it is a form of female-bonding. The analogy, however, is far from perfect. Men commenting on men bond both to the men they comment on and to each other. Because all the essays in this anthology are about men, while the women who authored them bond to each other by partaking in something that can be generally conceived as the same project, our bonding gets disrupted through the commentary—it bonds us to men. Though the bonding to men is also a disrupted bonding, ruptured by the bonding of women to women through the common project of a feminist commentary, it is because of it that a feminist criticism of a canon can and probably reinscribes the canon while criticizing it.

Problematic as an anthology like this is, I believe that it is extremely valuable. The least it does is challenge the philosophical claim that gender is marginal to a philosophy produced in a culture in which gender is significant. And gender has been shown to be particularly significant to modern philosophy by, for example, Evelyn Fox Keller, who has argued that contrary to ancient Greek philosophy and especially Plato's philosophy, modern Western philosophy, beginning with Bacon, more rigidly differentiates between the genders, valorizes masculinity and men and devalues femininity and women, and legitimizes the domination of women by men as it legitimizes the domination of nature by men.<sup>3</sup>

## II

In the U.S. the challenge of philosophy's claim that gender is marginal to philosophy was first put in print within the disciplinary boundaries of philosophy in 1973 when *The Monist*<sup>4</sup> published the first collection of essays written by U.S. academic philosophers that addressed feminist issues. This collection included one essay—Christine Pierce's "Equality: *Republic V*"<sup>5</sup>—that examined an argument by a person whose works are a part of the story of Western philosophy from a feminist perspective. The next collection of essays that addressed feminist issues philosophically formed the 1973–

1974 volume of *The Philosophical Forum*.<sup>6</sup> It included several feminist studies of positions of canonized philosophers, as well as Carol C. Gould's essay "The Woman Question: Philosophy of Liberation and the Liberation of Philosophy"<sup>7</sup> in which Gould argues for the possibility of studying woman philosophically.

Gould accepts the by now terribly contested claim that the proper subject of philosophical studies is the universal and that, therefore, philosophical examinations methodologically and necessarily exclude particular and accidental differences. According to her, it follows from this that woman as woman cannot be studied philosophically, if she is thought of as an accident of the universal human since, when thought of in this way, she would have to be studied not as woman but as human. Gould claims that, however, given an unessentialist conception of universality as concrete universality, woman could be studied philosophically. Her notion of a concrete universal is that of an ensemble of systematically related differences that are constituted by and constitutive of certain relations that are historically and socially, hence culturally, located. Woman is such a concrete universal. She says:

Being a woman . . . is . . . a property whose definition depends on the relation between men and women in concrete social life. . . . These relations or interrelations are . . . not external relations between individuals who are already independently defined by some criterion . . . Men become men, and woman become women, in the course of these interrelations.<sup>8</sup>

Gould, who believes that it is important and seems to be very optimistic about there being a way to philosophize about woman, does not address the role of canonical Western philosophy in the production of the hegemonic Western system of interrelated gender differences. Yet, like other Western disciplines, canonical Western philosophy has been contributing to this production along three lines.<sup>9</sup>

First, canonical Western philosophy provides claims and arguments about or descriptions and analyses of what it is to be a woman as distinguished from a man, what is appropriate for a woman as distinguished from a man, and what kinds of relations women and men should have. In addition, it deploys the feminine and the masculine as metaphysical principles or as metaphors, and it also deploys certain forms or styles of thinking. Finally, it uses both in such a way that claims and arguments about or descriptions

and analyses of other things engender these things as it intertwines them with the conceptions of woman and man and our relations, consequently also expanding, though not necessarily enriching, the conceptions of woman, man and our relations.

The essays in this anthology criticize canonical modern Western philosophy's contribution to the production of the hegemonic Western system of interrelated gender differences. Some of them focus specifically on the ways in which modern Western philosophy constructs genders and analyzes gender relations. For example, Marcia Lind's "Indians, Savages, Peasants and Women: Hume's Aesthetics," Kristin Waters' "Women in Kantian Ethics: A Failure at Universality," and Ofelia Schutte's "Nietzsche's Psychology of Gender Difference" show how each of these philosophers creates idealized categories such as that of good normative evaluators, competent moral agents, and even philosophical mavericks and rebels by excluding and inferiorizing women.

