

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.

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I

This anthology introduces several feminist voices into the study of Platonic and Aristotelian texts that modern Western philosophy has treated as foundational to the discipline of philosophy. What they are primarily concerned with is the extent to which Platonic and Aristotelian texts are (un)redeemably sexist, masculinist, or phallogentric.

The feminist voices in this anthology contribute to a Western feminist project that is constituted by a multiplicity of feminist critiques of various aspects and elements of Western culture. The project aims at exposing the hegemonic, though flexible and changing, system of interrelated gender differences and their valuations. It includes critiques of literature, art, and even music, of medical and scientific texts, as well as of approaches to criticism. The feminist critiques do not have a theoretical unity. Such unity as they do have is a function of a shared yet vague and contested methodological assumption according to which a critical understanding of a culture in which gender is significant requires letting gender play a role in the way one approaches the examination of the culture in question. This vague and contested methodological assumption is shared by the essays in this anthology.

The assumption about the analytical importance of gender does not lead to a uniformed reading of the Platonic and Aristotelian texts. The chapters in this book come into conflict with each other, leaving behind a tension-filled interpretation of Plato's and Aristotle's views. Thus, for example, Judith Genova's "Feminist Dialectics: Plato and Dualism" and Cynthia Hampton's "Overcoming Dualism: The Importance of the Intermediate in Plato's *Philebus*" suggest together that Plato's metaphysics and epistemology are dualistic and hierarchical and inferiorize the feminine and that, nonetheless, Plato valorized certain feminine qualities and used them to develop ways to overcome dualism and hierarchy. And in Aristotle's case, Cynthia A. Freeland's "Nourishing Speculation: A Feminist Reading of Aristotelian Science" suggests both that Aristotle's biological texts seem to provide an example of a science that could measure up to feminist criticisms and that, nonetheless, they are engendering texts that inferiorize woman and the feminine.

The chapters also bring the views of Plato and Aristotle into conflict with each other, suggesting that ancient Greek philosophy is not a seamless cloth. So, for example, according to Christine Pierce's "Eros and Epistemology", Plato does not epistemically privilege man but only the men who choose homoerotic love. Plato's arguments could be used to show that women who choose lesbian love should also be construed as epistemically privileged. On the other hand, in "Aristotle: Women, Deliberation, and Nature" and in "Aristotle on the Woman's Soul" Deborah K. W. Modrak and Christine M. Senack respectively, argue that Aristotle believed that all women, without any exceptions, were morally defective, and this defect was a function of a weakness of women's deliberative faculty.

The essays' portrayal of Plato's and Aristotle's philosophies as ambiguous and rich with contradictions could, but should not, be taken to imply that there is no hegemonic tendency of engendering in ancient Greek philosophy. As Susan Bordo, following Foucault,² claims in response to Jean Grimshaw's *Philosophy and Feminist Thinking*,³ where Grimshaw argues that canonical inconsistencies indicate that there is no hegemonic view:

[I]ntellectual dominance does not take the form of univocal, majesterial decree, but exercises itself through perpetual "local battle" organized around "innumerable points of confrontation [and] focuses of instability." Dominance emerges *through*, not in the absence of contestation.⁴

The importance of Bordo's answer to Grimshaw in the case of Platonic and Aristotelian texts is a function of their location in the Western philosophical canon, a location that assigns to them a power that shaped the rest of the canon. If the feminist suggestion that despite contradictions, there is a hegemonic tendency is true, then Platonic and Aristotelian texts form the origin of a philosophical canon that is thoroughly infused with gender. On the other hand, if Grimshaw is right, then even Platonic and Aristotelian thinking cannot be described as engendered.

One of the things that is tempting about Grimshaw's suggestion is that it seems to make it a little easier to consider the redeemability of those points in the Platonic and Aristotelian texts that seem to not devalue women or femininity and point out ways to overcome the dualisms that feminists have argued are part of phallogocentric reasoning. Under her view, contradictions suggest discontinuities and therefore the separability of elements of the text. And what her view implies is that according to feminists a sexist text is so in a saturated way.

There are feminists that believe this.⁵ But, as the title of the anthology indicates, I suspect Platonic and Aristotelian texts as primary contributors to the origins of the engendered philosophical tradition that builds on their works, and would like to present the anthology as a whole as suggesting that a position can be hegemonic and yet not determine every possible aspect and element of a text. I believe, therefore, that texts, specifically the Platonic and Aristotelian texts that are the subject of this anthology, are programmatically raidable for what one needs conceptually for a current project such as the feminist project. I would not, however, encourage raiding without a careful critique and a healthy dose of ambivalence toward the Western tradition in general and Plato and Aristotle in particular.

