

APA Newsletters

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NEWSLETTER ON FEMINISM AND PHILOSOPHY

FROM THE EDITOR, SALLY J. SCHOLZ

NEWS FROM THE COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN, ROSEMARIE TONG

ARTICLES

DEBRA JACKSON AND L. RYAN MUSGRAVE
“Special Cluster on Feminist Critical Theory: Introduction”

MARORIE JOLLES
“The Subject in this Class: Teaching Feminist Critical Theory”

MARJORIE JOLLES
“SYLLABUS: Topics in Women’s Studies: Feminist Critical Theory”

ANN FERGUSON
“Can Development Create Empowerment and Women’s Liberation?”

JEFFREY GAUTHIER
“Feminism and Critical Theory”

COMPILED BY JEFFREY GAUTHIER
“Bibliography: Feminist Accounts of Critical Theory”

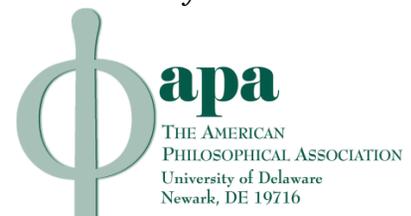
BOOK REVIEWS

Karen Warren: *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters*
REVIEWED BY DANA BERTHOLD

Charlene Haddock Seigfried: *Feminist Interpretations of John Dewey*
REVIEWED BY MATTHEW GROE

CONTRIBUTORS

ANNOUNCEMENTS



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Feminism and Philosophy

Sally J. Scholz, Editor

Spring 2005

Volume 04, Number 2

FROM THE EDITOR

This particular issue of the *Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy* features three articles on feminist critical theory. In their introduction, guest editors Debra Jackson and L. Ryan Musgrave include a discussion of some of the difficulties of circumscribing feminist critical theory. Jackson and Musgrave invited Marjorie Jolles, Ann Ferguson, and Jeffrey Gauthier to offer their reflections on the role of feminist critical theory within the classroom, world development, and professional philosophy, respectively. The result is a very interesting mix of the theory and practice of feminist critical theory. Readers will also find the graduate syllabus, provided by Jolles, and the extensive bibliography, compiled by Jeff Gauthier, useful in exploring this ever-growing field within feminist research.

The special cluster on feminist critical theory is followed by two book reviews: Dana Berthold's review of Karen Warren's *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, and Matthew Groe's review of Charlene Seigfried's edited collection, *Feminist Interpretations of John Dewey*.

Many exciting things are happening in the American Philosophical Association (APA) and the Committee on the Status of Women (CSW) in particular. Rosie Tong is spearheading a variety of rich projects that promise to enhance feminist philosophy as well as the lives of women in philosophy. Please be sure to read her letter below. We invite all of you to contribute to these projects with your insights and ideas—start by checking out the APA and CSW web pages where, among other things, you will find some archive editions of the *Newsletter* and, of course, the current edition. The APA has moved to an on-line format for all of the *Newsletters* in the hopes that more APA members will have access and reap the benefits of reading them.

About the *Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy*

The *Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy* is sponsored by the APA Committee on the Status of Women (CSW). The *Newsletter* is designed to provide an introduction to recent philosophical work that addresses issues of gender. None of the varied philosophical views presented by authors of *Newsletter* articles necessarily reflect the views of any or all of the members of the Committee on the Status of Women, including the Editor(s) of the *Newsletter*, nor does the committee advocate any particular type of feminist philosophy. We advocate only that serious philosophical attention be given to issues of gender and that claims of gender bias in philosophy receive full and fair consideration.

Submission Guidelines and Information

1. Purpose: The purpose of the *Newsletter* is to publish information about the status of women in philosophy and to make the resources of feminist philosophy more widely available. The *Newsletter* contains discussions of recent developments in feminist philosophy and related work in other disciplines, literature overviews and book reviews, suggestions for eliminating gender bias in the traditional philosophy curriculum, and reflections on feminist pedagogy. It also informs the profession about the work of the APA Committee on the Status of Women. Articles submitted to the *Newsletter* should be limited to ten double-spaced pages and must follow the APA guidelines for gender-neutral language. Please submit four copies of essays, prepared for anonymous review. References should follow *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

2. Book Reviews and Reviewers: If you have published a book that is appropriate for review in the *Newsletter*, please have your publisher send us a copy of your book. We are always in need of book reviewers. To volunteer to review books (or some particular book), please send the Editor a CV and letter of interest, including mention of your areas of research and teaching.

3. Where to Send Things: Please send all articles, comments, suggestions, books, and other communications to the Editor: Dr. Sally J. Scholz, Department of Philosophy, Villanova University, 800 Lancaster Avenue, Villanova, PA 19085-1699, sally.scholz@villanova.edu

4. Submission Deadlines: Submissions for Spring issues are due by the preceding September 1st; submissions for Fall issues are due by the preceding February 1st.

NEWS FROM THE COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Happy New Year! Reading through the contents of this *Newsletter*, I could not help but be proud of the accomplishments of women in our profession. We really are transforming philosophy, deepening and broadening it in diverse and often unexpected ways. Congratulations to us all and particularly to Sally for orchestrating our efforts in this publication.

Both of the CSW panels in Boston were excellent, thanks to the organizational work of Sally. The first session, "Feminists Connecting across Generations," featured the following

speakers (with titles of their presentations in parentheses): Sally Haslanger (“Power, Responsibility, and the Feminist Scholar”), Jennifer Purvis (“A ‘Time’ for Change: Negotiating the Space of a Third Wave Political Moment”), Laurie Calhoun (“Feminism is a Humanism”), Marilyn Fischer (“Feminism and the Art of Interpretation”), and Carmela Epright (“Navigating Relationships in Feminist Research and Practice”). The second session, “The Different Meanings of ‘Feminist Philosophy,’” featured Louise Antony (“When/Is Philosophy Feminist?”), Sara Beardsworth (“The Contexts of French Feminism”), Ann Ferguson (“Is Feminist Philosophy Still Philosophy?”), Jeff Gauthier (“Feminism and Philosophy: Getting It and Getting It Right”), and Ofelia Schutte (“Feminist Philosophy in Interdisciplinary and Transnational Contexts”).

Also excellent was a panel on the Status and Future of the Profession in which Chris Bellon participated together with Michael Kelly, Karen Hanson, Steven C. Wheatley, Saul Fisher, and John Lachs. Several members of the audience as well as some of the panelists expressed the view that these are extraordinarily challenging times for the profession. We need to be doing more both to remain full players in the realm of the humanities and to address the pressing issues of public policy.

Because the chairs of all the diversity committees are now members of the Inclusiveness Committee, the CSW will have more opportunities to work systematically with members of the American Indian, Asian and Asian-American, Black, Hispanic, and Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender philosophical communities. Joan Callahan, who chairs the Inclusiveness Committee, is particularly eager to get all the diversity committees working together. If you have any ideas about how we can move forward to improve the status of philosophers once marginalized in our profession, please contact me or one of the other CSW members. As listed in the *Proceedings and Addresses of the APA*, the members of the CSW as of July 2005:

Christina Bellon (2007)
Sharon Crasnow (2006)
Tracy Edwards (2006)
Ruth Groenhout (2008)
Christine Koggel (2008)
Janet Kourany (2008)
Elizabeth Minnich (2007)
Anita Superson (2006)
Sally J. Scholz (*ex officio*)

Continuing until June 30, 2005, are Cindy Stark, Marleen Rozemond, and Lorraine Code.

Hope to hear from you soon!

Rosie

Rosemarie Tong, Chair of the CSW

Distinguished Professor in Health Care Ethics

Director, Center for Professional and Applied Ethics

Department of Philosophy

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte

ARTICLES

Special Cluster on Feminist Critical Theory

Introduction

Debra Jackson and L. Ryan Musgrave **Guest Editors**

A glance at any worthwhile current feminist bookshelf these days is likely to turn up a good number of titles employing the term “critical”—critical race studies, critical legal studies, feminist critical theory, queer theory and critical social theory, cultural critical studies, critical aesthetics, etc. But what, exactly, do we take “critical theory” to mean? And, beyond this: What are the areas of commonality or divergence between feminism and critical theory?

In these three newsletter essays, we see the ambiguity of the term “critical theory.” Ann Ferguson, Jeffrey Gauthier, and Marjorie Jolles speak to concerns associated with critical theory. In its narrowest sense, “critical theory” refers to work developed by Frankfurt School theorists, those working at the Institute for Social Research. Taking up a number of Marxist insights, Frankfurt School critical theorists sought a thoroughgoing critique of Western culture, targeting Enlightenment conceptions of, for example, the individual, reason, freedom, and, of course, capitalism. In its broadest sense, “critical theory” refers to a wide range of theoretical work, especially from the latter half of the twentieth century, which seeks to describe and oppose oppressive features of contemporary society and provide practical means for emancipation. This broad approach usually operates via identifying oppressive hegemonic social forces and via ideology critique and often asks some version of this question: In the absence of formalized laws or codes explicitly enacting oppression, what general commitments, world views, or shared assumptions implicitly create a similar web of hegemonic practices that effectively keep marginalized groups oppressed?

In “The Subject in this Class: Teaching Feminist Critical Theory,” Marjorie Jolles examines theoretical, pedagogical, and practical dimensions of classroom dynamics involved with teaching a recent graduate course within a women’s studies program. In having students read work by Wendy Brown, Kelly Oliver, and Iris Marion Young, Jolles expected that they would use these postmodern theoretical frameworks to question both the field of women’s studies within academia and the political potential and pitfalls of stable notions of gender, sex, and sexuality. Yet this did not result, as Jolles thought it might, in students developing an immanent critique of these essentialized notions within the women’s studies framework; the students responded in unanticipated ways, some of them frustrating. Jolles mines the students’ responses in order to (a) see what pragmatic conclusions might be drawn for productive future pedagogical strategies, and (b) understand ways the theoretical positions covered in the course might have been impacted by background commitments operating for the students personally and for the classroom institutionally. She draws on Bordo’s description of how “feminist theorists are rendered Other through the conflation of the feminine with the particular” to contextualize students’ responses; in particular, she questions ways the students are implicated in consumerist educational patterns, and possible reasons why their thinking about gender remains trapped in an “inclusionary” liberal model.

Ann Ferguson builds on her previous work in materialist feminism and multiculturalism in her essay, “Can Development Create Empowerment and Women’s Liberation?” She puts mainstream approaches to “women’s empowerment” used by development institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund under a microscope, examining two programs that aim to increase women’s legal empowerment in Nepal. Skeptical of ways these efforts may co-opt and foreclose other political liberatory strategies that might be more fruitful for marginalized groups, she examines the degree to which they produce docile liberal subjects and reproduce hegemonic forms of oppression along lines of race, class, and nationality even as they may diminish some practical aspects of gender inequality. What Ferguson finds missing in the top-down empowerment model is sufficient attention to bridge identities, feminist collectivities, and revolutionary political potential. In contrast to this empowerment model and its dependence on (a) “power over” rather than “power with” and (b) the beginning unit of the liberal atomistic individual, she identifies the benefits of bottom-up “consciousness raising and self-organization practices at the grassroots” level. She suggests these as an essential democratic component to meaningful political self-constitution as a collective.