A second group of essays provide a detailed analysis of the philosophers conceptions of masculinity and femininity or of concepts that are intertwined with them. Lynda Lange takes a critical look at Rousseau's dualism and its normative implications in "Women and Rousseau's Democratic Theory: Philosopher Monsters and Authoritarian Equality". Robin May Schott's "Rereading the Canon: Kantian Purity and the Suppression of Eros" examines the intersection of the feminine with the sensible for Kant. Cynthia Willett criticizes Hegel for failing to accord emotions a proper place in his aesthetics, and more generally, failing to accord desires a proper place in his dialectic. For Hegel both emotions and desire are associated with the feminine in "Hegel, Antigone and the Possibility of a Woman's Dialectic". Another look at Hegel is Amy Newman's in "Hegel's Theoretical Violence" where she argues that Hegel is not simply one-sidedly valorizing the masculine and inferiorizing the feminine but advocates the suppression of woman and the feminine.

A third group of essays calls attention to the intertwining of gender with conceptual schemas and networks. Thus, in "Marx and the Ideology of Gender: A Paradox of Praxis and Nature" Wendy Lee-Lampshire argues that it is only at face-value that ecofeminism could appropriate the Marxian conception of praxis in order to articulate its vision of an undestructive and unexploitative human to nature relation. According to Lee-Lampshire, the Marxian conception of praxis is actually unsatisfactory because it is situated within a conceptual network that valorizes reason as separate from nature

which is associated with women. Similarly, in "Who is Nietzsche's Woman?" Kelly Oliver finds in Nietzsche a critic of dualism and an advocate of plurality who did not and could not break away from the tradition due to his commitments to masculine ideals. And, in "Interaction in a World of Chance: John Dewey's Theory of Inquiry", Lisa Heldke argues that Dewey's critique of the epistemological themes of modernity, despite its affinity to the feminist critique of the same, is problematic because it privileges science and manipulative inquiry which are intertwined with masculinity and masculine ways of doing things.

A special case of the third group are essays that situate the philosophical texts they read historically in ways that expose them as linked in many ways with the conceptual schemas of their time. One example of this is Susan Bordo's "The Cartesian Masculinization of Thought and the Seventeenth Century Flight from the Feminine" which situates Descartes' conception of thinking in his time, showing that Descartes, like others in the seventeenth century, masculinized the previously unmasculine concept of thought in response to the crisis of the time. Another example is Elizabeth Potter's "Locke's Epistemology and Women's Struggles" which situates Locke's epistemology socio-politically showing that in a time of crisis Locke formulated an epistemology that responded to the needs of the English middle-class of his time, hence, an epistemology designed to refute both the conservative royalists and the radical populists.

While most of the essays in this anthology are very critical of modern Western philosophy, there are a few essays that suggest that some modern philosophers do have ideas that can be useful for feminists, ideas that I described as raidable in the introduction to the Plato-Aristotle volume. Thus, for example, Sarah A. Bishop Merrill's "A Feminist Use for Hume's Moral Ontology" argues that Hume has a non-essentialist view of persons that could be useful for the development of a feminist ethics. Similarly, Jane Kneller's "Kant's Immature Imagination" suggest that Kant's moral theory has both a sensible and a rational aspect which could be integrated and is, therefore, important for feminist ethical theorizing. And, in "Nietzschean Debris: Truth as Circe" Margaret Nash put forth the claim that there are important affinities between Nietzsche's critique of modernity, and particularly his emphasis on play and the disunity of the subject, and feminist insights about modernity and the possibility of overcoming it.

## III

The possibility of finding raidable ideas in modern Western philosophical texts is in part a function of the fact that multiple inconsistencies are one of the properties of any canon. One would have to assume that a text or a corpus is totally unified by authorial intentions or subconscious designs, or is nothing but a symptomatic expression of a totalizing and invasively saturating hegemonic culture, or of a discursive practice or discursive mode, in order to believe that tensions are not a property of a text or a corpus, let alone a canon that is formed by many texts and corpuses.<sup>10</sup>

Still, the ambiguity and contradictory richness of canonical modern Western philosophy is also constituted by its interpretation and specifically its rational reconstruction, which, according to Richard Rorty, is a genre of historiographical philosophical studies that is motivated by historically located philosophical inquiry and driven by questions in such a way that rational reconstructionists “confine themselves to a relatively small portion of the philosopher’s work”<sup>11</sup> and do not produce interpretations that converge. Rorty describes rational reconstructions as follows:

They are written in light of some recent work in philosophy which can reasonably be said to be “about the same questions” as the great dead philosophers was discussing. They are designed to show that the answers he gave to these questions, though plausible and exciting, need restatement or purification—or, perhaps, the kind of precise refutation which further work in the field has recently made possible.<sup>12</sup>

In the case of this anthology, as in the case of the Plato-Aristotle volume, the influencing recent work is primarily feminist philosophical work in ethics, social and political philosophy, epistemology, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of science.<sup>13</sup> This work raises questions about and seeks alternatives to the philosophical construction of reality through a value-laden binary oppositional prism, the adequacy of moral theories that construe normative evaluations as a kind of a straightforward correct application of principles, and the idea of moral autonomy and agency, as well as scientific autonomy and agency, insofar as they are understood exclusively in terms of a general and unsituated reason.

