

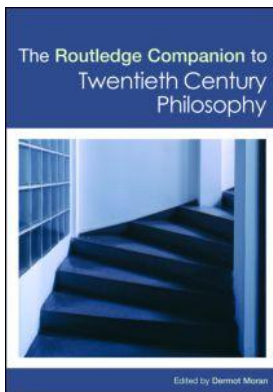
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## **The Routledge Companion to Twentieth Century Philosophy**

Dermot Moran

### **Feminism in Philosophy**

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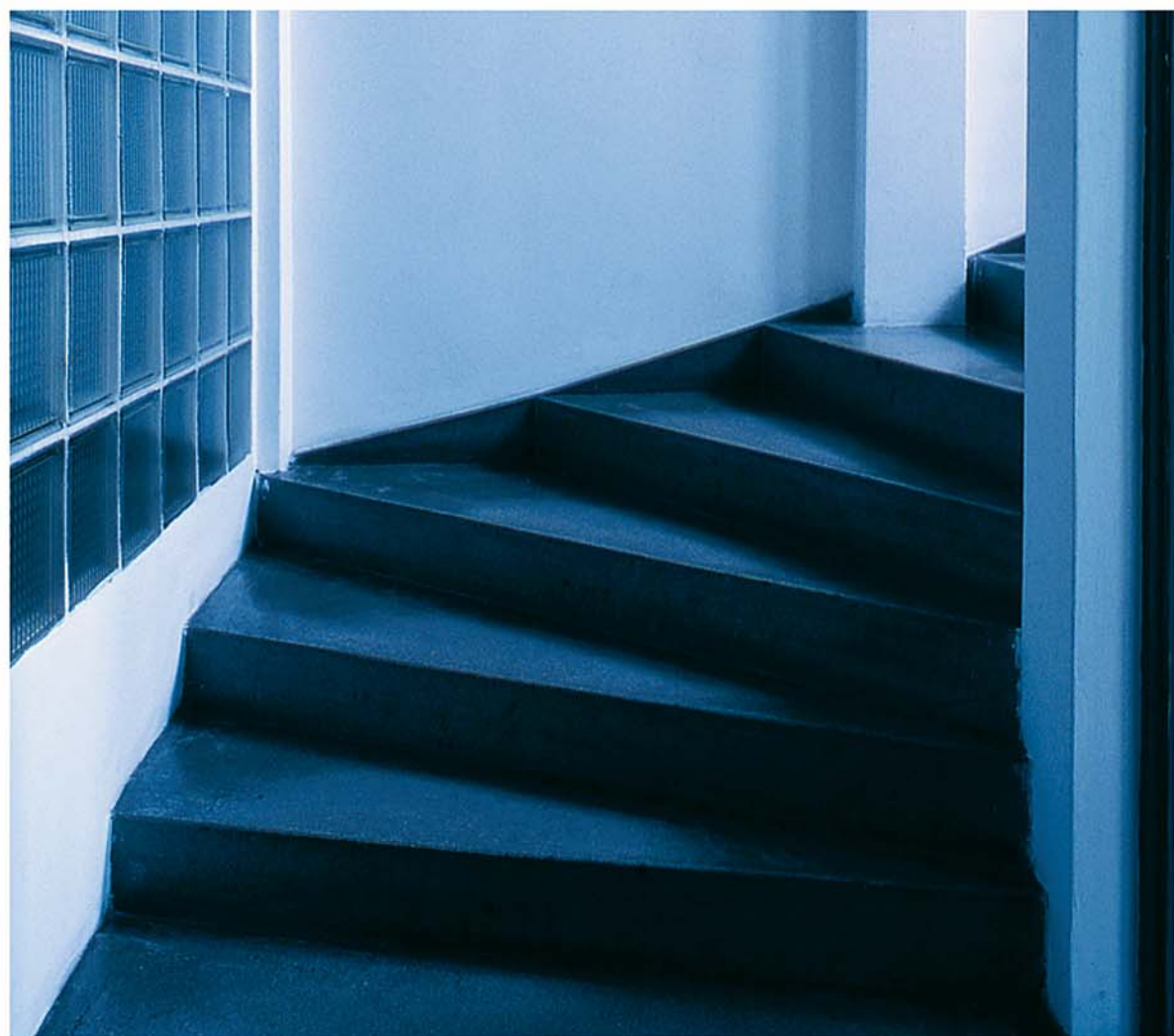
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# The Routledge Companion to Twentieth Century Philosophy



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# 7

## FEMINISM IN PHILOSOPHY

*Andrea Nye*

### From margin to center

The lack of references to feminist philosophy or feminist philosophers in other articles in the present volume (apart from a section on feminist epistemology in Matthias Steup's "Epistemology in the twentieth century," Chapter 11, and a section of feminism in Matt Matravers's "Twentieth-century political philosophy," Chapter 21) might be taken as indicating that feminism played little or no role in twentieth-century philosophy. Certainly this might have seemed true at mid-century when a standard reference work, the Macmillan *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, was published with no entry under feminist philosophy and virtually no reference to feminism throughout its many volumes. Although feminists were challenging methods and findings in many fields of knowledge, philosophy might seem to be exempt. Philosophers had worked hard to eliminate the last vestiges of unscientific idealism from philosophy. They reinvented a discipline free from the taint of theology or politics. They developed methods of logical, linguistic, and phenomenological analysis that transcended personal and group interests, or so it seemed. Institutional barriers to women's participation had been removed, as proven by the success of notable woman philosophers such as Elisabeth Anscombe (1919–2001) and Philippa Foot (1920– ). If women did not enter into the field, it might be assumed to be a result of choice and ability, not sexual discrimination.

Academic respectability in an age of science had been hard won. In Britain and North America a major concern was to reshape theories of knowledge and reality for a scientific age. Philosophy's identification with religion and the preaching of morality was cast aside, its role defined as a discipline with accredited methods and standards. The American Philosophical Association provided a venue where philosophers could meet, share ideas, correct errors, make progress in solving problems, just as problems were put to rest in science. Pragmatic lack of rigor and dabbling in politics was to be left behind. Logical atomism, Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, the positivist's principle of verification, all reflected a conviction that the tools provided by modern mathematical logic philosophy could insulate philosophers from variable opinion and allow

solid achievement to be rewarded (see “The birth of analytic philosophy,” Chapter 1). Philosophers might have personal political interests – Russell himself was a self-declared feminist and libertarian – but there was to be no place in the new analytic philosophy for pleading of any kind.

In Europe, Edmund Husserl proposed phenomenology as a foundation for philosophical insight and a method that would prove that philosophers were not redundant in an age of science. A philosopher could “bracket” away ordinary and occasional experience and reveal the logical grammar of thought. He could uncover “essences” and form a substratum for all knowledge, and so mark off a field of specifically philosophical research. As phenomenology evolved with Heidegger’s “Being” in time, and Sartre’s “being and nothingness,” gender difference was seldom discussed. Were not women, like men, mortal human beings living in time? If so, they needed no special voice or treatment.

Outside academic philosophy, powerful feminist voices were heard. Early in the century, Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860–1935) traced the effects of “androcentric culture” on economics, observing that masculine bias had wrongly made assumptions of scarcity and competition a basis for theorizing (1898; 1911). Emma Goldman (1869–1940) launched a critique against the liberal philosophies of the woman’s suffrage movement, arguing that there was no guarantee that women, restricted to traditional roles in the family, in awe of religious authorities, and unable to express their sexuality, would vote progressively or intelligently. A woman’s enemies, argued Goldman, were not only external but also internal in the form of social and sexual conventions that block intellectual development (see Goldman 1970).

Clara Zetkin (1857–1933) pointed out inconsistencies in Marxian philosophy and Marxist practice in matters of family and sexual relations. Although no argument consistent with Marxist theory could be made for women’s inferiority or special roles, women were not included in socialist leadership, nor were arrangements to free women from domestic labor given priority. Zetkin challenged Lenin’s reluctance to endorse issues of sex and marriage as topics for serious socialist debate. She pressed for radical reforms in family life. In Russia Alexandra Kollontai (1872–1952) insisted that the abuse and exploitation of women be addressed. The bourgeois family, analyzed by Marx as an economic institution, was linked to capital and unworkable in a socialist society. Logic, said Kolontai, dictated new forms of domestic and reproductive labor that would allow women as well as men self-realization in work and personal relations.

Rosa Luxemburg (1871–1919), leader in the Social Democratic movement in Germany in the early years of the century, worked closely with Zetkin to negotiate philosophical and tactical relations between liberal movements for women’s suffrage and socialist class struggles. In a 1914 article, “Proletarian women” written for International Women’s Day, Luxemburg paid particular attention to the condition of women in Africa and Latin America whose interests were poorly served by both liberal democratic philosophies and socialist philosophies framed within the male-dominated European worker’s movement.

Hannah Arendt (1906–75), a student of Heidegger as the Nazis came to power in Germany, produced along with her academic thesis on the ethics of St Augustine, a

philosophical critique in a novel form. Her innovative biography of Rahel Varnagen (1974) traced the misfortunes of a woman and a Jew poorly served by Enlightenment philosophies. Liberal theories of equality and freedom had not enabled Varnagen, and by implication others of subordinated groups, to construct viable selves or live coherent and happy lives. Although Arendt never formally identified herself as a feminist, or participated significantly in women's movements, her later treatment of the nature of thought and human society gave feminist philosophers new ways to think about the nature of mind, knowledge, and political commitment.

At mid-century, came a turning point. In 1949, as the effect of World War II's dislocation of gender roles began to be most painfully felt, Simone de Beauvoir (1908–86) published a ground-breaking application of existentialist philosophy to the condition of women. What is it to be man? This had been the core question of philosophers from Husserl to Heidegger and Sartre. In *The Second Sex* (1949) de Beauvoir asked another question, "What is it to be a woman?" The same? Or are women radically different and "other" than man? Using arguments and examples from sociology, psychology, literary criticism, as well as from philosophy, de Beauvoir marked out a line of inquiry that feminist philosophers would vigorously and inventively pursue throughout the rest of the century. If to be human has been defined by men in canonical texts of western philosophy, and if those texts have often declared or assumed women to be less than fully human, what should women do? De Beauvoir's answer was clear. A liberated woman must reject the stereotype of "universal femininity;" she must overcome the disabilities she experiences in reproduction and sex. She must refuse the role of passive object and lay claim to existential freedom.

In the next fifty years feminist philosophers debated de Beauvoir's answer with increasing energy, in the process calling into question core assumptions of western epistemology, ethics, and metaphysics. Who am I? What do I know? What should I do? What can I hope for? These were Kant's questions at the close of the eighteenth century, and they were revived by feminist philosophers at the midpoint of the twentieth. They had often been lost sight of: in neo-Kantian speculation, in phenomenological reduction, and in logical analysis. Now they were asked in new forms. What is it to be a woman philosopher? What is it to be a philosopher? Are gender, race, or class relevant to a philosopher's views? Will diverse human natures and experiences result in concepts and positions different from any in the history of philosophy written by men of European descent? Technological developments were creating a global marketplace; old-style colonialisms were dying away; religious and ethnic tensions festered. The questions were asked not only by women, but also by postcolonial peoples and growing immigrant communities in industrialized countries.

A first impulse of reflection on the part of feminist philosophers was historical. Analytic philosophers tended to mute the importance of historical studies in favor of ahistorical logical and linguistic analysis. At the same time they took for granted a steady progress of modern philosophical thought culminating in the mathematical logics and naturalized epistemologies of the postwar period. Now critical feminist readings of Descartes, Kant, and others began to challenge that lineage. Was it the natural rights of propertied men that had been defended by the father of democratic

theory, John Locke (1632–1704), and not the rights of all men? Was it men's reason that the founder of modern epistemology, Descartes, had championed against Aristotelian dogma? Were western philosophies of mind, idealist or naturalistic, theories of the male mind, or even the white European male mind? Feminist studies appeared, claiming that epistemologies based on existing methods and on concepts in the natural sciences were theories of masculine methods and procedures, that the deontological and utilitarian paradigms that had dominated ethics for a century gave voice to a man's but not a woman's moral sense, that logicist theories of language reflected masculine but not necessarily feminine styles of speaking.