In “Feminism and Critical Theory,” Jeffrey Gauthier examines why, despite shared interest in developing a critique of Western society, feminist political theory has not been greatly impacted by the work from Frankfurt School critical theorists such as Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, and Habermas. For early critical theorists, he argues, this is due to their skepticism of the effectiveness of social movements, which subjects the woman’s movement to ideology critique. Gauthier suggests that, due to this framing, Frankfurt School members underestimated feminism both as an emancipatory political movement and as itself a critical theory of society. Mutual influence is more promising given the usefulness of Habermas’s work as an avenue for navigating the terrain between postmodern relativism and modern liberalism. Nevertheless, Gauthier describes how Habermas has been targeted by feminists such as Nancy Fraser, Jean Cohen, Agnes Heller, Seyla Benhabib, and Johanna Meehan on a number of fronts. Habermas has failed to recognize the independence of gender as an organizing social force. He has also failed to consider the significance of separatism for developing effective social movement and neglected the importance of understanding the concreteness of one’s interlocutors. Gauthier suggests that feminism be understood as part of critical theory: a movement simultaneously extending some main aims of the original Frankfurt theorists and addressing some of its blind spots in areas of sex, gender, and sexuality.

In these essays, Jolles and Ferguson each provide a concrete example of a theme long associated with critical social theory. As Gauthier puts it, “How is emancipation possible at all given an ideological structure that seems to extend even to the concept of emancipation itself?” All three essays contribute to and deepen the productive area of inquiry at the intersection of feminism and critical social theory. We offer them as a step in thinking through productive ways the two areas can inform and strengthen one another.

The Subject in this Class: Teaching Feminist Critical Theory

Marjorie Jolles

[Editor’s Note: This article is followed by a syllabus for the course described.]

“But what relevance does all this theorizing have to the lives of real women?” This was a question I frequently heard in a seminar on feminist critical theory I taught in the Spring 2004 semester. The course, “Topics in Women’s Studies: Feminist Critical Theory,” was a graduate-level elective offered through the Women’s Studies Department at the University of Iowa, where I am currently a Visiting Assistant Professor.

A group of seventeen students—fifteen graduate students and two advanced undergraduates—met once a week for fourteen weeks. The two undergraduates were Women’s Studies majors. Five of the graduate students were completing their coursework for the Ph.D. in Women’s Studies; the remaining students—with the exception of two students from the law school—were from various graduate programs in the humanities working in the areas of gender and/or postmodernism. Only one student in this class was male, a Ph.D. student in Communication Studies.

Course goals included synthesizing a broad range of thinkers and texts that both inform and represent postmodern feminism. The reading list centered on questions at the heart of the intersection of feminism and postmodernism: agency, power, knowledge, autonomy, difference, contingency, and justice. It is worth noting that many students in the class were sympathetic to poststructuralist, feminist, postcolonialist, and postmodern views of nonessential subjectivity. The seminar did not require me to defend the legitimacy of feminist and postmodern theory week after week. Our challenge was to bridge the perceived distance between the highly abstract theory of which many of these students were so fond, and what we conjured—albeit problematically—as “the real lives of real women.” My role, then, included pushing the students to engage more closely and deeply with so-called postmodern texts. By doing so, I hoped they would commit to their positions with more precision and accountability to themselves, their classmates, their students, and their future academic audiences.

We spent the semester exploring the question of “the subject,” specifically, whether the category “woman” is theoretically sound, pragmatically useful, or limiting for women. We took the notion of the modern subject as exemplified in Hegel’s master-slave parable from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Emphasizing Hegel’s antagonistic scenario in which subjectivity occurs in a context of desire, recognition, negation, and, ultimately, the exercise of individual will toward the achievement of self-consciousness, allowed us to construct feminist and postmodern notions of subjectivity in opposition to this archetypically modern account. In contrast to the Hegelian drama of subject-formation, many postmodern and feminist theories of identity production reject the unity, rationality, detachment, and implicit ethical superiority of the modern, masculine subject in favor of an ambiguous, dynamic, relational self held together by commitments to others and her world.

As we read Hegel and his feminist critics throughout the semester, I looked forward to our class addressing one particularly provocative question Wendy Brown raises. In her essay, “The Impossibility of Women’s Studies,” she questions the foundational legitimacy of Women’s Studies in light of contemporary critiques of the inseparability of gender from

other axes of social identity. I was anticipating a lively discussion given the centrality of these questions to the real lives of the students, some of whom, after all, were fledgling professionals in the very field of Women's Studies. However, I was not anticipating the discussion to take on as hostile a quality as it did. The students from outside of Women's Studies, with little familiarity with the history of women's studies (beyond the background Brown provides), unanimously agreed with all the points in Brown's argument calling for the end of Women's Studies as we know it, and the tone of their agreement was zealous.¹

Many of us who subscribe to postmodern, postcolonialist, and feminist views, and who find questions about the limitations of the category "woman" interesting and productive, found ourselves in the curious position of defending our subjectivities as women. What made this curious was that the debate took the counterproductive shape of offense-versus-defense, that we defended ourselves in somewhat totalizing ways, and that we—the Women's Studies students and I—found ourselves bonded in a kind of solidarity that, prior to this challenge, had not been articulated.

What Happened When We Read Brown

Course readings over the semester were chosen for their usefulness in rethinking subjectivity against the backdrop of the (masculine) Hegelian subject. Broadly speaking, each week we explored the uses and limits of categorization in general, and gender in particular. I designed the syllabus to follow a specific theoretical trajectory such that students could collect and cultivate theoretical tools that would empower them to address each subsequent week's questions. I also designed the syllabus so that students would be forced to bring these questions about women, subjectivity, and agency to bear on their personal lives, thereby addressing the often lamented theory/practice division some believe to plague academic feminist work. About halfway through the semester we read Brown's essay, which offered a compelling analysis of the practical and theoretical limitations that institutional disciplinarity engenders, particularly for the field of Women's Studies.² If we believe that definitional dynamism is essential for "women"—in other words, if we believe that categorization consolidates gender in potentially problematic ways, if we accept that categorization constrains as well as enables—then, Brown argues, we are forced to recognize an untenable contradiction underlying the current state of Women's Studies.³

Moreover, by positing gender as coherent and circumscribable, which Brown claims Women's Studies cannot avoid doing, the field appears to uncritically privilege gender over other features of identity, such as race, class, age, sexuality, and physical ability, all of which are co-constituting. Brown claims that

sustaining gender as a critical, self-reflexive category rather than a normative or nominal one, and sustaining women's studies as an intellectually and institutionally radical site rather than a regulatory one—in short, refusing to allow gender and women's studies to be disciplined—are concerns and refusals at odds with affirming women's studies as a coherent field of study.⁴

My purpose here is not to debate the merits of Brown's argument—it is possible to appreciate all of Brown's premises, as I do, without immediately calling for the dismantling of Women's Studies as an academic field or concentration. Rather, my goal is to provide a narrative of a particular experience for which Brown's essay was catalytic, and which

can shed light on important pedagogical and political concerns facing feminist teachers.

The argument in our class took place on several levels. At one fairly obvious level, those of us identified as women and in Women's Studies defended the value of a field called "Women's Studies" by claiming that it seeks to address not necessarily an ahistoric entity called "woman" but rather the cultural, economic, political, and social effects of the persistence of binary gender ideologies, and the historic exclusion of women from the fields and projects of meaning-making. Brown, in other words, might be right about how the field of Women's Studies is premised on a fixity of "woman" that is problematic, but nevertheless it could be politically and institutionally pragmatic for such a field to (still) exist. Many of the Women's Studies students wondered if, at the institutional level, various other interdisciplinary departments and programs (e.g., Communication Studies; American Studies; Language, Literacy, and Culture) were also invested in reflexive practices of immanent critique, or if, from the outside, they were being constantly asked to defend their legitimacy as they felt Women's Studies is. The discussion, jumping off from Brown's piece, then turned to important questions about whether the *gender* of Women's Studies leaves it more vulnerable to self-doubt (and doubt by others) than other fields.

I was intrigued that students from outside of Women's Studies were quick to see Brown's argument about the putative content of the discipline yet not quick to appreciate the contingency of their own disciplinary borders. Rather, the issue was framed as one of particularity versus universality—the perceived fragility of Women's Studies's foundations was constructed in opposition to the perceived strength of fields such as Comparative Literature, Law, and Communication Studies, where the content under study appears a priori neutral. I suspect the gendered identity of Women's Studies—the assumption that it is a field for and about women—enabled some to see Women's Studies itself as feminine, which is to say, unstable, and therefore allowed the conversation to cling to notions of particular versus universal, rather than force us to realize the illogic of the particular/universal dichotomy.

Susan Bordo, in "The Feminist as Other,"⁵ articulates one of the central issues we struggled with in our discussion of Brown's claims. Bordo describes the phenomenon whereby feminist theorists are rendered Other through the conflation of the feminine with the particular, held against the implicit backdrop of the conflation of the masculine with the universal. It is acceptable and even expected for feminists to be experts on "women's" history or feminist philosophy, Bordo argues, but in History, or Philosophy, the experts are men. Thus the particularity of maleness is erased and rendered universal, while feminist scholars are perceived as—and therefore, in practice, become limited to—engaging in only "special interest" or marginal intellectual activity. The concerns of women and the role of gender in intellectual, political, and cultural history are considered inessential to real (read: male) scholarship.

Women's Studies as a discipline allows us to move unapologetically these concerns to the center of intellectual inquiry without letting go of the acknowledgment of the contingency of a category called "women," and while retaining a commitment to politicize and historicize women's "experience." However, as individuals *within* Women's Studies, many graduate students and faculty members still report experiencing the frustrating Othering that Bordo describes, especially in cross-disciplinary courses such as my Feminist Critical Theory seminar.

The frustrations of being limited by one's perceived specificity—that is to say, the frustrations of being Other—do not lead to the argument that one should be emancipated from the particular. Rather, the point is that the notion of the universal is a myth, and thus the particular must cease to be regarded as the universal's shadowy Other. In the case of my class discussion of the Brown essay, the problem of disciplinarity *in general* was never discussed; rather, it was Women's Studies' own unique—that is, *particular*—problem.

In a course offered through the Women's Studies Department, taught by a faculty member from that department, and with a strong cohort of graduate students representing that department, many of us were surprised to see a discussion about the possibility of Women's Studies become hostile so quickly. I was frustrated by the sense of entitlement the critics of Women's Studies felt in voicing their opinions regarding the "impossibility" of the department that was sponsoring this course, and that is home to me and many of the students in that room. To be fair, I assigned the Brown essay and encouraged discussion of it. I also consciously foster a feminist pedagogical ethos in my classes, reject the notion that only I have the authority and permission to question or provoke, and push graduate students to take greater ownership of their classroom experience through active participation. I suspect this atmosphere made students feel more comfortable speaking their minds, which was my hope. However, I still could not shake the discomfort I felt in response to how easily some students, after reading one provocative article, felt confident questioning the professional and intellectual legitimacy of their peers without reflexively extending this same critical question to their own fields, or using it as an occasion to rethink the conceptual and political limits of disciplinarity more broadly.

What Might, or Should, Have Happened When We Read Brown: Oliver

In addition to my frustrations about the hostile tone of the discussion and the lack of reflexivity by non-Women's Studies students, I was frustrated that the combative nature of the argument prevented us from using the important critical tools I made sure would be available to us at the time in the semester when we read Brown's essay. The week before the Brown essay was assigned, the class read Kelly Oliver's book *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*.⁶ In continuing to explore the weaknesses of the Hegelian model of selfhood, Oliver's text introduced the students to the possibility that the belief that oppressed individuals need recognition by their oppressors for full subjectivity—long regarded as an essential instrument for social justice—is perhaps misdirected or wrongheaded. Oliver argues that Hegelian models of identity that foreground recognition as essential to healthy subjectivity are inadequate, and policies that argue for the mere recognition of oppressed groups by those in power are themselves symptomatic of the pathology of oppression, not its remedy. Using analyses of various contexts in which the assumption of the value of recognition appears—many of them drawn from critical race studies—Oliver methodically shows the failure of recognition-based prescriptions for social justice. Beyond but related to arguments for recognition, arguments for inclusion (especially those surrounding "multiculturalism") can be said to share similar weaknesses, in that demands for inclusion frequently do not entail critique of the social institutions into which excluded individuals seek inclusion.