By reading the canonical Western texts in light of current feminist philosophizing, the essays in this anthology contribute to the

unique yet growing reinterpretation of the story of Western philosophy by groups whose voices have been excluded from this story. Because this interpretation is done by outsiders who are also insiders, both bound to the discipline and to each other yet in a disrupted way, it is particularly insightful about the ways canonized Western philosophy has contributed to the hegemonic dominant culture and about the ways it can perhaps, nonetheless, be useful to resistant readers.

### Notes

1. Le Doeuff, Michèle, "Women and Philosophy" in Moil, Toril (ed.), *French Feminist Thought: A Reader*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987, p. 182.

2. See Bartky, Sandra Lee's introduction to her *Femininity and Domination, Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*, N.Y.: Routledge, 1990.

3. Keller, Evelyn Fox's *Reflections on Gender and Science*. New Haven: Yale University, 1985.

4. *The Monist* 57 (1973).

5. Pierce, Christine, "Equality: Republic V". *The Monist* 57 (1973): 1-11.

6. *The Philosophical Forum* 5 (1973-1974).

7. Gould, Carol C. "The Woman Question: Philosophy of Liberation and the Liberation of Philosophy." *The Philosophical Forum* 5 (1973-1974): 5-44.

8. Gould, pp. 28-29.

9. I believe that these three kinds of Western disciplinary contributions to the production of the Western system of interrelated gender differences, hence the Western cultural production of women are suggested by feminist criticisms of the disciplines. For some of these see: Caine, Barbara, Grosz, E. A., de Lepervanche, Marie (eds.) *Crossing Boundaries: Feminism and the Critique of Knowledges*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1988, DuBois, Ellen Carol, Kelly, Gail Paradise, Kennedy, Elizabeth Lapovsky, Korsmeyer, Carolyn W. and Robinson, Lillian S., *Feminist Scholarship: Kindling in the Groves of Academe*. University of Illinois, 1985, Spender, Dale (ed.) *Men's Studies Modified: The Impact of Feminism on the Academic Disciplines*. Oxford: Pergamon, 1981.

10. On this, see LaCapra, Dominick, *Rethinking Intellectual History*. Cornell University, 1983, especially the first chapter "Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts", pp. 23-74. See also, and somewhat in

contrast, MacIntyre, Alasdair, "The Relationship of Philosophy to Its Past" in Rorty, Richard, Schneewind, J. B. and Skinner, Quentin (eds.), *Philosophy in History*. Cambridge University, 1984, pp. 31–48.

11. Rorty, Richard, "The Historiography of Philosophy: Four Genres" in Rorty, Richard, Schneewind, J. B. and Skinner, Quentin (eds.), *Philosophy in History*. Cambridge University, 1984, p. 57.

12. Rorty, p. 57.

13. A few very recent anthologies provide some excellent examples of current feminist philosophical work. See: Benhabib, Seyla and Cornell, Drucilla (eds.), *Feminism as Critique: On the Politics of Gender*. University of Minnesota, 1987. Code, Lorraine, Mullett, Sheila, and Overall, Christine (eds.) *Feminist Perspectives: Philosophical Essays on Method and Morals*. University of Toronto, 1988, Griffiths, Morwenna and Whitford, Margaret (eds.), *Feminist Perspectives in Philosophy*. Indiana University Press, 1988, Kittay, Eva Fedder and Meyers, Diana T. (eds.), *Women and Moral Theory*. Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1987. Other anthologies that address ethics are Claudia Cord (ed.) *Feminist Ethics*, Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1991 and Eve Browning Cole and Susan Coulthrop-McQuin (eds.), *Explorations in Feminist Ethics*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 1992. An anthology that brings together a number of essays from different philosophical fields is Garry, Ann and Pearsall, Marilyn (eds.), *Women, Knowledge and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989. Two recent anthologies Goldren epistemology and the philosophy of mind Alcoff, Linole and Potter, Elizabeth (eds.) *Feminist Epistemologies*. NY: Routledge, 1993 and Louise M. Anthony and Charlotte Witt (eds.), *A Mind of One's Own*, Boulder, CO: Westview, 1993. Other sources for such examples are *Hypatia* and the Newsletter of *Feminism and Philosophy*.