Philosophers, pursuing a shrinking number of jobs in philosophy in the second half of the century, could find such questioning unnecessary and perverse. A growing movement for pluralism in organizations such as the American Philosophical Society was demanding and promoting greater diversity in conferences and professional journals. Feminist philosophy, along with other "special" interests, was finding a voice in splinter organizations such as the Society for Women in Philosophy and the Society for the Study of Women Philosophers. Courses in feminist philosophy were added to curricula in many university departments. A reading or two by feminist philosophers were included in at least some social and political philosophy texts, and some academic publishers were profiting from a brisk trade in feminist publications. Was this not enough? Feminist philosophy was in a peculiar position. Not just a new topic of philosophical interest such as "philosophy of the social sciences," not the philosophy of a particular school of thought such as Marxian philosophy or existential philosophy, not the use of existing methods and principles to promote a specific political agenda, feminism was a counter-movement "within" philosophy. As such it could seem to threaten the very existence of philosophy, and undermine the success of the few women who had achieved prominence as professional philosophers.

### Friends and enemies

Not all feminist philosophers saw irresolvable conflict between mainstream lines of twentieth-century philosophy and feminism. De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* found existentialism a powerful tool with which to rethink the condition of women. Throughout the suffrage and equal rights movements, feminists called on liberal political philosophies – utilitarianism, social contract theory, democratic theory – to justify claims that women should be granted equal rights and economic opportunity. Democratic philosophies might begin with arguments based on the nature of "man," but if "man" were understood as generic, the natural right of women to self-governance and property and wealth might follow as a matter of course.

Other feminists drew on mainstream socialist philosophies, supplementing Marxist class oppression with analyses of gender and race. Friedrich Engels (1820–95) had asserted that the downfall of women came with the institution of private property. Did it not follow that once private property was abolished in a socialist state, nothing would stand in the way of the equality of the sexes? The power of men, able to dominate women because they controlled the means of production, should wither

away. In the 1960s and 1970s lively discussions among feminist philosophers echoed debates between liberals and socialists in establishment political philosophy, weighing the relative merits of free enterprise and nationalization, property rights and social welfare, individualism and communitarianism.

It was not only among political philosophers that feminists found friends. In Britain and the United States in the 1950s and 1960s, women philosophers used established analytic methods of logical analysis and conceptual elucidation on questions not previously considered worthy of philosophical notice. Philosophy had wrongly “relinquished the field of sex to the poets” said Baker and Elliston, the editors of a 1975 collection of articles, *Philosophy and Sex*. Love and marriage, important aspects of human life, should also be “examined” along with justice and knowledge. Papers began to appear sporadically in journals and edited volumes on promiscuity, monogamy, gay rights, and abortion. A popular model was a much anthologized 1971 paper by Judith Jarvis Thomson (1929– ), “A defense of abortion,” reprinted in the Baker and Elliston collection. To defuse the emotions and religious views surrounding abortion and restore words to their ordinary usage, Thomson used the method of imaginative counterexample popular in post-Wittgensteinian linguistic analysis. She constructed an elaborate hypothesis – what if a famous violinist were hooked up to a woman’s kidneys without her consent – and then asked the classic question of ordinary-language philosophy: “What would we say then?” Is the woman obligated to sustain the life of the violinist? The answer, argued Thomson, must be no. Because the situation is analogous with unwanted pregnancy, it follows that a woman should not be forced to sustain a child for nine months either.

Marilyn Frye (1983) made feminist use of tools of “linguistic analysis” to elucidate the terms “male chauvinism” and “sexism.” The precision of Frye’s analyses had a purpose beyond demystifying philosophical problems. Clear concepts are essential, argued Frye, if feminists are to get men to see the nature of their “offenses.” Her aim was not to leave “everything as it is,” but to clarify and sharpen usage so as cogently and precisely to name the wrongs done to women. Mixing politics with ontology, Frye teased apart and wove together strands of meaning and fact to delineate complex phenomena of oppression. If the aim of orthodox linguistic analysis was to put to rest vexing philosophical problems like the status of mental objects or the existence of the external world, Frye’s purpose was different. Careful description of possible occasions of use, sensitivity to root meanings, consideration of the reasons why an experience is singled out as an object of interest gave feminist critics a more secure grasp on reality and therefore a greater ability to challenge that reality.

Linguistic analysis and ordinary-language philosophy passed out of vogue in the 1970s and 1980s in favor of truth-functional semantics and naturalized epistemologies, and feminists found new inspiration in the neo-empiricisms of W. V. O. Quine and Donald Davidson. Lynn Nelson (1990) urged feminists to accept what philosophers had learned about knowledge in forty years of analytic philosophical inquiry, namely: theory is underdetermined by evidence, several theories might always be found to accommodate existing evidence, there is no reason to think that sensory observation can finally detect a best of all possible theories. Background assumptions shaped by



race, gender, and culture can never be completely filtered out of science. Argued Nelson, this is no reason to give up on empiricism or lapse into relativism. Evidence matters whether or not it is ever finally decisive. Quinian holism allows feminist intuitions to figure in knowledge claims based on feminist experience. Knowledge, Nelson concluded, is a makeshift business, in constant repair as science struggles to predict painful and maximize pleasurable stimulations, and feminist insights can be part of that process. If Quine's underdetermined "web of belief" is extended to include a wider net of political, moral, and social feminist experience, if it is understood that data is collected by communities of researchers not by individuals whose sensory receptors are innocent of social conditioning, empiricist epistemology can become feminist empiricist epistemology (1990).

In a collection of articles meant to show that analytic philosophers and twentieth-century feminists have much in common, Sharyn Clough recommended use of Donald Davidson's neo-Quinian semantics to help feminist philosophers escape a self-defeating relativism of male and female conceptual schemes ("A hasty retreat from evidence," in Clough 2003: 85–114). Given the mechanics of reference as understood in Davidson's application of truth-theoretic semantics, argued Clough, there can be no question of competing conceptual schemes. Understanding a language, whether it is a foreign language or the language of a new theory, requires the assumption that the user of the language is truthful for the most part. Ultimately feminists, like everyone, are "radical interpreters," dependent on occasion sentences and shared environmental stimuli to establish true and false propositions that, joined by truth-functional connectives, constitute meaning. There is no private inner world of feminine belief from which to issue forth bold new representations of reality. Feminist theory, like any other theory, must be grounded in occasion sentences that point to one world of facts shared with men. Again the lesson was both humbling and hopeful; feminist philosophers who envisioned a separatist break with establishment philosophy had misunderstood the nature of knowledge, but on the bright side late analytic theories of meaning left room for feminist intervention.

Richard Rorty's neo-pragmatism offered another friendly basis for feminist philosophizing. In a postmodern era, said Rorty, truth could finally be given up, along with the philosopher's illusion that there is a foundation of knowledge or a reflecting "mirror" that can be held up to nature. Once the illusion is cast off of an "overseer" of knowledge, philosophy will be open to "abnormal" discourses like feminism. Philosophers will give up the pretension to discover essences or first principles. They will leave material and practical matters to economics and politics. They will enjoy the freedom to try on ideas, sample ways of thinking, pursue divergent lines of thought like feminism (Rorty 1991).

Rorty's "pragmatism" and call for openness was not wholeheartedly embraced by all feminists (see Fraser 1991). Many were unwilling to give up politics and economics for light-hearted conversation, nor were they always satisfied with tolerance at the margins of the philosophical establishment. In the United States and other English-speaking countries, regardless of calls for pluralism, a hard core of "real" philosophy prevailed. Proponents held jobs at important universities

and set standards for publication in leading journals. In this inner circle, the mark of a philosopher was not tolerance of diversity and willingness to experiment with abnormal discourses, but rationality and respect for logic. Here the relation between feminist philosophers and the profession could be less than amicable. One of the first unfriendly attacks came from Janice Moulton (1983), who pointed out deficiencies in the adversarial style of much professional philosophizing, using Thomson's model paper on abortion as an example of these deficiencies. Thomson limited her argument to what might persuade her opponents, said Moulton. She accepted her adversary's premise that a fetus is analogous to a person. She restricted her treatment to refuting the arguments of her opponents. The result was a superficial analytic treatment of abortion that glossed over substantive questions about bodily identity and family relations. In emulation of science, philosophy tried to develop a distinctive method, but, said Moulton, different paradigms might be more fruitful and insightful. Moulton did not describe what a different feminist style of philosophical reasoning might be like, but feminist philosophers were already experimenting with philosophical styles far from the dry dialectic of much analytic debate. Going one step further, some began to weave together psychoanalysis, myth, personal history, blurring the line between philosophy and literature, philosophy and psychology, philosophy and memoir. The French philosopher Michele Le Dœuff (1948– ) argued that a submerged metaphorical "philosophical imaginary" was at work in texts cited as models of philosophical reason such as Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (Le Dœuff 1989). Susan Griffin (1980) explored matter and bodily existence in a mix of poetry and critique, weaving together a variety of voices: the parodied voice of objective philosophical or scientific authority, the voices of victimized and assaulted women, the voice of the author's own tentative vision of another future. Hispanic philosopher Maria Lugones and Anglo Elizabeth Spelman paired their different voices in dialogue in an attempt at cross-cultural understanding (1986). In these writings, the movement was not from claim to proof and rebuttal, but from claim to response and revision.

Non-adversarial exchange of divergent views was a goal pursued by feminist philosophers not only in print, but in energetic and sometimes painful confrontations at meetings of the new Society for Women in Philosophy. Decisive as the refutation of an opponent might be as philosophers competed as adversaries, wounds inflicted in gentlemanly debate tended to be superficial; the loser went home, constructed a new position, and sallied forth to better defend himself. In feminist discussions emotionally charged issues surfaced, and cool and calm were harder to maintain. Discussion was often passionate and sometimes angry as lesbian and straight philosophers, philosophers of color and white philosophers struggled to find common ground. Trampled under foot, said some critics, was reason, the very defining characteristic of philosophy.

Reason had been singled out since Plato as the mark of a philosopher. Reason could take different forms – intuition of Platonic Form, Aristotelian syllogisms, medieval arguments from essence, contemporary mathematical logic – but one thing remained. Reason was dispassionate and unemotional. A philosopher's job was not to feel, but to think. Now, reflecting on the history of philosophical reason, some

feminist philosophers indicted rationality itself as masculine illusion. Reason had been defined in hierarchical opposition to body, feeling, emotion, and, by extension, to femininity. In classical philosophy a superior reason ruled body, emotion, and women, making reason, some feminist charged, the mark of tyranny as men became masters of irrational women in the household and masters of primitive, less rational races abroad.

An early critique of modern reason came from the Australian philosopher and feminist Genevieve Lloyd (1984). On its face, Lloyd argued, Cartesian rationalism might seem to be sexless, not contaminated as was Aristotelian reason by a faulty biology and politics. Descartes himself declared his method available to anyone, including women. He paid due respect to the intellect of his female correspondent and patroness, Princess Elisabeth (Nye 1999). Later, in aristocratic salons in which Cartesianism was discussed, women played prominent roles. But, said Lloyd, Cartesian reason was defined against the bodily feeling ordinarily associated with femininity. That association and the fact that women continued to be expected to do the majority of reproductive, affective, and domestic work in families, meant that women were effectively barred from participating in rational Cartesian science. The separation of reason from sensual, emotional, bodily existence had ratified a sexual division of labor and separate roles for men and women.