I designed the syllabus so that students would bring Oliver's critical innovations to the experience of reading the Brown essay, in the hopes that students might offer productive

rejoinders to Brown's proposals. Specifically, I was eager for students to apply Oliver's critique of recognition and inclusion to the question of feminists' inclusion and integration into the academy, which Brown seems to gesture toward. One student framed the question of Women's Studies as a discipline in terms of women's recognition, asking why, "when Women's Studies is about women's inclusion," it was, in her view, reinforcing its own institutional marginalization through what she perceived as an unhealthy separatism. This approach reflected Oliver's observation that we often seek to address conflicts surrounding difference through appeals to recognition and inclusion.

Another non-Women's Studies student addressed one of the Women's Studies Ph.D. students and suggested that, in light of Women's Studies's allegedly dubious subject matter and limited perspective, and given her particular research interests, she could "just as easily" defect from Women's Studies to his department instead. This student's suggestion also conforms to the common tendency to find difference problematic and to try to resolve it through inclusion.

For these two critics of Women's Studies, (universal) sameness appeared preferable to (particular) difference. The language of inclusion is so familiar and hegemonic that perhaps it appeared to be the only obvious choice. It was an easy tool for both of these non-Women's Studies students to pick up, and thus they both took Brown's premises to conclusions Brown herself does not reach.⁷

The scenario that emerged in these two calls for "inclusion" positioned the Women's Studies students and non-Women's Studies students as political opponents, and the debate remained stuck at a fairly frustrating level of discourse—which is similar to the observation Oliver makes in *Witnessing* concerning the poverty of debates about race in the United States, given their dependence on a recognition-based model of social justice. Despite students' claims to have been moved by Oliver's book, the nature of the class' interactions flew in the face of what Oliver's project actually demands. For Oliver, witnessing requires radical, vigilant, and reflexive openness to difference in affective and political terms. Otherness need not be a threat to the self but can and should be reconceived as constitutive of the self. Thus, for our own survival, we are ethically obligated to witness Otherness through processes of reflection and self-reflection, for "self-reflection is not a turn inward but a turn toward otherness. It is not a return but a detour. If the self is by virtue of a witnessing relation to another, then self-reflection is the reflection of that relationship."⁸ But on this day, there was no spirit of witnessing in our classroom.

Fresh from completing Oliver's inspirational text, we nevertheless immediately took sides and then felt frustrated rather than empowered by the task of negotiating difference. Students did not (at least overtly) engage in self-reflection as an outward-oriented activity in order to see how Women's Studies, in its Otherness, actually sustains fields like Communications or Law. The Oliver reading had equipped these students better than they articulated, but, for reasons I speculate about below, the overtly political force of the text was not immediately available to them.⁹

What Might, or Should, Have Happened When We Read Brown: Young

While taking sides was, in this case, perhaps an overly reactionary and unproductive move, it can at other times be a positive and effective strategy to establish individual and group identity. Two weeks before reading *Witnessing*, and three weeks before reading Brown's essay, the class read Iris Young's article "Gender as Seriality: Thinking about Women as a Social

Collective.”¹⁰ Young uses Sartre’s notion of serial collectivity as a way to address the dual needs of women and feminist theorists to simultaneously resist “talking about women as a single group” as if they share a “common characteristic,” while still “insisting on the possibility of thinking about women as some kind of group.”¹¹ The need to think about women as a group at all, according to Young, rests on our need for an alternative to the individualism of liberal theory, as well as our need to posit oppression as systemic and not merely individualized, both of which are crucial for feminist praxis.

Series are related to groups, but not identically so. Young defines a group as “a collection of persons who recognize themselves and one another as in a unified relation with one another. Members of the group mutually acknowledge that together they undertake a common project.”¹² In other words, group membership is self-conscious and deliberate, and a group project is collectively worked toward and achieved. A series, on the other hand,

is a social collective whose members are unified passively by the objects around which their actions are oriented or by the objectified results of the material effects of the actions of others. ...The unity of the series derives from the way that individuals pursue their own individual ends with respect to the same objects conditioned by a continuous material environment, in response to structures that have been created by the unintended collective result of past actions.¹³

Thus a series is not characterized by the active, deliberate collectivity of a group, nor does the common objective of a series need to be undertaken collectively. Rather, a series is a collection of individuals who, through no deliberate organization and no obvious need for one another, happen to share the same personal goal in a particular instance. Series members do not seek each other out, but they are nevertheless aware that they belong to this passively defined collective.

Therefore, members of a series need not, and do not, share an essential feature that binds them in membership. Nevertheless, “membership in serial collectives define an individual’s being, in a sense—one ‘is’ a farmer, or a commuter, or a radio listener, and so on, together in series with others similarly positioned.”¹⁴ But the boundaries of a series are always indeterminate, due to the anonymity and passivity of series membership; one can belong to a series but share nothing else with other series members beyond the goal that unites one in series collectivity with others. Young proposes that we talk about women as a series in order to conceive of them nonessentially, as “a structural relation to material objects as they have been produced and organized by a prior history...the individuals who are positioned as feminine by the activities surrounding those structures and objects.”¹⁵

In the experience of belonging to the Ph.D. program in Women’s Studies at the University of Iowa and, specifically, in the experience of defending the institutional legitimacy to their classmates, the Women’s Studies graduate students in this class *were* a defined serial collective: they were allied in a common (temporally-specific) goal, and this belonging did not eclipse or even significantly obscure the range of important differences among them as individuals. Strictly speaking, they did not need each other for the achievement of their personal goals yet still found themselves belonging to a loosely defined, unified collective for the duration of our class meeting. Prior to this debate heating up, the Women’s Studies students, while departmentally and affectively connected to each other, were not a clearly defined, official, self-consciously assembled

group. But when their classmates argued for the illegitimacy of their disciplinary identity, they came together spontaneously in shared commitment.

The Young reading was enormously popular among the Women’s Studies graduate students, who reported to find it promising precisely in its practical application, more so than with the non-Women’s Studies students. Students made excellent use of Young’s article in their term papers, demonstrating their own awareness that theorizing collectivity without essentialism is of crucial importance to their own research. But rather than draw on Young’s notion of gender as series as it pertains to their own lives in our in-class debate over “the impossibility of women’s studies,” in defending the *possibility* of Women’s Studies, the students instead made repeated reference to “women’s experience,” “women’s lives,” “real women,” and other concepts that, in light of their allegiance to certain poststructuralist and postmodern perspectives, appear rather universalizing and essentialist and therefore empty, or at the very least, considerably less forceful. In short, they failed to use the theoretical tools I thought I had provided them in the readings by Young and Oliver.

Conclusion

Certain theoretical positions are intelligible and available (while others are not) relative to the sociopolitical contexts in which the theorist is thinking. The “answers” to the “problem” of Women’s Studies ranged from student to student and reflected their particular disciplinary logics. The willingness of many to find Women’s Studies unstable while finding other, perhaps more masculine, fields solid indicates the pervasive institutional sexism that renders the feminine as Other, locked in its feminine wobbliness and inessential particularity. With Oliver, the Women’s Studies students had a useful voice to demand not recognition, but a reflective witness to their difference, which could have produced transformative results in that witnessing requires self-examination of both “sides.” Rather than rely on essentialist notions that they did not believe in, these students had Young’s notion of seriality to help them ground their own legitimacy. Why didn’t they take up these tools?

One possible reason is that the so-called theory/practice division is even more complicated than we think when it comes to classroom politics. Not only do academic feminists often risk theorizing about “women’s lives” in a manner that some claim to be inaccessible to the actual subjects about whom they are theorizing, such theorizing also frequently suggests we care more about abstractions than practical realities, as if our practical realities are so privileged that we have no need for thinking about the practical. I would suggest that another privilege of academic theorizing is the ability to *opt out* of group identity in favor of the very liberal individualism Young critiques. In an individualistic, consumerist culture such as ours, we are treated as isolated individuals by numerous institutions, including universities. In the humanities in particular, much of an academic’s identity is characterized in isolated, individualistic terms. We might be less inclined to think and talk about ourselves explicitly as a class or series, which is not to belittle our historic tendency to universalize and normalize middle-class identity in our theorizing.

It is also possible that academic feminists, rightly chastened to think beyond their own whiteness, heterosexuality, and middle-classness, feel reluctant to bring texts like Oliver’s and Young’s to bear on their own personal politically-inflected struggles, such as the one that occurred in our class. I suspect that students might feel reluctant to apply “theory” to what happens inside their seminar rooms, perhaps for fear of

supporting the stereotype of the bourgeois feminist fixated on her personal struggles and ignoring larger, global concerns. But theorizing need not be limited to one group of women over another; in fact, the strength of theory is often its broad applicability.

Part of the problem Bordo describes is that academic feminists are stuck in a bind regarding the relevance of their personal lives to their professional lives. On the one hand, feminists risk being marginalized by the very particularity of the personal; on the other hand, feminists eschew the separation of the public and private, the personal and political. Perhaps it was too much of a risk for the Women's Studies students to point to what was happening in that room as justification for the possibility of Women's Studies. Thus it is not simply that texts, teachers, or students fail to link theory with practice, but rather that our specific class identity/identities made it harder for us to think of texts as tools for our personal use.

Endnotes

1. At this point it might appear as if this narrative is a projection of my own defensive insecurity regarding my professional legitimacy, given my departmental affiliation (my appointment is 100 percent in Women's Studies). To the degree that such neurotic maneuvers are often hard to see, I cannot claim not to be implicated. However, I am not seeking to establish neutral objectivity here. From a personal perspective, I will disclose right away that I did and do care to protect students from what I perceive as unfair, potentially sexist, attacks. From a professional perspective, I can claim that what *is* visible to me is that despite my own insecurity about the future of Women's Studies, my graduate degree and current research areas fall within the boundaries of philosophy, a discipline that, for better or worse, is not under quite the same kind of pressures to affirm its legitimacy. Therefore I am comfortable claiming that this observation of some students' zealous anti-Women's Studies ethos has relevance beyond my own immediate concerns regarding my personal professional viability.
2. Wendy Brown, "The Impossibility of Women's Studies," *differences* 9.3 (1997): 79-101.
3. Brown is clear that this problem is historically specific. Twenty and thirty years ago when many Women's Studies programs were coming into being, those programs and departments were perhaps the only place for feminist theorizing. Indeed, Women's Studies was not merely a home for feminists, it *produced* feminists. So Brown's question is explicitly not one of Women's Studies's profound historical value. Rather, Brown argues that the very insights gleaned from those positioned in Women's Studies (as well as those in other fields) have brought us to a new moment at which the foundations of Women's Studies seem untenable. Twenty years ago, insights into the indeterminacy of gender (and other signifiers) brought about through queer and poststructuralist theory and the postcolonialist critique of the co-constitutive nature of gender, race, and class had not permeated the intellectual terrain of Women's Studies to the degree that they have now—which is not to suggest that these are universally accepted notions, for they are still actively contested—and thus, the intellectual and political justifications for Women's

Studies are much less obviously coherent than they once were. Additionally, from a political perspective, given that feminists belong to the academy more broadly and legitimately now, Brown claims that at this moment the existence of "Women's Studies" as a separate discipline could actually be supporting the problem of women's and feminists' marginalization.