II

I first situated the voices in this anthology in relation to a Western feminist project of cultural criticism. But the voices in this anthology also contribute very specifically to Western feminist philosophical projects and are influenced by recent feminist philosophical work in ethics, social and political philosophy, epistemology, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of science.⁶ This work

raises questions about the philosophical construction of reality through a value-laden binary oppositional prism. It questions the adequacy of moral theories that construe normative evaluations as a kind of a straightforward correct application of principles. It also questions 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.

This work does not only question but also argues for alternatives. Thus, it argues for alternatives to the normative dualism of canonical Western philosophy, seeking them not in unifying methodologies that obliterate difference but in methodologies that emphasize plurality and heterogeneity. It argues for alternative approaches to normative evaluations, emphasizing the importance of human relations and relatedness, therefore, of care for and responsibility toward particular groups and individuals in normative evaluations. It also argues for alternative conceptions of autonomy and agency, emphasizing their historicity, sensibility, and embodiment.

Because they are motivated by the issues of feminist philosophy, the essays in this anthology raise certain kinds of questions and search the texts that they are about for certain kinds of traces. Thus, for example, in "Hairy Cobblers and Philosopher-Queens" and "Who is Who in the Polis?" Elizabeth V. Spelman criticizes Plato and Aristotle respectively, arguing that while they admitted the possibility of excellence for women, they were suspicious of the body, especially the female body, seeing it as a source of possible epistemic and social disorder and rupture. Susan Hawthorne finds a different kind of feminine body in Plato's *Symposium*. In "Diotima Speaks through the Body," she attends to the significance of the various aspects of the feminine body as the central metaphor of Diotima's teachings, believing that the metaphor is used in an attempt to articulate an epistemology that overcomes the subject-object epistemological dualism by not objectifying and alienating what knowledge is about from the knower.

Some of the issues that motivate the essays or aspects of the essays in this anthology show more clearly than others the double sources of the foci of feminist philosophy, i.e., feminism as a movement and canonical Western philosophy. This is particularly clear in the two Spelman chapters which, in addition to exposing Plato's and Aristotle's fear of and inferiorization of the feminine body, concern themselves with the class structure of the ideal societies of Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Politics* and with the division of gender that results from the interaction of class and gender.

The influence of feminist philosophy on the essays in this anthology goes beyond focusing them on certain issues. Some of the essays, for example, Hampton's, Hawthorne's and Freeland's, attempt to trace the feminine in the texts they read, and this kind of tracing is a response to the influence of feminist philosophy and its response to post-structuralism. Not too long ago, at least in the U.S., were one to pursue a feminist criticism of a canonical Western philosopher, one would emphasize the tracing of the masculine, which one would do by pointing out the sexism embedded in the text and its phallogentrism. Feminists influenced by post-structuralism have criticized this approach as tending to presuppose the total unifying power of hegemony and have argued that texts can have something about them that resists the hegemonic pressures. Insofar as these pressures are toward masculinization, what one can expect to find, were one to search for traces of resistance, are feminine traces.

Another way in which feminist philosophy influences the essays methodologically, due to the influences of post-structuralism, is by urging a modified cultural genealogy or something that resembles what Rorty calls intellectual history because it "consists of descriptions of what intellectuals were up to at a given time, and of their interactions with the rest of society".⁷ One example of this is Eve Browning Cole's "Women, Slaves, and 'Love of Toil' in Aristotle's Moral Philosophy" which situates Aristotle's assignment of women to the margins of the moral community in relations with other Greek intellectual discussions of gender and in relation to the socio-political institutions of the time. Another example is Nancy Tuana's "Aristotle and the Politics of Reproduction", which argues that Aristotle's ascription of lack to women is a descendent of a gradual cultural process in Greece, while his ascription of generative capacities to men arises out of the metaphysical framework of his time.

III

Though influenced by post-structuralist feminism, the essays in this anthology are silent about the way they have problematized gender for feminism.⁸ While, even if in different ways, they take gender seriously and make it matter interpretively, taken very literally, they only imply that what Plato and Aristotle have to say about gender and how they use it is culturally and theoretically important. In a way, this is also all that the anthology as a whole implies.

But, the essays, and maybe more so the anthology, are caught in a problematic situation. Their stance is that of the feminist critic of culture, and the danger that the feminist critic of culture faces is that of perpetuating just what she or he criticizes. The feminist critic of culture is motivated ethically and politically to take gender seriously and makes it matter interpretively. The criticism is part of a struggle whose end, however, is, ironically, the elimination of gender as a significant category.