Susan Bordo (1956– ) went further in her indictment of modernist reason (Bordo 1987). It was not only that Cartesian reason ratified existing distinctions between masculinity and femininity. Rational method constituted, said Bordo, a virtual “flight” from the feminine sensibility of the Middle Ages to a new era of science devoted to mastering and ruling the natural world. Bordo used developmental psychology to analyze what she read as the paranoid anxiety-ridden tone of Descartes’s arguments in the *Meditations*. What if all that I think has been put into my head not by a good God but an evil demon? What if everything my senses tell me is illusion and all that I think I see is a dream? A masculine pathology in these questions, said Bordo, continues to infect twentieth-century philosophy as philosophers return again and again to Descartes as founding father of modernism. Although she did not describe possible alternatives in detail, Bordo pointed to future styles of philosophizing, less alienated, less abstract, and friendlier to women.

Psychology was another popular basis for critiques of masculine reason. In an influential account, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978), psychologist Nancy Chodorow (1944– ) argued that boy children, brought up exclusively by mothers with whom boys can never identify, have a masculine identity that is inevitably fragile. A boy cannot learn to be a man, because he has no early model of masculinity. He learns only how not to be, specifically how not to be a woman. As a result, a man establishes rigid ego boundaries, a barricaded sense of self, and sharp distinctions between masculinity and femininity. Feminist philosophers were quick to see a connection with the attributes of philosophical reason. On the Continent the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901–81) in similar ways described a boy’s entrance into the social world by way of language necessarily structured around an illusory male presence. In any ordered semantic system, said Lacan, the phallus is the master signifier of rational order, the

guarantee of sanity and the key to mastery and stability, and also the strenuously defended fragile delusory byproduct of a split subject.

Lacan did not theorize any overcoming of masculine reason, but French feminist Luce Irigaray (1930– ) took Lacanian psychoanalysis a step further (1985). If reason as well as sexual difference is anchored in universal symbolic structures, it explains the seeming intractability of the association of masculinity and reason, and the failure of women to participate effectively in fields like philosophy and science. Instead women should find their own native thought and style, argued Irigaray, explore alternatives to the rigid logic of hierarchical opposition within which the feminine will always be subordinate to the masculine. Along with other French feminists, Irigaray looked forward to an *écriture féminine* that would express a woman's nature. Her call elicited an outpouring of innovative readings and creative explorations of philosophical themes, at times densely theoretical but also lyrical, autobiographical, and imaginative.

English-speaking feminist philosophers read the bold new French feminisms with excitement, but some had doubts about the war on philosophic reason. How were feminist critiques to be grounded or feminist claims validated without rationally ordered concepts and logical arguments? If feminists gave up claims to truth as illegitimate assertions of cognitive authority, did they not also give up the hope of changing attitudes or practices prejudicial to women? Much of the new feminist writing depended on substrata of erudite and sometimes questionable psychoanalytic and linguistic theory inaccessible to many women and without clear reference to material existence. Intoxicating and seductive as were new French styles, by the 1980s there was the sense among many feminists that it was time to return to more orthodox and accessible methods of analysis and less global indictments of philosophical reason.

Philosophical reason, even in the rigidly codified form of a logic, could take a variety of historically conditioned forms that related in different ways to exercises of institutional power. If some of those forms had been implicated in silencing divergent voices, the possibility of reasoning aimed at understanding and integration rather than silencing and domination might not be ruled out. If the purpose of some forms of logic was to barricade what is said against critique, other forms of inference might leave room for response and intersubjective understanding. The search for such an idiom and the alternative theories of subjectivity, knowledge, and morality it might reflect would be a priority for feminist philosophers in the latter decades of the century.

### Feminism in philosophy of mind

The metaphysical self of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* represents a problematic beginning for twentieth-century philosophy of mind. "Not a human being, not the human body, or the human soul," Wittgenstein's subject occupied the insubstantial point of self-awareness from which a rational being surveys the world. All ghostly Cartesian substance was expunged from that consciousness, but its continued and seemingly necessary presence in a world understood in terms of a logically ordered materialist science had to be anomalous. Where *in* such a world could such a subject be found? The dilemma was laid out by Kant. If the knowable world is an ensemble of causally

determined physical events and physical processes in space and time, as is the presupposition of empirical science, how can I think of myself as freely reflecting, judging, and acting in that world? How is it that I can hold myself and others morally responsible for thoughts and actions?

In Britain and the United States, Kant's question was deferred. The aim of Russell and transplanted positivists such as Carnap was to insure that philosophy fostered, supported the natural sciences, and removed impediments to progress in them. To that end, the task of "philosophy of mind" was not to negotiate Kant's antinomy but to account for commonsense beliefs and ordinary talk about minds and what goes on in minds, without recourse to non-natural souls or spiritual processes. Claims about mental objects and events, insofar as those claims are meaningful or true, were taken as referring to physical or neurological events, or to dispositions to behavior. Talk about what goes on in minds could be dismissed as naive "folk psychology" of no interest to philosophers or to scientists. What goes on in the mind could be seen as "functional," comparable to computer programming requiring no ghostly "hardware." Related, but mostly ignored, were clinical practices that the new theories of mind reflected and to some degree ratified. Should psychology concern itself with conditioning undesirable behavior, or should internal "cognitive" reconfiguring be its main concern? Should "talk therapy" be abandoned, and mental dysfunction due to faulty neural wiring be repaired with drugs or surgery? But of less importance than practical effects of theories of mind was the perceived need for philosophy to explain away as efficiently as possible any residue of unscientific spirituality.

Feminist philosophers approached philosophy of mind with interests closer to Kant's. Throughout the century, feminist research in history, linguistics, sociology, psychology, biology, and anthropology uncovered complex and diverse causes of women's lack of power. So successful and compelling was the growing body of research on the depth and ubiquity of sexism, that prospects could seem dim for any substantial change in women's situations. At the same time, a necessary element in feminist thought is the image of women as conscious beings with critical understanding, potentially free agents capable of acting according to freely formed beliefs and ideals. For feminists, the antimony between material causality on the one hand, and freedom of thought and action on the other cannot be so easily sidestepped in analyses of neural pathways or cognitive processing. In question is the very possibility of feminist reflective critical insight and progressive action.

Preliminary questions about analytic philosophies of mind were posed by Naomi Scheman in a paper, "Individualism and the objects of psychology," reprinted in Sandra Harding and Merrill Hintikka's *Discovering Reality* (1983), the first of many collections of essays critiquing mainstream epistemology and metaphysics from feminist perspectives. Scheman endorsed an "anti-individualist" approach to mental objects. Talk about beliefs and desires, she said, cannot be understood as talk about existing interior objects in individual minds. She went on to ask a further question: why did the assumption of individualism in contemporary philosophical analyses of the mind persist? Why the attempt to equate mental objects with neural events or functions in an individual's brain even after Ryle and Wittgenstein exposed

the category mistake in thinking so? Was this an accidental glitch in logic to be cleared up with counter-arguments? The assumption of individualism in philosophical psychology, Scheman argued, is no simple mistake, but has roots in wider currents of political thought. Individualism is ideology, part of a ruling complex of attitudes about society, government, and family. The economics and politics of capitalism, related techniques in education and psychology, and conservative family values hold in place a mistaken view of the mind, even after its theoretical inadequacy is pointed out.

Scheman's genealogical and ideological interpretation of philosophies of mind undermined the objective professionalism that was the pride of analytic philosophy, but feminists came to philosophy with existential as well as theoretical concerns. If elements in a given mind stand alone ready to be identified and categorized like other objects of scientific research, then a woman must either take her mind as she finds it or submit to remedial "treatment." But twentieth-century women were not ready to accept those alternatives. Their minds were in a state of disorder as they reconsidered beliefs, hopes, and desires in the wake of a growing feminist consciousness, but it was not a disorder that they were ready to disown as dysfunctional or pathological. What feminists thought and felt was not neural or representational fact, but painful and confusing processes of rethinking and reinterpretation as beliefs and feelings both challenged and reshaped experience. Reworking beliefs and feelings meant reworking what beliefs and feelings are about: namely twentieth-century working life, family life, and politics. Scheman's observations of the ideological roots of philosophies of mind were not only relevant for feminists. In a changing global environment, people of color, subject ethnicities, gays and lesbians were experiencing similar unsettled states of mind.

In a complementary analysis, Jennifer Hornsby (1951– ) pointed out some of the unacceptable implications of eliminating ordinary talk of beliefs, fears, and hopes, as "folk psychology" (Hornsby 1997). If what we ordinarily say about thinking, hoping, and fearing as we attempt to understand why we and others act is radically mistaken and eliminated, social life falls apart. What results is "nihilism," sustained by bizarre counterfactual examples featuring doppelgangers and body transfers that make life as we know it unintelligible. The alternative Hornsby prescribed was not a return to ghostly mental substance, but a "naive naturalism" that assumes "minded" human beings potentially conscious of their circumstances. The actions of a "minded" person cannot be understood from a purely extensional, impersonal point of view, as a predetermined causal sequence from neural event, to bodily movement, to physical consequences. Human life depends on the ability to understand action as a person's action, an aspect of coherent patterns in attitudes and beliefs governed by ideals. Behind attempts to eliminate mental talk in favor of descriptions of neural events, Hornsby saw faulty ontology. If naturalism means that there is nothing in the world except individual bits of matter and conglomerates of bits of matter, then there are no persons, actions, or subjects. If, however, naturalism means that not all aspects of reality are reducible to fusions of atomic bits, then persons and actions, as well as possible understanding of persons and actions, reappear.

Hornsby's conclusion left open the possibility of a style of philosophizing rooted in concern for social consequences. The quantitative logic taken as definitive of ration-

ality had cast a restrictive and distorting grid on reality. Philosophical questions are not all about objects that can be ordered into sets or equated with a fusion of simpler components. “A belief that  $p$ ,” “a desire for  $q$ ” might be anonymous tokens in logical games played by philosophers, but a person’s beliefs and desires concern dynamic objects not reducible to elementary particles or elementary propositions. How are a woman’s or man’s beliefs and desires formed? In what ways does desire permeate judgment? Should the goal of thought be a coherent web of belief that maximizes pleasurable sensations and promotes survival? Or should a person strive for other kinds of thinking, related to the material world in different ways?

If feminism was at work in currents of analytic thought, it also was at work in Continental philosophies of subjectivity. Here the other side of the Kantian dilemma took precedence: not how to explain away the mind given scientific determinism and materialism but how to understand the subject who is the source of knowledge. The problem was not what to do with the mind, but what to do with reality outside the mind. Immediate material existence had been bracketed out by Husserl in transcendental reflection. Instrumental reason and its technological products were condemned by Heidegger as dehumanizing. Material circumstance was denied as the determinant of personality in Sartre’s existentialism. The body disappeared, was tentatively revived by Merleau-Ponty, disappeared again in Derrida’s linguistic reworking of Husserlian phenomenology (see “Phenomenology,” Chapter 15). In the end what was left were systems of meaning, “representations” cast up by language. The subject remained, not as a physical brain or cognitive function, but as a subject place fixed in grammar, given substance in an ensemble of signifiers that identify that place as male or female, white or of color, straight or gay. “Women” figured, not as minded persons or embodied subjects, but as an idea or concept of “woman” different from and in subordination to “man.” A primal gender opposition at the center of an inescapable matrix of oppositional meaning – nature/culture, passion/reason, woman/man, slave/master, body/mind – held in place women’s subordinate identity.