4. *Ibid.*, 86.
5. Susan Bordo, "The Feminist as Other," *Metaphilosophy*, 27, no. 1&2 (1996), 10-27.
6. Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).
7. Brown's point is not that feminists should simply forsake Women's Studies and ask to be taken in by other disciplines, but that if important feminist work questions the coherence of the subject of Women's Studies, perhaps we should rethink our assumptions and expectations about where, disciplinarily, feminist work occurs, and if feminist work can be "disciplined." Such an observation does not immediately lead to an argument for inclusion without also implying that other disciplines rethink their own foundations.
8. Oliver, 219.
9. Students did make excellent use of Oliver's project for their term papers at the end of the semester, but, tellingly, students used her witnessing theory to explore the politics of literary criticism, while it was not taken up as strongly by students who wrote papers about social and political theory. My point here is that these students were more comfortable rethinking recognition in abstract and literary projects than with what some might consider more overtly, directly, and immediately political ones.
10. Iris Young, "Gender as Seriality: Thinking about Women as a Social Collective." In Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres and Barbara Laslett, ed., *The Second Signs Reader: Feminist Scholarship, 1983-1996* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 158-183.
11. *Ibid.*, 158-159.
12. *Ibid.*, 168-169.
13. *Ibid.*, 169.
14. *Ibid.*, 171.
15. *Ibid.*, 173.

SYLLABUS: Topics in Women's Studies: Feminist Critical Theory

Marjorie Jolles

Course Description and Expectations

This graduate seminar will offer a sustained look at the contested intersection of feminism and postmodernism. We will look at these debates from various perspectives to understand the origins and consequences of the critique of modernity in the West. Specifically, we will consider what the hallmarks of postmodernism—the challenge to modern epistemological foundations, the rejection of the rational, autonomous subject in favor of a more contingent selfhood—mean for feminism and women's studies. We will examine the effects of postmodern feminism in justice, knowledge, morality, identity, pedagogy, and authority. We will all share

“ownership” of the course, in terms of leading class discussion and sharing weekly writing. See “Assignments” section below for more details.

Policies

Attendance is required. I am always available to meet during office hours and by appointment. Email is another great way to reach me. I will answer all emails within 24 hours. Emails sent to me after 4 p.m. on Friday might not be answered until 9 a.m. the following Monday.

On the first day of class I will collect email addresses from each of you. I will rely on email as my primary way of contacting you with any announcements, follow-up on questions, and so forth during the semester. Please check your email!

Weekly response papers are due in class each week (by 2:30 p.m.), and we’ll exchange them at the break.

Required Texts

Course pack of articles:

Bannerji, et. al., *Unsettling Relations* (South End Press, 1992)

Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 10th Anniversary Edition (Routledge, 1999)

Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford University Press, 1997)

Butler and Scott, eds., *Feminists Theorize the Political* (Routledge, 1992)

Ferguson, *The Man Question* (University of California Press, 1993)

Flax, *Disputed Subjects* (Routledge, 1993)

Nicholson, ed., *Feminism/Postmodernism* (Routledge, 1990)

Oliver, *Witnessing* (University of Minnesota Press, 2001)

Rogers and Garrett, *Who’s Afraid of Women’s Studies?* (Alta Mira, 2002)

Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge University Press, 1989)

Needs Accommodation

Please contact me during my office hours to discuss any specific needs which may require some modification of seating, testing, or other class requirements so that appropriate arrangements may be made.

Course Requirements

Leading Class Discussion (25%)

Each week, class will begin with a pair of students presenting the week’s reading (around 30 minutes). While these will be informal, relaxed presentations where students are free to ask more questions than they answer, we will still expect each pair of students to walk us through the material we read with substantive explanations, providing a summary of the reading, highlighting any major theoretical innovations, questions, or contradictions found in the material, and offering questions for class discussion. Students should feel encouraged during their presentations to provide hand-outs with relevant quotes or questions, or engage the class in writing exercises, or employ any other practices that might facilitate learning and discussion.

Weekly response papers (25%)

Each week you are required to write and submit one short response to the readings due that day. Think of these papers as entries in a journal you keep as you read and think about the themes of the seminar—they are informal, immediate reactions to the reading. These should be no longer than two to three double-spaced typed pages. Additionally, we will exchange papers every week, so every student should make and bring multiple copies of their response papers, enough for

each student. There will be no response papers due the weeks of panel presentations (April 21 and 28).

Research Paper and Presentation (50%)

You are required to write a final research paper on a subject of your choice that substantially engages and pertains to feminist critical theory, due at the end of the semester. A one-page research proposal, which will be shared with all students, will be due at mid-term. Final research papers should be approximately 20-25 double-spaced typed pages and follow established style guidelines. You are also required to present oral summaries of your papers in conference panel format during the last two weeks of the semester. It is likely that some shared themes will emerge when students share research agendas in March. If this happens, students should then form panels of three according to common research themes, to present their work together. Panels may be organized as creatively as you wish, and you may use audio/visual technology or any other learning/presentation tools. Panel presentations must not exceed 30 minutes (10 minutes per person); each panel will then have a 15-minute question/answer session with the class.

Course Outline

Week 1: Modernity and Modern Selfhood: Hegel

Hegel, “Self-Consciousness” (course pack)

Gauthier, “Historically Emergent Agency” (course pack)

Gauthier, “Consciousness Raising and Political Critique” (course pack)

Jagutowicz Mills, “Hegel’s Antigone” (course pack)

Hutchings, “Feminist Philosophy and the Way of Despair” (course pack)

Week 2: Feminism and Postmodernism

Ferguson, Chapters 1 and 2

Benhabib, “Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism” (course pack)

Hekman, “Subjects and Agents” (course pack)

Huysen, “Mapping the Postmodern” (Nicholson, 10)

Week 3: Foundations of Knowledge, Foundations of Self

Flax, Chapter 7

Nicholson, Introduction to *Feminism/Postmodernism*

Fraser and Nicholson, “Social Criticism without Philosophy” (Nicholson, 1)

Butler, “Contingent Foundations” (Butler & Scott, 1)

Week 4: Rorty, Introduction and Chapters 1 through 4

Singer, “Feminism and Postmodernism” (Butler & Scott, 22)

Di Stefano, “Dilemmas of Difference” (Nicholson, 3)

Week 5: Defining Agency

Bartky, “Agency: What’s the Problem?” (course pack)

Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” (course pack)

Foucault, “Truth and Power” (course pack)

Foucault, “We ‘Other Victorians’” (course pack)

Flax, Chapter 4

Rogers and Garrett, Chapter 2

Week 6: Difference, Experience, Identity

Rogers and Garrett, Chapter 5

Felski, “The Doxa of Difference” with comments and reply (course pack)

Scott, “Experience” (Butler & Scott, 2)

Young, “Gender as Seriality” (course pack)

- Week 7: Butler's Theoretical Trajectory
OPTIONAL: Rogers and Garrett, Chapter 3
Butler, *Gender Trouble*, Preface (1999), Preface (1990), Chapter 1, and Conclusion
Weir, "From the Subversion of Identity to the Subversion of Solidarity?" (course pack)
Butler, "Introduction," *Bodies that Matter* (course pack)
Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (course pack)
Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, Introduction, Chapters 1 and 4
- Week 8: Recognition
Oliver, entire text
- Week 9: Postmodernism and "Women's Studies"
Rogers and Garrett, Chapter 4
Bannerji, et. al., entire text
Brown, "The Impossibility of Women's Studies" (course pack)
- **Research Proposals Due****
- Week 10: Rethinking Autonomy and Location
Barclay, "Autonomy and the Social Self" (course pack)
Meyers, "Intersectional Identity and the Authentic Self?" (course pack)
Lugones, "Purity, Impurity, and Separation" (course pack)
Bordo, "Feminism, Postmodernism, and Gender-Scepticism" (Nicholson, 6)
- Week 11: Postcolonialism and Praxis
Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (course pack)
Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes" (course pack)
Pathak, "A Pedagogy for Postcolonial Feminists" (Butler & Scott, 20)
Ferguson, Chapters 3 and 5
- Week 12: Panel Presentations
- Week 13: Panel Presentations
- Week 14: Justice
Mouffe, "Feminism, Citizenship and Radical Democratic Politics" (Butler & Scott, 17)
Flax, Chapters 5 and 6
Rorty, Chapter 9
Ferguson, Chapter 6
- Research Papers Due
- Course pack contents**
- Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, translated by Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001.
- Barclay, Linda. "Autonomy and the Social Self." In *Relational Autonomy*, edited by Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Bartky, Sandra Lee. "Agency: What's the Problem?" In *Provoking Agents*, edited by Judith Kegan Gardiner. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1995.
- Benhabib, Seyla. "Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism" from *Situating the Self*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Brown, Wendy. "The Impossibility of Women's Studies." *differences* 9, no. 3 (1997): 79-101.
- Butler, Judith. "Introduction" from *Bodies that Matter*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Felski, Rita. "The Doxa of Difference." *Signs* 23, no. 1 (Autumn 1997).
- Foucault, Michel. "What is Enlightenment?" "Truth and Power," and "We 'Other Victorians'." In *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.
- Gauthier, Jeffrey. "Historically Emergent Agency" and "Consciousness-Raising and Political Critique." In *Hegel and Feminist Social Criticism*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1997.
- Hegel, G.W.F. "Self-Consciousness." In *Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A. V. Miller. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977.
- Hekman, Susan. "Subjects and Agents: The Question for Feminism." In *Provoking Agents*, edited by Judith Kegan Gardiner. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1995.
- Hutchings, Kimberly. "Feminist Philosophy and the Way of Despair." In *Hegel and Feminist Philosophy*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003.
- Lugones, Maria. "Purity, Impurity, and Separation." In *The Second Signs Reader*, edited by Ruth-Ellen B. Joeres and Barbara Laslett. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Meyers, Diana Tietjens. "Intersectional Identity and the Authentic Self?" In *Relational Autonomy*, edited by Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Mills, Patricia Jagentowicz. "Hegel's Antigone." In *The Phenomenology of Spirit Reader*, edited by Jon Stewart. Albany: SUNY Press, 1998.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. "Under Western Eyes." In *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, edited by Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1988.
- Weir, Allison. "From the Subversion of Identity to the Subversion of Solidarity?" In *Sacrificial Logics*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Young, Iris Marion. "Gender as Seriality: Thinking about Women as a Social Collective." In *The Second Signs Reader*, edited by Ruth-Ellen B. Joeres and Barbara Laslett. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Can Development Create Empowerment and Women's Liberation?

Ann Ferguson

Empowerment of the oppressed, whether they be peasants, workers, racial minorities, or women, has been taken as a goal by social movements since the 1960s.¹ This has been true particularly of Western-influenced women's movements and other grassroots movements in countries in Latin America and the South influenced by the theology of liberation, the radical pedagogy of Freire, and/or Marxism, and struggles for national liberation. While consciousness-raising practices associated with empowerment as the means to challenge social oppression were initially used in radical ways by these movements, Western women's movements and race/ethnic rights movements often subsequently developed an identity politics that ignored the real conflicts that intersections of gender, race, class, sexuality, and nationality caused between

members of these movements. This made these movements liable to co-optation or defeat.

In a further blow to radical movements for social justice, empowerment as a goal has been co-opted by the neo-liberal hegemonic development establishment, including the World Bank and various international funding agencies such as USAID. I investigate the way in which the ostensive goal of empowerment has been used as a rationale to advance women's development by these agencies, but in ways that still perpetuate sexist, capitalist, and neo-colonial structures of economic, political, and social domination. I shall contrast what I take to be co-opted uses of the concept of empowerment with its more radical definition and applications by struggles for national liberation and movements for social justice. What consciousness-raising and collective self-organization practices at the grassroots suggest, I argue, is that radical empowerment is only achieved when it is a part of a participatory democratic culture fostered by a movement for social justice.