One could argue that the feminist critic of culture deploys gender strategically and one can show that this deployment has been very fruitful.⁹ Still, as Joan Cocks points out, the feminist critic of culture's situation is rather odd. She says:

How odd to remain faithful to the terms of Masculine/Feminine just at this point! How odd to obey a rule when one is looking to show the rule's political tyranny rather than categorical truth—and more, when one is looking to show that tyranny's less than total triumph over life.¹⁰

The odd problematic bind of this anthology is that it may perpetuate not only gender as a significant category but also the existing canon of Western philosophy and its Eurocentric underpinnings. By engaging in a critique of canonical Western philosophers that is motivated by current concerns, the essays make what these philosophers had to say come to life and matter. Since they are collected into an anthology that is focused on the canon and is not struggling with its revisions and expansions, while offering a very different reading of the canon, and thus violating the interpretive rules that bind it, they also preserve the canon. Yet, since it contains essays about ethics and politics, as well as aesthetics, epistemology, and the philosophy of science, the anthology does not perpetuate the story of canonical Western philosophy as the story of battles among and developments of positions about the certainty of knowledge, its origin, and its objectivity.

Still, due to its positioning of essays and the kinds of essays it includes, what the anthology seems to do is to preserve the mostly eighteenth-century European pretense that philosophy is a natural kind, a distinct form of thought, as well as the eighteenth-century's construal of the European seventeenth century as the century in which philosophy became modern.¹¹ In addition, because the anthology situates Plato and Aristotle in the canonically acceptable way vis-à-vis European philosophers proper, it perpetuates the Eu-

rocentric view of philosophy.¹² It may also perpetuate the Eurocentric view of philosophy by being part of the Western feminist project.

The bind of this anthology is a function of its interaction with a complex reality that is configured by a multiplicity of struggles for and resistance to dominance. In such a reality, authorial intentions and how they are executed just cannot dictate meaning—nor are they wholly powerless. And in light of this, the critical feminist readings of Plato and Aristotle that are in this anthology are important because they do several things and do them well: They challenge the general philosophical claim to abstract neutrality that Plato and Aristotle attempted to protect among other ways by excluding women, showing that Platonic and Aristotelian texts are indeed gendered and in multiple ways. At the same time, they identify elements of Platonic and Aristotelian views that might be useful for the current feminist project. And, they show that reading ancient Greek philosophy through the multiple lenses of current feminist philosophical concerns is interpretively productive.

Notes

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

2. Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish*. (French, 1975). NY: Vintage, 1977.

3. Grimshaw, Jean. *Philosophy and Feminist Thinking*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1986.

4. Bordo, Susan. "Feminist Skepticism and the 'Maleness' of Philosophy". Paper read at the 1988 American Philosophical Meeting in Washington, D.C., p. 8. A shorter version of this paper is published in *The Journal of Philosophy*.

5. See discussion in Braidotii, Rosi. *Patterns of Dissonance: A Study of Women in Contemporary Philosophy*. NY: Routledge, 1991.

6. Some recent anthologies provide excellent examples of current feminist philosophical work. See: Benhabib, Seyla and Cornell, Drucilla (eds.). *Feminism as Critique: On the Politics of Gender*. Minneapolis: 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*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988; Kittay, Eva Fedder and Meyers, Diana T. (eds.). *Women*

and *Moral Theory*. Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1987. 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. Other sources for such examples are *Hypatia* and the newsletter of *Feminism and Philosophy*.

7. Rorty, Richard. "The Historiography of Philosophy: Four Genres" in Rorty, Richard, Schneewind, J. B. and Skinner, Quentin (eds.). *Philosophy in History*. Boston: Cambridge University, 1984, p. 69.

8. See, for example: Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. NY: Routledge, 1990; Fuss, Diana. *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference*. NY: Routledge, 1989; Riley, Denise. "Am I That Name?": *Feminism and the Category of "Women" in History*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1988.

9. See, for example, Scott, Joan Wallace. *Gender and the Politics of History*. NY: Columbia University. 1988, especially the first part "Toward A Feminist History."

10. Cocks, Joan. *The Oppositional Imagination: Feminism, Critique and Political Theory*. London: Routledge, 1989, p. 195.

11. I am relying in my formulations on Jonathan Ree's "Philosophy and the History of Philosophy" in Ree, Jonathan, Ayers, Michael and Westoby, Adam. *Philosophy and Its Past*. Atlantic Highland, NJ: Humanities, 1978, pp. 3–39.

12. This point is made by Amin Samir in *Eurocentrism*. NY: Monthly Review, 1989. See, in particular the first chapter, "The Formation of Tributary Ideology in the Mediterranean Region", pp. 13–59.