As interest in Continental structuralism, post-structuralism and postmodernism grew, feminists responded to the new structural semantics of gender in different ways. Some were energized by post-structuralist and postmodern critiques of delusive unity of the Kantian or Husserlian “subject.” Drawing on the neo-Freudian psychoanalytic theories of Lacan and on Derrida’s critique of presence as the basis for meaning, feminists attacked the philosophical subject as a fraud, an attempt to manufacture substance and presence. “Any theory of the subject has already been appropriated “au masculine,” wrote Irigaray (1985). If a woman attempts to assert herself as a rational subject – becomes a philosopher for example – she only buys into her own objectification. She becomes the truth-telling, logic-wielding theorizing subject, placing herself, given the symbolic identification of woman with nature, matter, earth, body, as an object to be worked, owned, grasped, penetrated.

For feminists it was a chastening diagnosis. If beliefs, desires, and ideals are not individual events within an individual, and not the fruit of dynamic interactions with reality either, but “constituted” within systems of representation organized around the “name of the father,” whether those systems are ordered or disordered

hardly matters. Feminist freedom to think, and to act creatively and constructively disappears. The would-be feminist activist is caught in a web of belief with the only recourse a self-defeating refusal to speak in intelligible terms. Given that reality is a linguistic construction not of anyone's making, there would seem to be no way to escape oppressive either/or identities. Much feminist philosophizing in the 1980s and 1990s was concerned with negotiating this Continental challenge. Techniques of "writing the feminine" were examined and analyzed. Michel Foucault (1926–84) was studied for ways temporarily and locally to elude the power of reason and science on physical bodies. Deconstruction was adopted as a technique to expose inconsistencies and incoherence in any attempt to establish stable logical sequences. Some left philosophy altogether for activist work, redressing in practical ways the violence done to women.

A sustained and complex treatment of the problem of the postmodern subject came from Judith Butler (1993; 1997). Butler (1956– ) reviewed several decades of feminist attempts to rethink agency and consciousness within the context of Continental post-structuralism. Not only were women defined as "not men," said Butler, the oppositional structure of structural semantics is itself oppressive. Either/or logic makes it necessary to be either a man or a woman, enforces heterosexuality, and bans homosexuality. To be someone, a subject must take on an identity, male or female, white or colored, father or mother. Like a straitjacket, discourse traps subjects in preconstructed identities and behaviors. How – by what power – is an inferiorized psyche formed? asked Butler. The standard answer is that certain attitudes and beliefs are "internalized." This assumes that there are pre-existing minds into which ideas are transplanted and from which they might be expunged. But if one's very existence as a subject depends upon a place in a system of signs, there would seem to be only two alternatives: resignation to the fact that radical consciousness and action are impossible, or search for a stance outside established linguistic and social forms, a quest doomed to failure as subjects only further entangle themselves in compromised meanings. "Woman" produces "real" women, subjects with given identities, not by reference to any pre-existing unifying natural presence but by ruling out what real women are not (not masculine, not queer, not androgynous ... ). Because the list of identifying features is never complete, warned Butler, identity politics based on "natural kinds" such as "woman" or "black" or "gay" inevitably dissolve into factional dispute. There is a progressive alternative, argued Butler. Once the myth of rigid designation to natural kind is dissolved, names like "woman" and "queer" can be reinhabited and resignified. Refusing illusory utopian remedies, Butler cited the potential for liberation potential in "speech acts," in conscious citation and "performance" of stigmatized identities.

Another move was to attempt to resurrect the body. Subjects, feminist philosophers pointed out, have bodies marked by sex, race, and other physical determinants, a fact that Continental philosophies of subjectivity ignored. Moira Gatens (1996) turned to the non-dualist philosophy of Spinoza for inspiration. There was no twentieth-century philosophy of the body, noted Gatens, that feminists could draw on to understand the power politics of abortion, contraception, and sexual assault. The body was seen in physicalist terms as a mechanism or in idealist terms as a conception of the mind,



all of which perpetuated dualist illusion. In Spinoza, Gatens found a philosophy of the person as a dynamic being with two expressions of thought and extension, in interaction with others and with the world, constantly changing and striving. The result of thinking of the body in non-dualist terms, rather than terms of a male “imagining” based on a man’s bodily relations with women, Gatens suggested, might be ways of thinking about sociality, ethics, and politics that take into consideration women’s bodily experience. Further analyses of embodiment came from Rosa Braidotti (1991) and Elizabeth Grosz (1995).

It was not only the masculine identity of disembodied subjects that was in question but a subject’s race, class, and ethnic identity. Theories of the subject, embodied or disembodied, are a product of white minds, said Hispanic philosopher Maria Lugones in a pair of influential essays (Lugones and Spelman 1986; Lugones 1987). What characterizes the subjectivity of Hispanic and other women of color, argued Lugones, is neither physiology nor entrapment in a conceptual scheme, but experience in a real borderland between dominant and exploited cultures. Forced to travel between “worlds of sense,” a woman of mixed or mestizo identity understands mechanisms of oppression and possible escapes from that oppression in ways that monolingual and monocultural subjects cannot.

A complementary treatment of non-white subjects came from Patricia Hill Collins (1990). Black woman’s subjectivity, said Hill Collins, is necessarily “dual.” They see themselves in the symbolic terms of dominant white culture as “mammy,” “welfare mother,” “matriarch,” and “whore,” but given the degrading nature of these identities they also see themselves as themselves. The result is that they can look at semantic categories from a distance, and understand that the ideology in which those categories are embedded is not uniform or cohesive. So negative are white discourse’s images for black women that there can be no doubt that they distort reality, and black women are able to develop a resistant internal sense of self.

“Who am I?” was not only a theoretical question for women like Hill Collins and Lugones, but part of an ongoing project of reworking feminine identities. Once a female “subject” turned and considered herself in a move seemingly essential to moral freedom and responsible agency, another subject appeared that might also have to be critically examined and overcome. Without reliable knowledge and realistic social categories the thinking feminine subject could seem trapped in an endless round of self-questioning. Theories of man’s knowledge were readily available, but no theory of a woman’s knowledge. The question remained: Is there any way to achieve knowledge of self and world certain enough to stop the process of self-reflection and become the basis for “minded” responsible action consistent with feminist ideals?

### **Feminism in epistemology**

In philosophy, the question “who is it who claims to know?” is typically eclipsed by the supposedly more fundamental question: not “who” but “how” is knowledge properly acquired and justified? In an age of science, if any question remained for philosophy to answer it was this. Natural philosophy was now the province of the physical sciences.

The nature of man was determined by the human sciences. Normative ethics and aesthetics were delegated to moralists and art critics. The ultimate justification of methods in science was left for the philosophers, who offered a variety of positivist, constructionist, holistic answers to the question of how knowledge is possible. The very purpose of these accounts was removal of “who” of personality and perspective, a removal seen as necessary for science’s objectivity and truth. When proper methods and procedures were identified, it would not matter who produced knowledge or why. Biases, prejudices, and preconceived ideas held by the producers of knowledge would be ruled out. This ideal, of a personality-free knowledge and its attendant projection of authority and universality, marked twentieth-century theories of knowledge in both the analytic and Continental traditions. The essential structures of subjectivity that Husserl’s phenomenology mapped had no sexual, gender, or racial identity. Frege’s “thoughts,” ultimate building blocks of meaning in constructing the logic of science, were the thoughts of “everyone,” man or woman, western or non-western, gay or straight. The sensory events and occasion sentences that grounded empiricist theories of knowledge from Russell to Carnap were not observed or spoken by individuals with identities, but were anonymous, experienced by any normal “observer.”

Feminist philosophers were not the only ones to express doubt about this ideal of objectivity in knowledge. As the century wore on, Kuhn’s incommensurable paradigms, Feyerabend’s relativity, sociological science studies, Quine’s ontological relativity and inscrutability of reference, all clouded the possibility of complete objectivity. But in few of these critiques of certainty was knowledge understood as personal motivated action in the Hornsby sense, or in any way shaped by the bodies or imaginations of scientists of specific genders, incomes, nationalities, or cultural identifications. If scientists and the philosophers who theorized about science happened to be predominately men or white or of a particular ethnicity resident in a particular geographical location, or involved in particular social or political relationships, this was not considered relevant to the cognitive status of the theories they produced. To think otherwise, went the standard wisdom, was to misunderstand the difference between accidents surrounding the discovery of a theory and a theory’s justification. The methods of justification used in the various sciences might not be infallible or even commensurable, but their purpose was to transcend bias and personal interest.

Women philosophers, whose inferiority as women had often been the subject of scientific research, were less inclined to accept scientific methods without question. Feminist critical studies documented bias and distortion in many scientific fields: in anthropological theories of man the hunter, in brain studies that showed weakness in women’s mathematical skills, in psychological studies that proved women’s inferior moral sense, in biology texts that pictured “passive” female eggs invaded by “active” male sperm. Given the many examples, it was hard not to think that “who” conducted research might have made a difference.

A first response was a call for an alternate paradigm that would validate knowledge in traditionally female-dominated fields like nursing and teaching. “Women’s ways of knowing” would include emotion, be empathic rather than analytic, come from feelings of oneness with nature, interact with rather than dominate nature, understand

natural processes as organic rather than mechanistic. Immediately, a first surge of enthusiasm was checked by second thoughts. To aspiring women scientists, “women’s ways of knowing” could seem a reversion to pre-modern superstition, producing enclaves to which feminist research could be safely consigned while well-funded mainstream science continued on unchallenged. To speak of “women’s knowledge” might imprison women in feminine essence. It might wrongly imply that women subjects are all the same, a presumption vigorously protested by vocal constituencies of women of color, gay women, working-class women.

A scientist might be male, but he was also probably white, and either of North American or European descent, identities that colored his thinking as much as his gender or sex. “Ways of knowing” proliferated, not just “women’s ways” but lesbian, Africanist, mestizo knowledges. The conclusion that knowledge is relative to many different perspectives seemed inevitable, prompting a deeper worry. If reality is constructed out of various incommensurable conceptual schemes, the truth of competing theories can never be established. Feminist science or Africanist science is no better than masculinist western science. There is no way to decide between them except by fiat or arbitrary choice. As a result, whatever faction is in power will have to dictate what is to count as knowledge.

Feminist philosophers energetically debated the dangers of relativism throughout the 1980s and 1990s. One response was to return to scientific empiricism, but with renewed diligence as to the possibility of bias. Repeatability of experiments, insistence that contrary evidence not be discounted, well-formed hypotheses, and logical clarity would lead to objective results. Faith in the reliability of empirical methods, however, was undermined by a growing consensus among mainstream philosophers that theory is underdetermined by evidence, that scientific ontologies are relative, and references ultimately inscrutable. If it is always possible that another theory might just as well account for empirical evidence, male or other bias can never be completely ruled out. In mainstream theory of knowledge two positions were popular: a “naturalized” epistemology that eschewed normativity for descriptive accounts of evolved ways of dealing with the world as exemplified in contemporary science, and a scientific realism that left it to scientific experts to identify the objects of scientific research. Neither approach, it seemed to many feminists, provided sufficient protection against flaws in thinking that were targets of feminist critique.

A second “feminist standpoint” approach borrowed from Marxism. Nancy Hartstock acknowledged the importance of perspective and at the same time hoped to avoid self-defeating relativism (1984). Marx had argued that science in western countries was “bourgeois” science, science from the standpoint of a ruling capitalist class; classical economics and functional sociology served capitalist and colonial interests even as they pretended to present a neutral and objective worldview. Similarly, argued Hartstock, western science is male science tailored to men’s interests in controlling wealth and exercising power. Marx posited a “universal” working class, whose perspective would prevail. The challenge for feminist standpoint theorists was to show that women had a similarly privileged viewpoint. If male workers understand capitalism better than capitalist owners who have vested interests to defend, women, less privileged, with less

to lose, and less ego to defend, might be in an even better position. The work of Nobel Prize-winning microbiologist Barbara McClintock (1902–92) was often cited as an example. At first ignored by her colleagues, McClintock used intuitive methods and models and eventually changed the way genes and genetic processes are understood. Male scientists had failed to understand genetic processes, feminist philosophers of science such as Evelyn Fox Keller (1936–) charged, because they came to biology with flawed masculinist conceptions of natural “law,” master molecules, and linear causation (Keller 1983; 1985).