Definitions of Empowerment, Power, and Interests

What exactly is understood by "empowerment" as a process and a goal, and how does this concept relate to the concepts of "needs," "interests," and "rights"? The concept of empowerment of an individual or a social group presupposes that a state of social oppression exists that has disempowered those in the group by denying them opportunities or resources and by subjecting them to an ideology and a set of social practices that has defined them as inferior humans, thus lowering their self-esteem. As a general goal, empowerment has been described as a political and a material process that increases individual and group power, self-reliance, and strength. However, there are two different ways in which to define empowerment, and I argue that only the second can escape manipulation by forms of social domination.

Typical of the first camp of mostly feminist economists and sociologists is Paula England's treatment, which defines empowerment as a process that individuals engage in when they obtain both objective and subjective resources of power, which allow them to use power to achieve outcomes in the actor's self-interest.² On this definition, it would seem that economic, legal, and personal changes would be sufficient for individuals to become empowered, and such a process does not require the political organization of collectives in which such individuals are located.

The second camp, more influenced by empowerment as a goal of radical social movements, emphasizes the increased material and personal power that comes about when groups of people organize to challenge the status quo. Jill Bystydzienski gives a typical definition:

Empowerment is taken to mean a process by which oppressed persons gain some control over their lives by taking part with others in development of activities and structures that allow people increased involvement in matters which affect them directly. In its course people become enabled to govern themselves effectively. This process involves the use of power, but not 'power over' others or power as dominance as is traditionally the case; rather, power is seen as 'power to' or power as competence which is generated and shared by the disenfranchised as they begin to shape the content and structure of their daily existence and so participate in a movement for social change.³

This political process of empowerment has been conceptualized as a process in which the personal becomes the political. As developed in the women's movements and New Left social movements of the 1960s in the West, it involves what has been called "consciousness raising," that is, a participatory process of individuals sharing their life experiences with others in a regular group process.⁴ This in turn aims to create the emotional space for individuals to challenge low self-esteem, fear, misplaced hostility, and other issues dealing with internalized oppression. In this process, they can voice their own life experiences in a context where they learn to apply analytic tools and concepts to understand themselves as structured by oppressive systems.

What are the philosophical presuppositions of empowerment as a political goal? First, it assumes individuals can develop increased power with others as well as individual capacities to do things by a process of consciousness-raising within a group. This implies that individuals share common interests with those others in the group, for example, either to better meet their human needs or to promote the acknowledgement of their human rights as a rationale to change existing social and legal structures. But if the political goal of empowering women assumes women have common interests, do race, ethnic, class, sexual, and national differences between women challenge this presupposition, hence vitiating women's empowerment as a general political goal?

In the 1980s in the United States, the theory that social oppressions are intersectional and not merely additive, hence that feminists cannot detach gender identity from racial and class identity and interests, suggested that we must reject the idea that women have political interests in common as a group.⁵ But this conclusion seemed to leave women's movements without any social base on which to unite across race, class, and sexual differences. Gayatri Spivak suggests that we need to assume at least a "strategic essentialism" of women as a social group.⁶ But can we assume women as a social group have any common interests?

Chandra Mohanty has argued recently that there *is* one way in which women can be said to have common interests, but only in the narrow "formal" sense developed by Jónasdóttir (1988, 1994), who argues that the concept of "interest" arose historically from the demand for participatory democracy in state and society.⁷ Jónasdóttir argues that there are two components of this historical conception of "interest": a formal and a content component. For members of a social group to have a common formal interest in *X* refers to the right of group autonomy and control over the conditions of choice of a set of needed or wanted goods connected to *X*,⁸ including the meeting of material needs.⁹ For a group to share a content interest with regard to a particular content, *X*, implies that all members of the group have common needs and/or desires with respect to *X*. A group can have a common formal interest in *X* without a common content interest in *X*, that is, without having common needs or desires in *X*.

An example of a formal common interest that women share could be the interest in reproductive rights that are acknowledged and defended by the state in which they live. Claiming that women have a common formal interest in reproductive rights does not imply that they all need or desire to exercise reproductive rights (for example, pro-life women may desire to prohibit the reproductive right to abortion, both for themselves and others). It also does not imply that their social class or racial/ethnic position gives them the same material resources to achieve the goal of reproductive choice (so, the Hyde Amendment creates a material limitation on

poor women's access to abortions by denying funding for them through government welfare and health entitlements). What it does imply, however, is that all women have a minimally common social location as citizens of the nation states of the world, through legal differentiation by gender and other means, such as a structured sexual division of labor. Thus, in spite of racial, ethnic, class, sexual, and national differences, it would benefit all women to have access to reproductive choice because of this common social location.¹⁰

I agree with Jónasdóttir that having an interest is not a permanent state but a historical one that develops when a group, or an individual situated within a social group, comes to desire and to claim a right to participate in choosing which of its needs or perceived concerns (i.e., wants) it will meet with respect to a particular goal.¹¹ Individuals and groups have interests in relation only to particular other groups, in this formulation, and conceptions of who constitutes one's "peers" (who has equal rights to negotiate) and who are not one's peers (children, social inferiors, foreigners, animals, etc.) will determine whether individuals or groups desire to negotiate with, or to dominate (exercise power over), the other group in question, therefore whether or not their interests are compatible.

Needs versus Interests

What are the implications of Jónasdóttir's definition of interest with respect to the goals of development? First, let us look at how Maxine Molyneux uses her approach to make a distinction between practical and strategic gender interests, and then in turn how this distinction is used by Carolyn Moser to apply the concept of empowerment to gender and development discourse.

Molyneux's line of argument in her very influential 1985 article on the women's movement in Nicaragua aims to assess the claim of some feminists that the Nicaraguan revolutionary state did not promote "women's interests" because of the control of the male-dominated Sandinista party, in which the interests of male leaders to preserve their patriarchal privilege was put above that of women's liberation.¹² Rejecting universal "women's interests," she does want to argue that there are relational "gender interests" that women share because of their social positioning in relation to men, for example, in the gendered/sexual division of labor. These relational interests are in turn of two sorts: *practical gender interests* and *strategic gender interests*. Practical gender interests are those which are defined by women acting to promote perceived practical needs that they have as a part of their given gender role in the sexual division of labor; strategic gender interests are derived from a critique of male domination and a vision of an alternative set of gender arrangements that would eliminate it. In Latin America, "feminine" versus "feminist" women's movements have been defined by Molyneux's distinctions: women's activism, which promotes practical gender interests, since it does not challenge status quo gender domination, is feminine not feminist, while movements that explicitly act to promote social change toward a vision of gender equality can be called feminist.

Carolyn Moser, a World Bank development planner, makes a distinction similar to Maxine Molyneux's distinction between practical and strategic gender interests, although Moser redefines both "practical and strategic gender interests" as conscious "practical and strategic gender needs." Moser explicitly ties both practical and strategic gender needs to subjective claims of women, consciously identified, rather than ones defined outside of the context.¹³ She does this because she wants to distinguish between what she calls "top-down"

government approaches to development, such as that of welfare states that provide resources to less well-off citizens, and "bottom-up" approaches, which come from constituents organizing in what they perceive to be their interests as the grassroots level. Moser contrasts what she describes as the bottom-up Empowerment approach to development, as initiated by a group called DAWN at the 1985 Nairobi United Nations Women's conference, from other paradigms such as the top-down Welfare and Anti-Poverty approaches, and the Equity and Efficiency approaches, in order to persuade planners to take the Empowerment paradigm more seriously.

While I would agree with Moser that there is a distinction between the Empowerment paradigm and the other paradigms she sketches, I would argue that those operating from the Empowerment approach need not and should not adopt the subjective definition of needs and interests that Moser defends. Rather, it is only when individuals organized as groups come historically to articulate a demand to choose and define their own interests collectively as a group that the problem of top-down manipulation of individually felt needs and desires can be mitigated and challenged. The existence of DAWN, WAND, and other such groups in underdeveloped countries shows that they have formed the conditions necessary for articulating a common formal interest as a collective subject and are capable of creating the democratic participatory space where consciousness-raising and the articulation of demands against other groups, including the state, will not so easily be manipulated from above.

Since the Empowerment approach is explicitly materialist feminist, it can be helpfully contrasted with the mainstream development Equity approach, which is an explicit liberal feminist approach. Both approaches claim that capitalist development and mainstream development discourse and development projects in the Third World initially marginalized women. They have done so by ignoring the central nature of women's productive, reproductive, and community organizing work to meet human material and nurturance needs, often in the subsistence and informal economies rather than in the capitalist labor market. Thus, women must be given equal opportunity with men, via education, health care, and funding, to enter employed work and so develop some economic independence and hence gain bargaining power with men in all important social sites, including the family/household, civil society, and the state.

The Equity approach, although it agrees with the strategic or visionary gender interest goals of the Empowerment approach, tends in practice to assume that top-down legislative reforms such as laws against domestic violence or for women's reproductive rights, and social welfare measures, such as family planning clinics and free public education for both boys and girls, will lead to the achievement of these goals.¹⁴ By contrast, the Empowerment approach emphasizes the way that a combination of institutional domination relations, including race, class, gender, and the effects of colonialism and neo-colonialism, will keep such top-down methods from empowering the majority of women. Rather, the situation of women privileged by class and race may be improved, but the bulk of women will simply be controlled in the interests of dominant groups.

DAWN, a spokesgroup for the Empowerment approach, is an example of a grassroots group that refuses reformist politics in favor of bottom-up organizing by social movements and coalitions of poor, working class, and Third World women of color who come to see their interests as allied. Unlike the Equity approach, they refuse to isolate gender inequality from

other social dominations in women's lives as the key issue to prioritize. They agree on the importance of a bottom-up emphasis on autonomous women's groups to improve women's capabilities of self-reliance, internal strength, and self-esteem. As an "integrative feminism,"¹⁵ it insists that the autonomous women's movement be thought of not as just one but as many situated women's movements based on different race, class, sexual, and national locations; and that its members be allied to a broader social justice coalition seeking democratic control over crucial material and non-material resources for other dispossessed social subjects, including men.

Empowerment, Discourse, and Conflicts of Interests

It is time to turn to the problems posed by Jónasdóttir, Molyneux, and Moser's interest-based justification of the politics of empowerment, particularly as it applies to development projects. One problem is that using empowerment discourse to apply to a social group, such as women, might be thought to presuppose a homogeneous community of the oppressed, either through an identity politics of gender or race, ethnicity/nationality, or a Marxist structural analysis of class exploitation. A politics of empowerment based on the assumption of such homogeneity tends to suppress internal differences between its members in ways that ignore power and inequality relations.

How does a gender interest approach handle the intersectionality question? It can be addressed by pointing out that a person or group *A* may have some interests in common with another person or group *B* with regard to *X*, and another set of interests that are in conflict with respect to another issue, *Y*. So a white and an African American woman may have a common formal interest in having their reproductive rights protected by a government law, but their content interests may conflict with respect to an affirmative action policy for a job for which they are competing and that gives preference to the African American, even when they are similarly qualified for the position.¹⁶

This example shows two problems with Jónasdóttir's important intervention concerning the historical nature of the concept of "interest," which also relates to the concept of empowerment. First, if interests are not static effects of human nature but are goals developed historically, then they are defined by collectivities in struggle with each other as political priorities that connect to social identities. But the feminist empowerment theorists assume that these collectivities themselves are either naturally or structurally given, and downplay the fact that these collectivities are social constructs whose boundaries, structures, and norms are the result of constant processes of struggles and negotiations.¹⁷ Consider, for example, the following questions of identity boundaries: whether bisexuals are accepted as members of lesbian and gay communities engaged in identity politics of empowerment; whether male to female transsexuals are accepted as women; whether mixed race individuals whose parents are white and Chicano are Chicano for the purposes of *La Raza* politics; and the question, subject to ideological debate, as to whether the "popular classes" can be a unified community that includes native and immigrant workers, workers from different racial/ethnic backgrounds, peasant independent producers, salaried rural workers, market women, and those in the informal economy, as well as regular working class members who are employed for wages in factories or *maquilas*.

The point is that those advocating empowerment for a particular "community's interests" will constantly have to deal

with who counts as within the community and who is perceived as a hostile other, as well as differences of power of individuals within the community by gender, religion, sexuality, etc. As Yuval Davis points out: "The automatic assumption of a progressive connotation of the 'empowerment of the people' assumes a non-problematic transition from individual to collective power, as well as a pre-given, non-problematic definition of the boundaries of 'the people'."¹⁸

The second problem has to do with conflicts of interests that may not be easily resolved by assuming a process of shared empowerment between homogenous individuals whose differences can be bracketed. So, for example, feminist explanations of the process of political empowerment differentiate between the individual "power to" (capacitation) and the "power with" that a consciousness-raising group generates, which increases the energy and capacity for self-organization of the whole group, and the negative "power over" that is typical of oppressive structures of racism, sexism, and capitalist class relations. But since groups are not homogeneous and individuals within each group may have power over other individuals based on class, race, national origin, etc., it may often happen that an empowerment process allows some people within the group to take more control over their lives at the expense of negative consequences to others. One case is that of the middle class mom freed by the rise in her self-esteem from a feminist C-R group to seek a professional career, who uses an immigrant domestic servant to allow her this space, while the maid must sacrifice time with her own children.

Empowerment Discourse in Development

Criticisms of a politics of empowerment can be raised from a poststructuralist perspective in the context where the discourse of empowerment is used by mainstream funding agencies to justify organizing and funding groups to advance their development toward the goal of empowerment itself. For example, many community development projects in the Third World funded by the World Bank and other international donors, such as those promoting nutrition and health, literacy, or sanitation, now attempt to enable women not only to acquire certain knowledge but to change their characters in such a way as to be able to exercise power continuously, hence demonstrate "empowerment" in various venues (e.g., in the political and economic realms and in the family household).

From a Foucauldian analysis, it can be argued that mainstream development institutions have appropriated the discourse of empowerment, along with self-disciplining practices, to create a new development rationality.¹⁹ No longer is it acceptable to describe the Third World clients/recipients of the training or enabling practices called empowerment practices as "illiterate," "disenfranchised," "backward," or "exploited." Rather, they are now to be described as "rational economic agents," "global citizens," potential "entrepreneurs": they inherently think the way that producers and consumers of a globalized capitalist economy should think, but merely need some help honing specific skills to achieve their self-interests.²⁰ Development education should advance such a mindset in its clients, as it will encourage them to act as good entrepreneurs, wage earners, and consumers, that is, as proper "subjects/objects" of development.

Foucault's work on the normalization of various discourses and practices in new institutions claiming a scientific/rational base, such as the mainstream discourse of development, suggests that the new ways of thinking about and knowing such subjects involve power/knowledges. That is, researchers and practitioners teaching or applying these practices are

creating what he calls a “productive power” in which they gain power over the objects of research, their subjects, and their discourses about them change the subjects themselves. This happens through a process in which their subjects become “subjectivated,” (i.e., internalize these new ways of thinking about themselves) even as they are also increasing their power to engage in various activities (e.g., self-scrutiny for confessional purposes, or body exercises and comportment for increased military or socialization efficiency, etc.). Typically, however, the positive side of this productive power, for example, that the subjects are more disciplined, effective, efficient, or successful in certain tasks, is used as a justification of these new knowledges, while the negative side, that subjects are being increasingly exploited or acclimated to a competitive individualism that may eventually undermine the very group cooperation that led to their empowerment, are ignored. These are, after all, in the vested interests of mainstream development agencies and the corporate capitalist world that funds them through the World Bank, the IMF, and colluding wealthy capitalist nations, and not in the interests of the clients/subjects.

An example of this power/knowledge use of the concept of empowerment in a particular development project is discussed by Chizu Sato in a case study of a USAID-funded project, the Women’s Empowerment Program (WEP) designed to increase Nepalese women’s empowerment by two projects in literacy and microfinance training. One non-government organization (NGO) carried out a six-month training called “Rights, Responsibilities, and Advocacy,” which taught participants their legal rights and responsibilities as Nepalese citizens as well as collective advocacy of social change to promote these rights. Another NGO ran a “Women in Business” program that taught women literary skills as well as how to be involved in microfinancing collectives that would operate somewhat like the Grameen bank model.

The WEP project can be analyzed as having created a set of group practices and a discourse (set of concepts) that allowed the participants to constitute themselves as subjects in different ways than they had traditionally done. The rule by which to run their microfinancing mandated that women must rely on mutual assurance for repayment of loans to individuals, and to think of this as group “self-help,” even though this rule and concept (what Foucault calls a “technology of self”) came from outside the group. Similarly, the citizen and human rights they were taught were designed to create them as liberal pressure groups for government reform (but not revolution).²¹

The ideology of “self-help” rationalized the lack of any initial seed money by the outside donors for the micro-finance projects, hence ensuring that the poorest of poor women, those who had no initial capital at all, could not participate in the groups. This created an excluded but invisible Other, just as advanced capitalism does, whose lack of class resources were ignored in the ideology of women’s empowerment subjectivated by the group. Furthermore, the development rationality of the discourse of women’s empowerment as employed in the WEP projects made invisible ways in which male heads of households and other male elites could continue to appropriate the surplus labor of wives, daughters, and other relatives involved in these projects by patriarchal practices in which women are expected to distribute their capital to other family members in ways not reciprocated by male members.²²

Social Movement Empowerment versus Power/Knowledge Development Empowerment

The objections that have been raised previously against a politics of empowerment used in various social movement

identity politics suggest that empowering some in a social group may also inadvertently disempower individuals within that group or other social groups. Furthermore, the case study from Nepal presented above is an example of how dominant groups may co-opt empowerment discourses and processes by creating a productive power that gives individuals new powers but does so in a context that simply reorganizes domination relations of patriarchy, racism, imperialism, and class exploitation.

Nonetheless, movements for social justice require a discourse of liberation from those who have unjust power over them, and the language of empowerment is one that can continue to have a radical interpretation under the right circumstances. How then can we distinguish between the co-optive productive power enabled by mainstream development practice and the liberating sort of productive power found in grassroots women’s movements and other left social movements?

There are two conditions for the existence of a liberating empowerment process: first, it must be part of an indigenous social movement. This is not to say that the movement itself may not be influenced in its values, goals, and strategies by those outside the area or country in which the movement is located. Rather, the point is that the movement must be connected to a grassroots constituency that involves some form of participatory democracy that gives it legitimacy to those it claims to speak for. Second, since social movements are never homogeneous, there must be some political way for individuals and groups within the social movement to negotiate conflicts of interest within the movement. Social movements that are mass movements are never simply engaged in identity politics, but are constantly negotiating for coalitions in solidarity with other oppressed groups inside and outside their boundaries. This means that there can be no one core of accepted “experts” whose analysis of the relevant structures of oppression automatically gives them the best insight on the political strategy to change it, in part because that group of experts will have a social position with vested interests that may contribute to a new oppressive power/knowledge.²³ Thus, coming to agreement on what structural changes are necessary for empowerment or liberation cannot be achieved by fiat but must be the product of participatory democracy in coalitions. This does not imply that outsiders may not come to be integral parts of social movements; however, the example of the Zapatistas demonstrates that an outsider, sub-commandante Marcos, can come to act in solidarity with a group in such a way as to become an insider, an “organic intellectual” with leadership powers, in Gramsci’s terms. But for an outsider to become an insider, he or she must come to understand the group’s world view and values and be able to reconstitute his or her own values or categories of critical analysis into that world view as an expansion or development of it, not as a rejection and imposition. I call this process of social, political, and epistemic reorientation of the outsider the construction of “bridge identities.”²⁴

An affinity group, coalitional approach is particularly necessary in promoting women’s empowerment that will be liberatory rather than cooptive. The early middle-class-based second wave feminist movement’s support groups, for example, gave women a powerful means of challenging subjectivation into gender subordination, but tended to be too simplistic about class, race, ethnic, and national systems of domination that also differently empower women in relation to each other. Without a multi-system analysis of social dominations,²⁵ women may be empowered as individuals in relation to particular men but still disempowered in relation to

other relevant hegemonic forces, such as racism, capitalism, and imperialism.

Conclusion and Summary

I have argued that there are political disagreements as to the content and political application of the notion of “empowerment” as a goal and strategy for women’s liberation. I have contrasted mainstream development institutions’ co-opted uses of the concept of empowerment with its more radical applications by struggles for national liberation and movements for social justice. As poststructuralist critics have pointed out, identity politics by itself has not been successful in organizing in heterogeneous communities.²⁶ Rather, individuals and groups divided by gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and nationality can only be empowered by a participatory democratic culture that strives for solidarity in a coalition of oppressed groups, while working out a democratic procedure to negotiate possible conflicts of interest among its members as one of the ends of a developmental process toward social justice.