The choice between objectivity according to standard empiricist logic on the one hand and the possibly relativistic acceptance of different conceptual schemes on the other was uncomfortable for many feminist philosophers. Sandra Harding (1935– ), reviewing the successes and failures of feminist empiricist and standpoint epistemologies, suggested several ways to negotiate the dilemma. A “strong objectivity” could be demanded in which critical scrutiny is given not just to theory but also to methods used to establish theory, relations in the community of scientists that produced it, and the presuppositions and interests that motivate research programs (1991). The credentials of “local” ways of knowing, better suited to different cultures and environments than western science, might be validated in their own settings with due attention to the needs and methods of non-western peoples (1993).

If feminist epistemologists were at work in analytic philosophy, they were also active in Continental philosophy. At the beginning of the century, Husserl addressed some of the same questions as Russell and Carnap. If scientific theories – and even the mathematical idioms in which those theories are expressed – change, can there be any noncontingent grounding for science? Even more important, if science alone decides on its methods, what is the role of philosophy? Russell and Carnap bowed to science’s authority, reserving the right for philosophy to reconstruct the logic that best accounted for science’s obvious success. Husserl, focusing on the subjectivity that produces logic, was less willing to leave the first or final word to science. Science claimed to describe the world, but its theories would be empty formulae with no roots in thought. A philosopher can uncover essences that are the very conditions for intelligibility and the beginning point of any knowledge. Science, grounded in philosophy, will have to return to the philosopher’s intuited life-world conceptions to be understood.

By the 1960s Husserl’s phenomenological attack on the independence of science was replaced by more radical claims. In a climate of counter-culture rebellion, Michel Foucault claimed to show in a series of historical/philosophical studies that the modern “episteme” that generates objective knowledge is not rooted in essential structures of subjectivity, but is a historically specific mix of discourses, logics, and practices that mandate non-judicial and impersonal exercises of power over physical bodies in prisons, institutions, medical facilities. (For further discussion of Foucault, see “French philosophy in the twentieth century,” Chapter 19.) It was only a small step to apply Foucault’s argument to women, whose bodies had so often been the object of scrutiny and control. Sciences of cosmetology, weight control, plastic surgery, argued Sandra Bartky (1990) exert a violent discipline on female bodies.

Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) presented another model for radical feminist doubt about truth in science. Tracing Husserl's generative studies of the emergence of essences from nature, body, psychology, Derrida traced the breakup of the phenomenological project to ground objectivity in subjectivity. Only language, and specifically writing, stabilizes meaning, argued Derrida, and it must do so on its own. There are no essential presences that words name, only a primal twist of "difference," a trace that generates fragile, always contradictory systems of oppositions that support linguistic meaning. As a result, no sharp line between knowledge claims in science and imaginative literature can be drawn, no line between fiction and truth. Postmodern critiques like Derrida's, argued theorists like Jane Flax (1990), had a natural affinity with feminism. To undermine the unitary subject, the transcendence of reason, and the idea that history is progressive is to question patriarchy. Nancy Fraser (1947– ) and Linda Nicholson agreed – postmodernism could be a useful corrective to ethnocentricity and essentialism – but added a caveat: space has to be left for situated social criticism (Fraser and Nicholson 1990).

The question remained about the grounding for critique. If knowledge, and objects of knowledge, are constituted – or worse, constituted for purposes of domination – then the knowing subject who claims universality for his or her beliefs is not only a fraud but a tyrant. The claim to know with objectivity and truth is an imposition of authority that forbids alternative thought. To posit in addition to masculinist science an alternative feminist science is to mimic the master, a move that inevitably creates new "abject" objects of knowledge. Was this to give up any hope of realizing feminist hopes for the future? Was it to answer Kant's question "What can we know?" with the nihilist response, "Nothing, nothing unless one tyrannizes over and dominates others, nothing if one does not want to look out at the world with arrogant male eyes"? But critique was no more exempt from such doubt than positive theorizing. If there is no solid ground on which to base a truth claim, how is critique possible? How can a theory be said to be false if there is no basis for the judgment? As dangers and merits of postmodern and post-structuralist theory were vigorously debated by feminists in the last decades of the century, several new strains of feminist epistemology emerged.

One emphasis in much feminist epistemology was on relations, relations between producers of knowledge, and relations between producers and the objects of knowledge. There was general agreement that the assumption of a lone (probably male) scientist recording data innocent of preconception and constructing logically consistent theory was imaginary. Actual scientific research goes on in communities within which methods of experimentation and theoretical models and metaphors evolve. Nor are researchers independent of wider society. Relations by funding and affiliation with political, cultural, and commercial interests shape scientific interests and commitments. One hope was that with feminist insight critical thought could be fostered within such communities. One way to accomplish this was by simple inclusion. If women and men with diverse identities and affiliations were encouraged to become scientists, fresh perspectives, interest, concerns in science would naturally be voiced and addressed. From European critical theory came a further consideration. If truth is not transcendent but a result of rational discourse open to differing opinions, discourse

requires a certain kind of speaking community. Divergent viewpoints must be not only articulated but also heard and understood. Critical theorist Seyla Benhabib (1950– ) called attention to the radical institutional and funding changes necessary for a speaking situation in which women's and diverse voices enter into debate on an equal basis (1992).

A second emphasis was on the relation between scientists and the objects of scientific study. Inspired by critiques of mainstream epistemology, feminist researchers in psychology and sociology experimented with interactive research involving human subjects. Research models were developed in which battered women assisted in isolating causes for violence against women and in developing remedies for that violence. Women physicians forced male physicians to consider new kinds of cooperative relations in which patients were not passive followers of doctor's orders but active participants in their cures. Even in "hard" sciences like physics, Keller and others argued that intuitive interactive understanding of organisms as dynamic systems rather than as mechanisms subject to linear causation and manipulative control increased understanding.

Helen Longino (1944– ) proposed standards of "epistemic virtue." Rules of method and foundational truths, she said, cannot guarantee results. Values are an integral part of good science, nor can any sharp line be drawn between cognitive and non-cognitive values. Empirical adequacy and originality are only a beginning requirement for understanding. As important are recognition of "ontological heterogeneity," complexity of relationship, applicability to human need, and the diffusion of power among producers of knowledge, virtues that refer not to logical adequacy of theory, but to relations between researchers, between researchers and objects of research, and between the scientific establishment and the greater community (Longino 1994).

Feminists from non-western traditions foresaw further changes. Foucault described in detail the discipline that western sciences like criminology and psychology had forced on western bodies; women from "developing" countries saw even more destructive discipline exerted by western science and epistemology on non-western environments. Vandana Shiva (1952– ) drew from the experience of rural Indian women (1996). The foundationalist empiricist paradigm, argued Shiva, went hand in hand with interests in accumulating capital wealth at the expense of colonized "underdeveloped" regions. The result was not only an erasure of local cultures and "maldevelopment" that brought poverty to many peoples, but incipient ecological disaster due to deforestation, global warming, depletion of water reserves, desertification, and loss of diversity. Nor, Shiva charged, is this due to a wrong "use" of objective science. The philosophical notion that reality is solely describable as bits of matter, fused together to make bigger bits, provides a metaphysical foundation for exploitation that ignores dynamic systems, equilibrium between aspects of nature, and reciprocity between humans and the natural world.

In a review of twentieth-century coherentist epistemologies, Linda Alcoff (1996) looked forward to the abandonment of epistemologies generated historically in an age of Anglo-European economic and social dominance. Methods, she said, suited to new relations between men and women, and between different races and cultures, have

to be developed that constantly negotiate multicultural values. Not only will new sciences be necessary in the twenty-first century, but also new epistemological and ontological paradigms. Alcoff's mixing of critical diagnosis and normative prescription was characteristic of much feminist epistemology at the end of the century. Given the fact that science had not always promoted human well-being, given the realization that no unmediated description of nature is possible, the choice between a naturalized epistemology that refuses normative judgment and a nihilist denial of science's authority might seem inevitable. Feminists, however, were unwilling to give up hope for a non-foundational global science of the future that would serve diverse human needs.

### Feminism in ethics

In the early twentieth-century struggle for voting rights, feminist activists drew freely on utilitarian and democratic philosophies for arguments to justify their demands. They cited the beneficial "utility" of women's education and contribution to the work force. They pointed out the "greatest happiness of the greatest number" that would result when universal suffrage allowed women to register their preferences. They argued that women have the same "essential nature" as men, and the same "natural right" to political representation. Kantian principle was invoked; acting according to a law one can will to be universal requires that women be taken into account.

In the aftermath of World War II, with women forced back into prewar domesticity, came doubts that liberal standards of morality and justice were sufficient to bring about liberation. Women now worked, but remained clustered in low-paying service jobs while at home they continued to do the majority of unpaid childcare and housework. Women voted, but, as Emma Goldman warned, often they voted on principles that were socially conservative and protective of private interest. More important, the "right" to vote, attend college, apply for jobs was for many a right in name only, unexercised by women conditioned to think of themselves as inferior, burdened by childcare and domestic responsibilities, subject to rape and assault.

Socialist women had not fared much better. In Communist countries, constitutions guaranteed women full equality, but in public women continued to be marginalized and exploited while in private they did the major share of domestic labor and were subject to abuse. In western countries, women enlisted in radical civil rights and anti-war movements of the 1960s, but soon found that they were unlikely to rise to leadership positions. Western socialism gave lip service to women's liberation; in practice male socialists were no more willing than liberals to cede power to women. Lingering in the background was the assumption, seldom voiced, but with a long philosophical history, that women are less moral than men, less focused on principle, less rational when it comes to determining ultimate value, too concerned with personal relations and emotions to be impartial in ethical matters or resolute in matters of justice.

At this point of frustration came two catalysts that led to a flowering of feminist ethical theory in the latter decades of the century. The first was social psychologist Carol Gilligan's studies of women's moral thinking (1982). Standard psychological

tests for moral development, on which women often scored lower than men, used philosophical ethics as guideline. The lowest level of moral development was taken to be egoistic self-interest; an advance was made when general utility was calculated. At the highest level of moral development a moral agent acted on Kantian principle regardless of consequences. At all levels of decision-making, autonomy and reason were the mark of moral agency, whether as objective calculation of private or group interests, or as rational grasp of universalizable principle. Gilligan's conclusions were provocative.

Women, said Gilligan, did not approach an abortion decision either as utilitarians or Kantians. They were not objective calculators of pleasure nor did they adopt principle and act on principle regardless of consequences. Emotionally involved, aware and protective of complex relations with others, they struggled to find courses of action that would prevent harm and preserve relationships. Gilligan's conclusion was not that women are less moral than men. It was that women think differently from men in moral matters, in ways that are complementary, or even superior to a man's sense of justice.

Feminist ethical theory, freed from the confining alternatives of utility and principle, was revitalized. Not only, it seemed, were there "women's ways of knowing" to explore, but also "women's ways" of virtue and goodness. Women's traditional care-giving and teaching of young children was used as a basis for "ethics of care." Nel Noddings (1929– ) was a leading proponent. Values, Noddings argued, cannot be located in reason or rules, which are not a reliable protection against evil, but in concern for and responses to others (1984). She described in detail subtle and demanding exchanges between teacher and student, care-giver and patient, parent and child that allow both to grow and to prosper. Sara Ruddick proposed "maternal thinking" as the basis for a feminine ethics, in her book of that title (1989). The evil of war and genocide can be justified by appeals to utility or principle. In their place, Ruddick proposed a practicalist ethics rooted in responsible parenting. Mothers, as they care for children, develop a distinctive metaphysics, cognitive style, and matrix of values. Maternal virtue, claimed Ruddick, can be extended to governance and international relations to advance global peace and prosperity.