Endnotes

1. A shorter version of this paper, entitled “Empowerment, Development and Women’s Liberation: A Genealogical Critique,” is a part of the Proceedings of the International Association for Women Philosophers (IAPH) Conference in Gotteburg, Sweden, June 2004.
2. Paula England. “Conceptualizing Women’s Empowerment in Countries of the North.” In *Women’s Empowerment and Demographic Processes: Moving Beyond Cairo*, edited by Harriet B. Presser and Gita Sen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).
3. J. M. Bystydzienski. *Women Transforming Politics: Worldwide Strategies for Empowerment* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992). Cited in Nira Yuval-Davis, “Women, Ethnicity and Empowerment,” in *Who’s Afraid of Feminism?* edited by Ann Oakley and Juliet Mitchell (New York: The New Press, 1997), 78.
4. Dorothy Henderson, “Consciousness Raising in Participatory Research: Method and Methodology for Emancipatory Nursing Inquiry,” *Adv. Nurs. Sci.*, 17 (1995): 58-69.
5. Patricia Hill Collins. *Black Feminist Thought*, 2nd Edition (New York: Routledge, 2000); Angela P. Harris, “Race and Essentialism in Feminist Legal Theory” *Stanford Law Review*, 42 (1990): 581-616; Elizabeth V. Spelman. *Inessential Woman* (Boston: Beacon, 1988).
6. Gayatri Spivak. *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogue* (London: Routledge, 1990).
7. Chandra Mohanty. “Women Workers and Capitalist Scripts: Ideologies of Domination, Common Interests, and the Politics of Solidarity.” In *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, edited by M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (New York: Routledge, 1997), 3-29; citing Anna Jónasdóttir. “On the Concept of Interest, Women’s Interests, and the Limitations of Interest Theory.” In *The Political Interests of Gender*, edited by Kathleen Jones and Anna Jónasdóttir (London: Sage, 1988), 33-65; and Jónasdóttir. *Why Women Are Oppressed* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1994).
8. In other words, it is the desire for what Balibar calls “egaliberté,” i.e., the desire for participatory democracy—equal opportunity and freedom as a group to define and negotiate to achieve one’s perceived needs with other individuals and groups (cited in Renata Salecl. *The Spoils of Freedom: Psychoanalysis and Feminism after the Fall of Socialism* [New York: Routledge, 1994]). On Jónasdóttir’s definition of “interest,” in a society structured in dominance, whether of gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, or other social grouping, social groups may have contradictory interests. These have to do with structured social relations between them that allow a dominating group to have greater conditions for overall autonomy in their lives based on the denial of another group or groups’s reciprocal abilities to choose.
9. For Jónasdóttir, a need seems to be not simply a means to achieve a perceived concern, as it is defined by Moser, but a material necessity, either to achieve physical survival or other basic good, which could then exist whether or not the individual who has the need actually has a perceived concern about it. Imagine the anorexic who needs food to survive physically but does not have a perceived concern, or goal for, or want of, food. (Carolyn Moser. *Gender Planning and Development: Theory, Practice and Training* [New York: Routledge, 1993]).
10. Jónasdóttir’s distinction between formal and content interests allows her to occupy a third position, a historical materialist feminist one, between those political theorists who conceptualize interests as merely subjective preferences or desires, on the one hand, and those who take them to be objective and ahistorically given as a part of an essentialist concept of human nature. She rejects the subjectivists who, by identifying interests with perceived needs and desires, give us no ground for critiquing the manipulation of the needs and desires of one group by another more powerful group, as with the creation of consumerism by advanced capitalist globalization. She also rejects objectivist positions like conservatives who deny that women have interests as a group to challenge the existing order since their natural interests are confined to their familial role, and liberal humanists who think women’s interests are the same as men’s interests, even though traditional gender roles have blinded us to our commonality as rational self-interested agents. Her position, that there are historically developed objective interests in individual freedom and democratic participation, is similar to those in the Marxist camp such as Paulo Freire. Freire holds that human development in the capitalist age involves an interest in expanding individual freedom, but that this goal, as specified by the demand for participatory democracy, is unachievable for oppressed groups within capitalism, and thus we need a pedagogy of the oppressed to educate the oppressed to claim their rights (Paulo Freire. *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* [Harmondsworth: Penguin Press, 1972]). But I would claim, and Jónasdóttir would agree, Freire has failed to conceptualize the workings of the “sex/gender system,” so he does not see that there is another system besides capitalism, patriarchy, which has pitted men against women in terms of gender interest (Ann Ferguson. *Sexual Democracy: Women, Oppression and Revolution* [Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991]).

11. I argue that interests are always relational; that is, a person has an interest in deciding what to do regarding *X*, in opposition to other groups whose needs or perceived concerns regarding *X* may conflict. The relationality of the concept of “interest” may be noted by connecting it to the concept of “power over,” which is also a relational concept. Paula England points out that a similar definition of power was maintained by Max Weber who claimed: “Power is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests” (Quoted in England, 1997, 38-39). She also cites the similar definition of Robert Dahl (1957): A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do (Reference in England, 1997, 39, footnote 2).
12. Maxine Molyneux, “Mobilization without Emancipation? Women’s Interests, State and Revolution,” *Feminist Studies*, 11 (1985): 227-254.
13. Moser 1993, 39.
14. An example of this is the position already referred to by Paula England (1997) in which she cites many examples of the importance of changing objective bases of power (economic resources, legal and institutional rules, and social norms) as conditions for women’s empowerment but no real examples of how to change subjective bases of power (beliefs in self-efficacy and entitlement). Since the objective bases of power she cites could be achieved by top-down methods, but the subjective bases of power tend to require bottom-up social movements to change the self-esteem of masses of women and other oppressed subjects, we can see the way that the Empowerment approach’s difference in emphasis from the Equity approach becomes important politically.
15. Angela Miles. *Integrative Feminisms: Building Global Visions, 1960s-1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1996).
16. This claim is controversial, since it might be argued that the white woman’s long-range interest involves making coalitions with women of color to fight racism and sexism, and hence she should support an Affirmative Action policy that may not be in her short-term interest. Rather than make this distinction, I prefer to argue that we should distinguish between immediate interests and social justice visions. The white woman thus can be said to have a conflict of immediate interest with the African American woman and Affirmative Action policies based on race, but can advocate out of solidarity, a social justice vision that supports the elimination of racism, hence need not be in opposition with the social justice vision of the African American woman.
17. Yuval-Davis 1997, 80.
18. Ibid.
19. Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Pantheon, 1977); Michel Foucault. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-77*, edited by Colin Gordon (Brighton UK: Harvester 1980); see also Arturo Escobar. *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).
20. Chizu Sato, “The Making of Global Citizens: A Nepalese Case of Women’s Empowerment,” mss., Exam paper, Center for International Education, U Mass/Amherst, 2003.
21. As Sato argues, coming to “subjectivate,” that is, think of themselves as agents (women) with common gender interests that connect to their individual self-interests, is connected to the idea of themselves as citizens with rights to promote these interests through collective political action. This created a “constituency of becoming” (Sato 2003, 17) among the women that supported solidarity with other self-help groups. However, this solidarity pre-supposed the coming of participants to think of themselves as lacking certain skills (literacy) and resources (claimed to be rights) and hence, coming to desire empowerment on the terms of outside development experts who taught them this development rationality and desire, but with a modernist analysis of their problems that made invisible the vested interests of the outside powers (the U.S. government, multinational corporations, etc.) that stood to gain by the success of such micro-finance and political activist groups. For example, powerful funding elites hoped that such constituencies as women, in learning networking skills among themselves (another technology of self) could come to displace traditional local patriarchal and feudal powers, and hence eventually “modernize” their countries as terrains for the global penetration of capital.
22. Ibid., 22.
23. The problems that Marxist-led national liberation movements have had because of the view that some group of experts (typically the party or front’s central or governing committee), could best discern such strategies are well known, and suggest that factions must be tolerated in a process of participatory democracy and negotiation to avoid state power being used in repressive ways.
24. Ann Ferguson, “Resisting the Veil of Privilege: Building Bridge Identities as an Ethico-Politics of Global Feminism,” *Hypatia*, (Special issue, “Border Crossings: Multicultural and Postcolonial Feminist Challenges to Philosophy, Part II”) 13 (1998): 95-113.
25. Ferguson 1991.
26. See, for instance, Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Judith Butler. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993); and Wendy Brown. *Manhood and Politics: A Feminist Reading in Political Theory* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 1988).

Feminism and Critical Theory

Jeffrey A. Gauthier

The relationship between feminist political philosophy and the critical theory developed by theorists associated with the Institute for Social Research or Frankfurt School is not easy to fix. Although the motivations and methodologies of Frankfurt School theorists share much in common with theories of women’s oppression in the late twentieth century, critical theorists have not had the influence on feminist philosophy—even among continental theorists—that one might expect. The

reasons for this are complex. In the first place, “critical theory” encompasses a broad range of conceptual approaches that sometimes share little in common aside from exposing and explaining the power of ideology in late capitalism. Secondly, because most critical theorists have included the women’s movement among the phenomena to be explained in their critique of ideology, critical theory is a theory of feminism in addition to being a body of thought that feminists might employ toward their own ends. As such, it has been at least as much a target of feminist critique as a source of theoretical insight. Finally, critical theory’s uneasy positioning between the materialist economic theory of traditional Marxism and the more thoroughgoing anti-totalizing accounts of postmodern and poststructuralist philosophies has made it subject to criticisms from both sides. To Marxist and socialist feminists it may appear that critical theory has abandoned all hope for fundamental economic change, while for postmodern feminists its central focus on the ideology of late capitalism may itself suggest hangover from the economic determinism of orthodox Marxism.

I will address here some of the central themes of the most influential critical theorists and their significance for feminist thought. In section one, I briefly consider the work of Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, and Habermas. Although I cannot do justice to the extensive and complex thought of these writers, I focus on the parts of their work that have had the greatest influence on recent feminist theory, as well as those that have generated the greatest criticism. In the second section, I consider some important recent feminist responses to critical theory. Because of the disproportionate importance of Habermas’s still-evolving theory for recent feminist thought, I devote somewhat more attention to his work than to that of the early critical theorists. A bibliography of recent feminist readings of critical theory and critical theorists follows the essay.

The Development of Critical Theory

The critical social theory originally associated with the Frankfurt School developed through the varied approaches of a wide range of social theorists including Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Erich Fromm, Max Horkheimer, Otto Kirchheimer, Leo Löwenthal, Herbert Marcuse, Franz Neumann, and Friedrich Pollock. Later, Jürgen Habermas took up various themes from the school and has continued to develop them in his normative theory of society. Although critical theory can scarcely be reduced to a single coherent set of doctrines, it is fair to say that all the critical theorists began by assuming a broadly Marxian account of social and economic relations, and by developing explanations for the inaccuracy of Marx’s predictions of a working-class revolution in late-capitalist democracies. Instead of a worker’s paradise, the twentieth century had yielded fascism and ever-increasing bureaucratic control of human life in both central state communist and democratic capitalist nation states. In the seminal “Traditional and Critical Theory,” Horkheimer traces this in large part to the benighted condition of an alienated working class no longer capable of playing the revolutionary role that Marx had assigned to it.¹ In this assessment, Horkheimer relied on the influential work of Georg Lukács, whose groundbreaking writings on Marx’s concepts of alienation, ideology, and commodity fetishism had awakened twentieth-century interest in Marx as a theorist of consciousness. In *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács argues that the commodification of human existence in late capitalism occasions a break between the existing beliefs of the proletariat and the genuine interests of the class. The true interests of the working class are not the actually existing interests of members of the class, but the interests that they would take up were they freed

from ideology and made fully aware of their conditions.² Under the influence of the commodity fetishism of consumer society, such awareness does not exist.

Although Lukács remained committed in principle to the emancipatory potential of a fully-informed working class, critical theorists such as Horkheimer and Adorno came to doubt that the hypothetical conditions for politicizing the workers could ever be met.³ Moreover, their reasons for skepticism extended well beyond the particular social conditions of late capitalism. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno combined a Marxian analysis of class-consciousness with a Freudian-inspired account of human civilization to argue that alienation has roots in human culture’s enduring struggle to dominate nature and to make it an object of manipulation and control.⁴ The repression of sexuality in the body as well as the subjection of marginalized people (e.g., women, serfs, and wage-earners) have a common source in the primordial endeavor of bringing nature under the power of human beings and thereby to suppress its disturbing “otherness.”⁵ Even the conceptualization of the world in language reflects this need. If all human culture reflects a drive toward domination and control, Horkheimer and Adorno saw the triumph of scientific reason as taking the drive to a new level. Science’s “disenchantment” of the natural world, in which all reality becomes subject to the manipulation and control of instrumental reason, represents the final loss of otherness and, with it, the alienation of humanity from its own natural capacities.⁶ Positivism in the sciences represents the theoretical culmination of this estrangement, as a disinterested inquiry, distanced from the objects of its study, becomes the universal model of understanding in both the natural and human sciences. As Seyla Benhabib points out, Horkheimer and Adorno’s analysis locates a fundamental contradiction at the heart of the Enlightenment project of emancipation: “The theory of the dialectic of the Enlightenment...perpetuates the very structure of domination it condemns.”⁷

By tracing the origin of the failure of the working class to effect emancipatory change to a conception of reason implicit in modernity itself, Horkheimer and Adorno extended the concerns of the critical theorists well beyond those of traditional Marxism. They also set up the fundamental problem with which critical theorists would wrestle: How is emancipation possible at all given an ideological structure that seems to extend even to the concept of emancipation itself? For Horkheimer, the struggle with this problem led him to abandon the belief that political change could serve as an effective avenue for emancipation. He came to argue that religion, faith in transcendental being, lends the most adequate expression of a yearning for justice and freedom in a world that cannot practically be transformed.⁸ The impossibility of a positive social transformation led Horkheimer to become suspicious of the success of movements that claimed to have an emancipatory goal. Practical success was evidence of complicity with the dominant ideology. This suspicion extended to the feminist movement toward equality with men. Horkheimer worried that equality generally came at the cost of genuine liberty, and more specifically that a truly equal partnership between women and men in marriage would promote precisely the kind of mutual isolation that characterized contemporary bureaucratic society.⁹

By contrast, Adorno never abandoned the possibility of radical social transformation and focused his work on the logic of identity that underpinned Enlightenment science’s drive toward manipulation and control. For Adorno, Hegel’s argument that it is possible for the human subject to come to a grasp of the reality of the world by means of conceptual

mediation epitomizes the “totalizing” thought of the Enlightenment. In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno argued that conceptual knowing could not encompass the totality of its object, as there remains an otherness or “immediacy” that defies mediation by concepts.¹⁰ In a sense, Adorno returned to the Kantian epistemology that Hegel had sought to overcome, claiming that there remains an aspect of reality that is always beyond our attempts to conceptually understand it. In late capitalism, this “distanced nearness” of the ultimately inassimilable content of the object finds expression in art, thus making the work of art the site where a subversive call remains possible.¹¹ Although capitalism manipulates the work of art in its commodification of culture, the very aesthetic appeal that makes that manipulation possible expresses a value that refuses reduction to mere exchange value.