In these and other versions of distinctively feminine moral practice, an alternative paradigm emerged of virtue. To be good was not to stand off from personal involvement, to fight down instincts and emotions, to refuse partisan interests, and reason dispassionately from utility or principle. A virtuous woman looked at the unique context of a moral decision rather than abstracted features. She fostered empathetic concern for others so that she would know how to prevent harm. She engaged in collaborative discussion and tried to reach moral consensus. Instead of refusing emotion, she fostered in herself good feelings of love and care for others. She did not act as a lone individual but as a daughter, mother, care-giver, and friend. She did not pretend to bring about a utopia that could easily lapse into dystopia, but envisioned realistic and complex particular goods. Acting from calculations of utility or on principle absolves guilt; when good faith calculation from available information, or from principled action, turns out badly one escapes blame. An emerging feminine



virtue ethics imposed a greater burden of responsibility. Not only ruptured personal relations, but poverty in developing countries, environmental collapse, causalities in war were potential objects of feminine care and maternal thinking.

Again there were second thoughts. Was this to essentialize women? To suggest that all women have the same moral sense? If so, it was a claim that offended women of different backgrounds and cultures. Did feminine “ethics of care” and “maternal ethics” assign women to the same care-giving self-sacrificial roles that traditionally restricted their autonomy and agency? Did care and maternity lay on women a crippling burden of guilt given that there was no final absolution, no way to limit the sphere of a responsibility for others? At the same time, there was little enthusiasm for a return to calculated utility or Kantian reason, ideals that for many feminist thinkers were associated with the illusions of masculinity.

A second catalyst came from Continental postmodernism and post-structuralism. If, in postmodern accounts of knowledge, truth claims were forms of authoritarian violence, to proclaim an action good or just could seem an even greater imposition. It is possible to remain unmoved by truth, but value judgments have imperative force. If postmodern accounts of knowledge denied the existence of pre-linguistic facts, even more suspect were non-natural or intrinsic qualities of goodness. Pleasure, good will, happiness, all had been claimed as guiding presences, standards of value that statements of moral obligation should reflect. Throughout the history of philosophy, the relative merits of standards had been contested and debated. Now that long history of debate was put on a different footing. In question, it seemed, was not moral truth – care rather than justice, mothering rather than war – but contested bids for power. In the new postmodernism, there was no founding presence of masculine or feminine goodness to be intuited in the depth of a subject’s soul, grasped as an objective template, recognized as a universal value. “Good,” like everything else, was a function of *différance*, “bad” turned back against itself in twisting oppositional matrixes of value whose pretense to stability and order is the mark of oppressive authority.

Again there were second thoughts. If feminists had to limit themselves to the deconstruction of moral authority, if no claim to positive justice could be made without the claimant becoming an oppressor, how was feminist critique, or any social critique, to be grounded? French theorists – Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault – all attempted to absolve postmodernism and post-structuralism of political quietism with limited success. For feminists there was much at stake. Could moral autonomy, seemingly necessary for moral agency and moral justification, be rescued from the postmodern claim that subjects and values are constituted in language? Could moral justification be reconceptualized in ways that accommodate postmodern critiques but also take account of women’s moral experience? If autonomy was important for feminist agency, it had to be autonomy that acknowledged ties of relationship and societal positioning. If standards of evaluation were available by which to condemn the wrongs done to women, they would have to be standards that assumed no totalizing and oppressive principles.

In response to these questions came detailed studies, some avowedly feminist and some not, which, in the words of one editor of a collection of essays by women

ethicists, “reset the moral compass” (Calhoun 2004). Abandoning the high ground of universal theories of right or justice, women philosophers examined the nuances and ambiguities of concrete moral life. In the place of fictitious and hyper-real examples they described commonplace dilemmas that arise in daily life. Moral decisions were realistically depicted as made by dependent and vulnerable women and men in relation with others. Women philosophers drew not only on standard examples in utilitarian or deontological ethics, but also on literature, psychoanalysis, and sociology to describe homely virtues such as diligence, decency, trust. They emphasized the element of moral luck and the importance of narration in moral deliberation and evaluation. A reworked conception of autonomy was of particular interest. Women ethicists worked to describe a realistic personal identity, shaped in interaction with others, but at the same time supporting choice based on reflection. A woman finds herself as daughter, wife, mother, lover, friend, but somehow out of these diverse relations she must achieve a stable sense of self so as to act in coherent ways. With no universal principle to make decisions automatic, she must acquire Hornsby’s agency and be able to give reasons that refer back to her own ideals.

Annette Baier (1929– ) championed trust as a way to straddle the choice between relational dependency and rational autonomy (2004). Trust, she argued, is the fabric of moral life, crucial in ethical relations as response to the human condition of mutual vulnerability. Trust requires not rational objectivity but a repertoire of interpersonal virtues such as thoughtfulness, considerateness, courtesy, patience, responsibility, respect. But trust, said Baier, must always be tempered with anti-trust. There is no easy categorical answer to the question: “Whom should women trust?” No mark of sex, race, or occupation guarantees trustworthiness. Nurses, mothers, care-givers, all on occasion harm those under their care. The key to responsible agency, argued Baier, is not so much in the corrective logic of moral calculation as it is in careful attentive distinctions between lesser and greater risks. Judgment is needed, judgment that takes one’s own dependency into account.

Christine Korsgaard’s neo-Kantian ethics, although not explicitly feminist, addressed similar questions. Investigating the “source of normativity” (1996), Korsgaard (1952–) rejected the bugbear of a scientific worldview in which free will is impossible. Like Hornsby, she focused on a person’s ability to reflect on beliefs and desires and decide whether to act on them. The decision should be based on principle, said Korsgaard, but not on the empty formalism of a Kantian “categorical imperative.” More is required than reason. A moral agent must think of herself as human, as part of family, friendship, national communities, and ultimately as a member of a possible human kingdom of ends. This requires a self in the world in actual and potential community with others.

Also renegotiated by feminist ethicists was moral justification. Foundationalism based on non-natural intuited properties of goodness, or the supposed intrinsic good of rational principle or utility was no longer possible, but the alternative of relativism in ethics was equally unappealing given the feminist sense of wrongs done to women and other oppressed groups. To escape the either/or of foundationalism or relativism, some feminists drew on procedural accounts of justice popular in the 1970s and 1980s. The

hypothetical contractualism of John Rawls (1921–2002) dominated much mainstream analytic ethics in that period, but made little reference to gender inequities. An imagined social contract between heads of households left relations in the family outside the reach of justice. Susan Okin (1946–2004) in a 1989 feminist critique of Rawlsian justice suggested remedial additions. Justice and fairness have to prevail in “private” family relations as well as public life; any man devising standards of justice has to be able to put himself in the place of a woman.

Even when justice as fairness was extended to internal family matters, the demand that a theorist put himself or herself in the position of least advantaged others raised additional questions. Can a privileged male philosopher or policy-maker put himself in a woman’s situation so as to come up with just arrangements that are to her advantage? Can he place his sex and race behind a “veil of ignorance,” and imagine that he is a disadvantaged African-American unwed mother? There was doubt among some feminist philosophers whether imaginative empathy with the situation of oppressed others is possible and whether private hypothetical reflection can ever result in universally applicable standards of morality or justice. Should not the disadvantaged speak for themselves in real and not simulated dialogue?

For critical theorists such as Seyla Benhabib, Jürgen Habermas’s rational discourse provided a better procedural model, requiring actual public discussion to determine right and wrong (Benhabib 1992). In “ideal speech situations,” when diverse viewpoints are heard and debated, rational debate determines what is right. Again there were doubts and revisions. Habermas’s distinction between private and public matters, said Benhabib, had to be overcome so that women’s abuse and disadvantage in the family were not removed from discussion. In addition, rational adversarial debate had to be supplemented with empathic understanding. Social theorist Nancy Fraser (1947– ) went further, questioning whether disadvantaged groups like welfare mothers would be able to articulate their needs “rationally” in public forums and be heard (1986). Iris Young (1990) questioned the very possibility of the empathetic understanding that was a prerequisite for a hypothetical “justice as fairness” or Benhabib’s ideal speech situation. To claim to put oneself in the position of oppressed others, Young argued, is not only impossible but also disrespectful.

Doubts about procedural accounts of justice raised larger questions about the moral value of counterfactual visions of imagined social contracts or ideal speech situations. Rawlsian justice required the impossible exercise of forgetting one’s own identity. Habermas required that debaters lay aside personal interests and listen to others with open minds. Both required domination-free discourse in which oppressed viewpoints can be expressed. In reality there are formidable barriers to the expression and understanding of long-standing unvoiced wrongs, wrongs that often have no names and are not easily talked about. Public discourse, suited to rules of order and well-established principles, can be a poor venue for the moral work of isolating and describing evils not yet clearly delineated. Alison Jaggar reviewing the history of feminist ethics pointed to the philosophical importance of separatist groups – women, black women, lesbian women, Hispanic women – meeting to share narratives and experiences and do the conceptual work of describing and defining wrongs (2000a). She pointed to

the importance of such groups in the history of philosophy, citing as examples the Vienna Circle and the Frankfurt School, where relatively closed circles of like-minded thinkers worked to develop new terms and new principles of analysis. In such groups the adversarial style of argumentative rational debate was suspended in favor of active listening and an attempt to develop common understanding. Out of separatist women's groups came new moral concepts: "heterosexism," "sexual harassment," "date rape," "objectification." Jaggar added a caveat: private enclaves formed to escape the dangers of dogmatism and exclusion must eventually return to public discourse and open discussion.

One source of feminist philosophical concepts was discussions between women from different constituencies. Martha Nussbaum gestured to the important conceptual work of cross-cultural understanding as contributor to a 2001 collection, *What is Philosophy?* Philosophers, said Nussbaum, have an important role to play redefining concepts like "development" that are the basis for economic policy-making. "Development" measured by gains in GNP may be an ultimate value only for western philosophers and policy-makers. From the perspective of women in "developing" countries, gains in GNP can be useless or harmful if men continue to control the wealth, social welfare is neglected, education unfunded, and public health neglected. But, said Nussbaum, postmodern relativism – the view that neoliberal western worldviews and traditional non-western cultures are incommensurable – is not the only alternative. Philosophy offers systematic and rigorous debate that can generate clearer concepts, but not necessarily when the debate is only between western academics. She noted that in meetings convened between philosophers and international economists, philosophers committed to various versions of epistemological theory made little attempt to communicate with economists who themselves continued to operate from prior assumptions and arguments. In contrast, in discussions with women in rural India, Nussbaum reached new understanding of the importance of property rights, work outside the home, and women's friendships, and was able to revise and strengthen an alternative "capabilities" approach to development.

At the end of the century, with ethnic wars in many parts of the world, with racial tensions growing in western countries, with growing conflict between rich and poor nations, there was a sense among feminists that values and ideals could no longer be western exports. Philosophers who move back and forth between professional philosophy and life in a variety of non-western cultures might be in a better position to develop global standards of right and justice than the privileged few who travel on the university lecture circuit or as members of international task forces. If it was a modernist fantasy to think that the knowing or moral self is autonomous, it might be a postmodern fantasy to think that values are constructed in the one hermetically sealed world of western semantics.

### Feminism in philosophy of language

At mid-century, studies in socio-linguistics brought new insight into linguistic sources of gender inequality. Grammatical gender divides the world of persons into masculine

and feminine. The generic use of “he” along with the species name “man” makes the subject of discourse male except in cases of feminine-identified roles like nurse or mother. Women are not “actors” or “stewards,” but diminutive and sexually charged “actresses” or “stewardesses.” Obligatory titles – Mr, Mrs, Miss – ignore a man’s marital status but make it a woman’s primal identity. Lexicons contain many more derogative sexual words for women than for men. Feminine speech styles – tag-on questions, avoidance of the assertive use of “I” – mark a woman’s relative hesitancy and lack of authority in speech. These and other revelations resulted in a call for language reform. By the last decades of the century, “inclusive language” was required in academic writing and in publishers’ guidelines.

Other more radical linguistic revisions were proposed. Feminist theologian Mary Daly (1928– ) used creative etymologies to convert insults like “hag” and “slut” to emblems of feminist power (1978). In France, Julia Kristeva (1941– ) called for a “revolution in poetic language” that would release the passionate maternal semiotic underlying the symbolic order of rationally ordered discourse (1974). Marilyn Frye looked for positive constructions of female difference generated as women relate to other women in separatist collective projects (1992). Rejecting both masculine assertiveness training for women and what she called a “vegetal blossoming” of passionate expression, Luce Irigaray called for a new “syntax” to support communication between men and women (1996, 1997). In Italy, Adriana Cavarero (1993) urged feminists to find a “fissure” by which finally to escape the whole ensemble of man-made concepts and begin to conceptualize from the women’s situation outside the categories of man-made discourse.

There was a sense, however, that a deeper semantics of gender difference was not so easily dislodged. Philosopher of law Catherine MacKinnon pointed out the role of male dominance in the formation of linguistic meaning (1987). Men in positions of power, said MacKinnon, name reality on their own terms, in ways adequate to their experience and reflecting reality as they see it. But words can be made to respond to women’s experience as well as men’s, and must be, if there is to be a rule of law to which both men and women are subject. At the center of any feminist movement, she said, must be the ability to participate in defining terms that create public norms and standards: words such as “rape,” “sexual assault,” “pornography.” The emergence of the legal term “sexual harassment” was of particular importance. Here was a phenomenon that had been an indistinguishable part of a neutral background of unnamed fact. The work of defining sexual harassment as a legal action singled out that phenomenon, marked it as important, and even more important, as wrong. A name, said MacKinnon does not create or construct an event; it allows events to be seen and judged.

A recurring theme in much feminist theorizing about language was the damaging effect of “dichotomy” as a deep structure of meaning. De Beauvoir had been one of the first but hardly the last to point out woman’s status as “unmarked other” defined as what is *not*, “not male,” “not rational,” “not quite human.” Post-Saussurean structural semantics only deepened a conviction among feminists that “hierarchical oppositions” – mind over body, civilized over native, man over woman, white over black, etc. – shape meaning in theoretical discourses that disadvantage women or minorities. The

status of any logic that required negation as a core operator was called into question, along with a deeper question about logic's relations to natural language. If logical form requiring oppositional meaning is built into all language – or into all Indo-European languages or into any language in which rational thought can be expressed – there is little point of talking about feminist reform. If a semantics of plus and minus features constitutes only an ideal template restricting and regularizing the messy ungrammatical business of everyday expression, the result is not very different. Feminist critics can speak, but not speak rationally in a way that carries authority. If on the other hand, dichotomous categories are the reflection of a possibly false or overly restricted concept of reason, or worse the reflection of an ideology of dominance, then it might be possible to develop logics and languages that restructure discourses of gender and race and, more speculatively, change relations between sexes and races. To this end, various non-standard feminist logics were proposed, including “relevant” logic, neo-Aristotelian term logic, John Dewey's instrumental logic, and a revival of aspects of Stoic logic (Falmagne and Hass 2002).

Beyond both reforms and revolutions in logic and language lingered what is perhaps the core question in philosophy of language. Does language construct the real, or is reality parceled out and individuated, ready to be noticed and correctly named? More specifically, whether they naturally occur or are imposed by standards of logic and rationality, do gender inequalities and gender asymmetries in semantic and grammatical structure reflect and represent the fact of women's inferior nature or lesser social status? Or do linguistic devices construct and maintain that inferior status? If language constructs the world, linguistic reform can change reality by reconfiguring semantic categories or by rescinding grammatical rules that privilege masculinity. If, on the other hand, language names pre-linguistic qualities and relations, the effect of reform is uncertain. Demands for inclusive language or new logics may result only in awkwardness, artificiality, and lack of meaning. Proposed non-sexist titles like “Ms” can become terms of humorous derision. Acquiescence to the demand for inclusive language can become sardonic adherence to political correctness. “Deviant” logics can be theoretical constructions with no effect on actual discourse.

Inevitably, feminist philosophers turned to ontology and metaphysics. How does language relate to the world? Are the things we talk about manufactured by language? Or is the role of language to designate and describe pre-linguistic natural kinds? The traditional philosophical framework for answering the question is triangular. Three elements must be put into proper relation: real objects and events, subjective concepts of ideas about those objects and events, and lastly language itself. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century empiricist philosophy focused on ideas and the correspondence of ideas with real qualities, treating language as secondary representation of ideas formed from sensory impressions. In the twentieth century attention shifted, away from psychology to language's structure, reference, and possible reform. Mathematical logic, reluctantly applied by Frege to natural language, was adopted by philosophers in English-speaking countries as the necessary structure of truth-stating language. Reference and meaning were reworked accordingly. Either meaning was “reduced” to references to sense-data, or sensory experience was bypassed as uncertain and

subjective and words made to refer directly to physical elements. Or language could be seen as a logically structured matrix that touches down on reality only at certain anchor points. As theoretical disputes continued about the nature of meaning and reference in a logically structured empirically based language, the technical work of translating the idioms of natural language into forms of modern mathematical logic was ongoing and considered in establishment circles to be the hard core of “real philosophy.” The logical ideal of a purely externalist language of science purged of ambiguity and subjectivity closed to citizen debate and questions of value troubled many feminists. Frege’s stated aim was to fashion a system by which thought could be mechanized, in which the ambiguities and nuances of natural language were eliminated (Nye 1990). A science that adopted such an idiom would be true, barricaded against misunderstanding or equivocation, free from subjective coloring and the taint of values. Relations between subjects and predicates would be governed by existential and universal quantifiers that eliminated both singular and qualitative reference. Sentences would state facts. They would be true if they matched up with fact, false if they did not. True and false propositions could be assembled in logical order according to truth-functional rules governing the use of logical connectives like “and” and “or.”

From a feminist point of view, however, this claim that science is or could be a “truth-machine” might block scrutiny of background assumptions, political motifs, metaphors, and images that shape objects and methods of scientific research that are responsible for biased research. If individuation of objects is informed by non-scientific concepts, values, experiences, and beliefs, if the relation of scientific language to physical reality is multidimensional and complex, truth in and out of science cannot be a simple matter of propositions in truth functional order, or countable objects gathered into sets. Even more important, a surface showing of logical inference might be used to paper over deep flaws in the identification and choice of facts and objects.

A beginning in clarifying feminist distrust of contemporary mathematical logic’s authority was made by Merrill and Jaakko Hintikka, in their 1983 paper “How can language be sexist?” The prevailing truth-theoretic semantics, said the Hintikkas, deals with structure but neglects reference. Unspoken interests that determine the kind of objects that are subject to quantification and the kind of propositions that are put in truth-functional order are not addressed. In fact, said the Hintikkas, ways in which objects are individuated can differ, depending on who is doing the individuating. Men, focused on individual objects, might devise logics with reference to objects identifiable across possible worlds; women with a different approach might sort objects according to relations in this world. The implications were far-reaching. Throughout the history of philosophy a reason given for women’s exclusion from rational pursuits had been a supposed failure to be logical. If, however, logic begins from a man-made domain of objects, the accusation that women are illogical says no more than that, for better or for worse, women do not talk and reason about the same things as men.

Both logic’s defenders and its feminist critics tended to speak of logic in the singular, as if one Logic took more or less perspicacious surface forms. Taking into account the Hintikkas’ suggestion of diversity, I looked at selected moments in the history of logic

to give a critical account of the genealogy of differing forms of classical, medieval, and modern truth-functional logic (Nye 1990). In my “reading,” logics were diverse human products, shaped by context, interest, and desire, subject, like any other form of expression, to quasi-hermeneutic interpretation and understanding. Given that a primary interest in developing a logic is often to place a discourse, practice, or institution beyond criticism, my interpretation of logic as codification of different styles of barricaded and authoritative speech could be seen as perverse. At the close of the century, for some, logic was still “the last word,” to be vigorously defended if all knowledge was not to collapse into meaningless contingency and postmodern relativism. Even though there was talk of jettisoning once sacred laws like that of the excluded middle in the light of new findings in physics, the truth of *modens ponens* and the law of non-contradiction were often claimed to mark a last dividing line between respectable doubt and rabid postmodern or politically motivated irrationality.

On the Continent, language theory tended to begin not with Frege but with structural linguistics. Words, said the structuralists, have meaning not “externally” because they refer to facts or objects, but “internally” because of relations between words. There was agreement on the need to bypass psychology – concepts and ideas cannot be individuated without language – but neither can terms refer directly to objects and events. Structural meaning is differential. “Woman” means woman not because it designates an identifiable natural kind, but because “woman” is an element in interlocking patterns of plus and minus features that define features of reality. Again there was cause for feminist concern. If direct reference to objects is eliminated and linguistic meaning is seen as internal to language, if there is no extra-linguistic presence or experience in the name of which masculine power and feminine inferiority can be questioned, critical feminism theory would seem to be impossible. Language change may occur, but not as a result of consciously directed reform. If male presence and female absence are organizing principles of language and at the very core of linguistic meaning, the name and power of the father is written into language and inescapable.

Some hope was given to French feminist linguists by “deconstruction.” Derrida’s exposure of the fragility of oppositional semantic structures inspired readings to break down the rigidity and the hierarchical order of any language with pretensions to logical order. Irigaray’s readings of canonical figures in philosophy such as Plato, Kant, and Descartes were models of transgressive exposure of a delusive masculine imaginary as it pretended to model a neutral and universal truth. Judith Butler’s proposed “performative” derailment of elements of semantic structure was another alternative. Once the myth of rigid designation to natural kind is dissolved, names like “woman” or “queer” can be reinhabited and resignified. No reality unmediated by language allows a reformer to stand back from language and dictate new usage consistent with reality; any attempt to do so only entangles the reformer in old categories. But language is not a static system. Meanings are perpetuated as words are repeatedly used, and when unconscious “use” is replaced by conscious citation, said Butler, both meaning and reality can change (Butler 1990).

Powerful as postmodern and post-structuralist critiques were in exposing the ways gender forms and deforms linguistic meaning, most feminists were unwilling



to abandon the possibility of referring to something other than language itself. In a postmodern climate, reference could no longer be taken for granted, either as established in one-to-one correlation between pre-linguistic essences and designated terms or as reduction to sense-data or some class of privileged physical element. But the feminist sense of otherness, of critical difference in perspective, of distorted masculine views on reality was too strong to accept confinement in what some critics called the “prison house of language.” For some analytic feminists Quine’s behaviorism provided a possible basis for translatability if not for certain reference. Others, myself included, questioned the ethnocentricity that Quine’s radical translator embodied, as well as set theory’s elision of the problem of concept formation (Nye 1998). The inclusion of an object in a designated set says nothing about how that set is formed and how the objects that make it up are individuated. If the formation of categories and identification of objects is the real groundwork of science, it is groundwork which set-theoretic logic ignores, ruling out critical scrutiny of ontological and epistemological commitments that predate logical inference. As a result, condoned by logic, indexes of development tracked in economics, diagnoses of mental illness in psychiatry, the identification of “non-democratic” forms of government as candidates for “regime change,” go unchallenged. A dangerous illusion is created of an ideal language in which preformed facts rigorously deployed guarantee truth.

The subject matter of philosophical semantics was never language as used by actual speakers and researchers. The aim of Russell and of those who came after him was not to describe speakers’ or writers’ meanings in science or elsewhere, but to lay out what could be “legitimately” meant by users of assertive language. Indeterminacy and personality that introduce subjectivity and so give rise to skepticism were to be eliminated as conceptual residue unworthy of philosophical attention. In contrast, the tendency among feminist philosophers was to return to actual spoken and written language in which there is no binary true or false. In natural language, truth is gradual, evidenced by infinite nuance expressible in prepositional attitudes (I think, believe, am certain, know, etc.), in extensive evaluative vocabularies (sure, probably, possible, inevitable, etc.), in subtle linguistic moves from personal experience to objective claim (I feel cold . . . in my view it’s cold . . . it is cold, etc.), and emergent as a linguistic effect of communicative trust and intersubjective agreement. This is not to eliminate reasoning or inference, but to insist that reason takes a diversity of forms that may not be automatable or subject to one system of validation, and recognize that the reliability of inference ultimately depends on the referential adequacy of the terms in which that inference is expressed.

### Conclusion

Reviewing a closely argued treatise on Saul Kripke’s scientific realism at the turn of the twentieth century, a leading proponent of a functional approach to the philosophy of mind and knowledge confessed that he could not “shake off the sense that something has gone awfully wrong.” The “laity,” he commented, “seems to have lost interest” in philosophy, and indeed, he went on to confess, “there seems to be a lot of earnest

discussion of questions that strike my ear as frivolous” (Fodor 2004). Fodor noted the relative popularity of Continental philosophers such as Foucault – “I wish I had his royalties,” he quipped – but he offered no insight into why the equally dense and inaccessible prose of the postmodernists should have more appeal than the logical lucidity of Anglophone analysis.

One question posed by philosophy identified as feminist at the close of the twentieth century is whether it is possible to envision “non-frivolous” philosophies of the future with interest to those who are not professional philosophers. Certainly there was a sense among many feminists that more was needed than academic critique. It was important to answer the last of Kant’s existential questions: What can we hope for? In what way can the mathematical formulas of the sciences be made to serve human aspirations to peace and prosperity? How can people of diverse identities establish common cause and values that transcend group interest? Can language be found to communicate changing and multicultural realities? Two twentieth-century philosophical visions stood in the way. One was the logician’s vision of a purely extensional idiom in which “I think” is replaced by statements of fact arranged in truth-functional order. Such a language can lead, as Luce Irigaray charged, to “a sclerosis of discourse, a hardening of language and a repetitiveness that makes nonsense of established meaning” (1984: 135–6). Equally unhelpful in answering Kant’s question was the deconstructed vision of the same language detached from reference to material reality, unregulated by coherent lines of thought, endlessly open to stylistic intervention. The problem for twenty-first-century philosophers would be to find a way between these two alternatives, to rethink the relation between words and objects, facts and propositions, reality and theoretical constructions of reality in ways that preserve truth and at the same time allow room for a continual reworking of both knowledge and reality.

One characteristic of feminist philosophizing of possible value in the new postmodern age of globalism and postcolonial consciousness was the tendency for feminists to accept the fact that all thought, including philosophical and feminist thought, is situated. No matter how it is structured, no matter how it clothes itself in certainty, thought is always the thought of thinkers with familial, cultural, ethical identities who speak from a location in space and time. The realization was not specific to feminism, but was particularly strong among feminist philosophers given the shock of discovering that most of the twentieth-century intellectual traditions available to women reflected the limited thinking of men whose view of the world was colored not only by their masculinity but also by class, ethnicity, and race. Feminist philosophy, energized by this discovery, had a richness of texture, an openness, and experiential reference lacking in both the technical virtuosity of philosophical analysis and the theoretic sophistication of Continental structuralism and deconstruction.

The problem was not that race, class, or gender shaped methods and styles of twentieth-century philosophies as they had philosophies in the past and would continue to shape philosophies of the future, but rather the hubris that allowed limited and interested viewpoints to be projected as absolute, universal, and complete. At the end of the century, given a global world economy, instant communication of information, and an irreversible mixing of cultures and ethnicities, that hubris was

more and more untenable. Vestiges of the absolute remained, in projects of worldwide democratization, in evangelical and extremist religions, even in some versions of feminism, but globalization and emigration made a fully dominant imperial culture or a homogeneous racial or religious state increasingly difficult to conceive in reality.

The challenge for philosophers of the twenty-first century would be to avoid the dilemma of choosing between epistemological relativity that precludes any critical judgment on the one hand, and claims to truth that are inevitably ideological on the other. Feminist philosophers showed little liking for either alternative: for complacent tolerance of “diverse” views all equally true, or for claims to unassailable necessary truth. Instead the tendency was to dialogue, cross-cultural collaboration, and global understanding. The emerging image of philosophy among feminists was not a closely-knit group of professionals insulated from politics making progress in solving carefully delineated “theoretical problems,” but a free-wheeling discussion energized by social concerns, open to insights from many disciplines and the participation of many kinds of thinkers.

Critique has always been the forte of philosophers. In the late twentieth century much critique turned away from the real, natural, and social world to philosophy itself. The targets for postmodern critiques were philosophers’ universals and absolute values. The targets for analytic critiques were the formulations of rival analytic philosophers on issues whose original importance had often receded far out of consciousness. Tools of philosophical analysis were used by a few “applied” ethicists on clearly marked out “moral issues” like animal rights and stem cell research, but larger questions of public policy and political ideology were often left aside by philosophers as too large, too value-laden, too potentially charged with political favoritism. For many feminist philosophers, commitment to social change overcame such scruples. Issues such as gay marriage and abortion rights were debated not as opportunities to exercise techniques of refutation, but as ways to penetrate to deeply felt and strongly rooted social presumptions – heterosexuality, compulsory motherhood, the sanctity of marriage – that generated social inequality and whose disruption threatened long-standing social and conceptual structures.

Philosophy in this critical dialogic role does not pretend to be a science, or even the overseer or handmaiden of science. Nor is its job the naturalistic description of thought processes innate in the wiring of the brain or evolved by natural selection. Cognitive science may have an important role to play in diagnosing and treating developmental problems or in the invention of artificial intelligence. Naturalized epistemology might describe how some people reason. But feminist philosophers did not restrict themselves to statements of empirical fact, nor did they endorse the erasure of subjectivity and normativity assumed in externalist theories of meaning. In this they identified with philosophers of the past who often spoke out of a personal sense of outrage or puzzlement, and also from a conviction that legitimate puzzlement and outrage could not be a private affair but should be shared by others. Plato spoke for the educated few who deplored the excesses of democratic mob rule. Descartes spoke for scientists who dared to challenge the Aristotelian academic establishment; Locke spoke for entrepreneurs and colonists who opposed autocratic monarchies. Much

feminist historical work has gone to show the limitations of these constituencies: classical refusal to acknowledge the point of view of slaves, women, and non-Greeks; Cartesian neglect of the social and political underpinnings of science; Locke's refusal to see the claim of native peoples to ancestral tribal lands. The question would be whether feminist philosophy's own inevitable narrowness of vision, if never finally overcome, could still be constantly redressed. Would it be possible to sustain both the admission of subjectivity and the claim to a normativity open to critique from outside the circle of its own certainty?

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## Further reading

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### General

- Fricker, M. and J. Hornsby (eds.) (2000) *The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Critical treatments of feminist work in various areas of philosophy).
- Kourany, J. (ed.) (1998) *Philosophy in a Feminist Voice: Critiques and Reconstructions*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. (In-depth reviews of feminist work by well-known feminist philosophers).
- Le Doeuff, M. (1991) *Hipparchia's Choice: An Essay concerning Women, Philosophy, etc.*, trans. T. Selous. Oxford: Blackwell. (A meditation on relations between women and philosophy, both theoretical and personal)
- Nye, A. (1988) *Feminist Theory and the Philosophies of Man*. London: Croom Helm. (A critical look at feminist use of Marxism, existentialism, psychoanalysis, and structural linguistics to ground feminist theory).
- (1995) *Philosophy and Feminism: At the Border*. New York: Twayne Publishers. (An overview of the impact of feminist theory on mainstream philosophy).
- Spelman, E. (1988) *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought*. Boston: Beacon Press. (A critical examination of feminist essentialism and its effect on theory).

### Philosophy of mind

- Anzaldúa, G. (1990) *Making Face, Making Soul*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Foundation. (An exploration of Hispanic and mestizo subjectivity).
- Wittig, M. (1992) *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*. Boston: Beacon Press. (An examination of the category "woman" and the oppressive ways it structures identity).
- Hypatia* 8/1 (Winter 1993) Special issue on feminine subjectivity.

### Epistemology

- Alcoff, L. and E. Potter (eds.) (1993) *Feminist Epistemologies*. New York: Routledge. (A representative collection including a variety of perspectives in feminist theory of knowledge).
- Anthony, L. and C. Witt (eds.) (1993) *A Mind of One's Own*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. (A collection of essays defending feminist versions of mainstream epistemology).

- Code, L. (1987) *Epistemic Responsibility*. Hanover, NH and London: Brown University Press. (A study of the role that morality plays in scientific reasoning).
- (1991) *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. (A critical account of feminist approaches to epistemology).
- Longino, H. (1990) *Science and Social Knowledge: Values and Objectivity in Science*. (A classic feminist treatment of the role of values in science).
- Smith, D. (1987) *The Everyday World as Problematic*. Boston: Northeastern University Press. (An approach to sociology rooted in women's experience).
- Tuana, N. (1993) *The Less Noble Sex: Scientific, Religious, and Philosophical Conceptions of Women's Nature*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. (A critique of science studies dealing with women).

### Ethics

- Card, C. (ed.) (1991) *Feminist Ethics*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas. (A representative collection of essays in feminist ethical theory).
- Cole, E. B. and S. Coultrap-McQuinn (eds.) (1992) *Explorations in Feminist Ethics: Theory and Practice*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. (A collection of essays that pays special attention to relations between ethics of care and ethics of justice).
- Elshtain, J. B. (1981) *Public Man, Private Woman*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. (A hermeneutic reading of social philosophy inspired in part by Hannah Arendt).
- Held, V. (1993) *Feminist Morality: Transforming Culture, Society, and Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (A critique of contractualism and foundationalism in ethics).
- Pateman, C. (1988) *The Sexual Contract*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. (Pateman argues that there is an understood sexual contract that sets the terms for relations between the sexes prior to any social contract).

### Philosophy of language

- Cixous, H. (1976) "The laugh of the Medusa," trans. K. Cohen and P. Cohen. In *Signs* 1/4: 875–93. (Classic description of feminist writing as escaping logical syntax).
- Kress, G. and R. Hodge (1979) *Language and Ideology*. New York: Routledge. (Kress and Hodge argue that an underlying semantic scheme constructs gender difference).
- Lakoff, R. (1975) *Language and Women's Place*. New York: Harper & Row. (A review of systematic gender difference in language).
- Nye, A. (1987) "The inequalities of semantic structure." *Metaphilosophy* 18: 222–40. (A review of gender inequalities inherent in systems of meaning).
- (1989) "The voice of the serpent: French feminism and the philosophy of language." In A. Garry and M. Pearsall (eds.) *Women, Knowledge and Reality*, New York: Unwin Hyman, pp. 233–50. (An analysis of French feminist challenges to traditional philosophies of language).