The same Hegelian tradition that is at the center of Adorno’s critique of Enlightenment ideology finds a more positive reading in the work of Herbert Marcuse. For Marcuse as for Lukács, Hegel’s dialectical logic lends expression to “the rationality of contradiction, of the opposition of forces, tendencies, elements, which constitutes the movement of the real and, if comprehended, the concept of the real.”¹² By contrast, the reductive analyses of positivism and operationalism in modern scientific thought would repress this oppositional dimension of historical reality. Indeed, the possibility for change in Marcuse’s diagnosis of late capitalism lies with his claim that the ideological mystifications that keep the working class from recognizing its true interests take the form of “false needs,” repressing the content of their true interests.¹³ By integrating themes from the ideology critique of Adorno and Horkheimer with Heidegger’s discussion of authenticity and a Freudian account of unconscious drives, Marcuse developed a theory of the effects of ideology under the conditions of late capitalism that is sweeping in scope and ultimately bleak in its outlook. While consumer capitalism provides an abundance of commodities, the addictive consumption of these products fails to satisfy unconscious longings and issues in what Marcuse terms “euphoria in unhappiness.”¹⁴ As part of the reduction of all human needs to immediately satisfiable desires for commodities, contemporary culture has stripped modern human individuals of occasions for sublimating their desires and achieving the higher goods of civilization. Marcuse laments the way in which “higher culture becomes part of material culture” and the great literature and art of the past become articles for consumption.¹⁵ In his analysis, this deprives them of their alienating capacity, something necessary for them to open people to certain higher goods and thus retain their true cultural value.

Given his view that the working class was immersed in “false needs” manufactured by consumer capitalism, Marcuse was as skeptical as any of the other critical theorists as to the capacity of the workers to serve as the catalyst for revolutionary change. Perhaps because of his closeness to the social movements sweeping the United States in the 1960s, however, Marcuse held out hope that other groups might lend expression to repressed emancipatory desires. He argued that the women’s movement had such radical potential owing to the fact that women’s exclusion from the economic and political institutions of modernity had permitted them to develop certain counter-cultural attitudes and emotions including receptivity, non-violence, and tenderness.¹⁶ Such expressions of the life instinct might serve to transform culture overall, effecting a change in the instincts of women and men over time. While holding out this possibility and supporting the activism that sought to actualize it, however, Marcuse’s relentless exposure of the power of “one dimensional” thinking

to co-opt its opposition did little to raise hopes that political movements will be successful.

In their descriptions of the ideological nature of late capitalist culture, the critical writings of Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse articulate primarily a negative interpretation of its emancipatory possibilities. By contrast, the most influential work of Jürgen Habermas concerns the positive normative vision underpinning those criticisms. To the extent that critical theory aims to offer a critique of the technical interests of manipulation and control that lie behind the natural sciences, the critique must itself have a justification in another kind of human interest. Otherwise, it would be no less in the grip of ideology than the institutions and practices of which it is critical. Habermas identifies a source of justification in the existence of a positive human emancipatory interest in freeing consciousness from the grip of ideology. This human interest is distinct from the interest in manipulation and control that animates the natural sciences.¹⁷ Because Habermas shares in critical theory’s skepticism concerning an epistemologically privileged proletarian vision that can reliably offer emancipatory insight based upon that interest, however, it is incumbent upon him to identify an alternative nonideological source of normative justification. Habermas takes up the task of explaining such a source in his complex and controversial description of the “ideal speech situation.” On this account, every act of communication commits the participants of the interaction to shared norms of comprehensibility, sincerity, truth, and appropriateness. Included in this commitment is the further condition that speakers can defend the normative validity of their speech act if they are challenged. Since it is obvious that not all speakers are *actually* prepared to mount such a defense of the claims even if they have invoked them implicitly, Habermas argues that speakers *would* be able to defend the validity of their claims in an ideal speech situation that meets a formal set of conditions for fair and rational discourse.¹⁸ The unconstrained and rational search for truth in the ideal speech situation represents the normative ideal that ideological communication distorts.¹⁹

In making the search for justification central to his theory and in identifying a hypothetical agreement among rational actors the source of normativity, Habermas’s project more closely resembles the Kantian constructivism of liberals such as John Rawls than that of the earlier Marxist-inspired critical theorists. While Habermas’s more recent writings make less direct appeal to the ideal speech situation, he remains committed to the normative force of formally governed, universalist, argumentative discourse in advancing emancipation. While such guidelines follow a strongly Kantian model, Habermas rejects Kant’s reliance upon an isolated rational subject who applies the moral law in favor of an intersubjective self that develops in language and public discourse.²⁰ Likewise, on Habermas’s account, there is no simple moral test for valid public legislation. Rather, it is the evolving consensus of various formally governed but historically situated legal and political discourses in modern democracies that legitimate the norms of society. Thus, the relationship between morality and the law is more complex and dynamic than Kant had conceived it.²¹

Habermas’s pursuit of the positive conditions of unconstrained dialogue that critical theory assumes in its critique of ideology effectively shifted his focus away from the distortions of consciousness that were at the center of earlier analyses, and toward those of language and dialogue. As the “original mode” of human interaction, communicative action aims at a kind of shared understanding that is distinct from both production in labor and the instrumental control

that governs the sciences.²² Habermas identifies the “lifeworld” as the site where the symbolic interaction of human communication develops and reproduces itself, while the “system” is the site of economic production and technical control of nature. While system and lifeworld are related, features of the lifeworld cannot simply be reduced to functions of the system in the manner suggested by some interpretations of Marx’s base and superstructure. In early societies, system and lifeworld were unified, but the economic system of production has become increasingly split off from the lifeworld. In the modern world, the family has become the seat of the lifeworld while the sphere of business and government represents the system. Habermas claims that the disenchantment of nature has extended into the lifeworld as well, as the definitions and interpretations that arose from unexamined traditions became restructured and rationalized. In contrast to Horkheimer and Adorno, however, Habermas does not lament this process as simply an overextension of instrumental rationality inasmuch as he takes the extension of critical thinking into the lifeworld as potentially expanding the opportunities for understanding and freeing people from the grip of oppressive traditions.²³

Despite this emancipatory potential, Habermas also argues that the “uncoupling” of system and lifeworld has in fact led to an increasing “colonization” of the latter by the former.²⁴ The once largely instinctive and autonomous symbolic life of the family is now subject to a variety of incursions by the capitalist marketplace and the state. Commercialization and consumerism are now an integral part of family life and child development. The state’s role in education and the administration of the various agencies of the welfare state subject the symbolic life of the family to ever expanding systemic control. Likewise, the judicial structures of the state have a growing impact on family relations as contract law and litigation enter into more and more parts of family life.²⁵ According to Habermas, this colonization of the lifeworld has given rise to a fragmented consciousness and a decreasing capacity on the part of people to interpret the world based upon ingrained but increasingly fractured and incoherent cultural traditions.²⁶

Like Marcuse, Habermas sees some emancipatory potential in the movements that react against these incursions on the lifeworld, particularly in the women’s movement because of its universalist motives in seeking equality and justice. Reactions against colonization, however, encompass a broad range of groups, many of which have only defensive and particularistic ends. These include not only organizations on the left, such as feminism, the lesbian and gay movement, environmentalism, and the peace movement, but also some on the right, including religious fundamentalism and anti-tax activism.²⁷ These movements seek not so much to effectively resist the influence of the political and economic system on the lifeworld as to separate from the system and thereby to form a counterculture that respects the autonomy of the lifeworld. Habermas sees little emancipatory potential in the narrow “particularity” of such a strategy. Rather, the best hope for such movements would lie with the establishment of “autonomous public spheres” of discourse that could afford a space for members of the group and the possibility of indirectly influencing the larger system of which they are a part.²⁸ These spaces cannot be created by the system but must arise as a result of organizing within the lifeworld. Given the power of the economic and political system of late capitalism, however, Habermas is skeptical of direct attempts to change the system or to separate from it entirely.²⁹ Rather, positive movement toward overcoming the power of ideology is possible through

unconstrained dialogue within various movements, and by the indirect influence of these movements on the market and on democratic state structures.

Feminist Reactions to Critical Theory

For purposes of analysis, it is useful to separate the ideology critique of the earlier critical theorists from Habermas’s broader ethical program. A number of the central themes of those early theorists resonate with those of feminist theorists. In the first place, critical theory’s displacement of economic determinism as a totalizing motive force in history would be accepted by all but the most orthodox Marxist feminists. Moreover, the complexity of finding a ground for claims about oppression in the absence of an epistemologically privileged vanguard has been a vexing problem for feminists much as it has been for critical theorists. Horkheimer and Adorno’s identification of the domination of nature with the subordination of women and hatred for the body in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* anticipates de Beauvoir’s development of many of the same ideas in *The Second Sex*, and that have continued to be at the center of feminist social critiques ranging from descriptions of the objectification of the female body to the vision of ecofeminism.³⁰ Adorno’s negative dialectic raises questions concerning the construction of subjectivity that have been at the center of much continental feminist theory.³¹ The relationship between the prevalence of instrumental reason and the reduction of the feminine and nature to otherness remains a potentially fertile intersection of feminism and critical theory. Finally, the exposure of ideology concerning the manipulation and control that is implicit in positivist approaches to the sciences has been mirrored in many feminist critiques of traditional science.

Despite these important points of intersection, the development of ideology critique among the early Frankfurt School theorists involved elements at odds with some major trends in recent feminist theory. Perhaps the most fundamental and far-reaching shortcoming of these theorists involved their failure to take the struggle to overcome the oppression of women as one of truly serious emancipatory significance. For example, Horkheimer and Adorno’s analysis of ideology leads them to reject the Marxist claim that the proletariat can function as a revolutionary class. In further concluding that no political activism can serve as the motive force toward radical social transformation, however, they assume that such a transformation remains the unique prerogative of the working class that is incapable of exercising it. In addition to underpinning much of the pessimism that has come to be attributed to Horkheimer and Adorno’s vision, such an assumption diminishes movements such as feminism as agents of fundamental social change.³² Horkheimer, as noted above, actually saw feminist movement for equality with men as bolstering the alienation and isolation of late capitalist society: “As a woman becomes a subject she becomes less of one.”³³

Part of the skepticism concerning the revolutionary potential of the women’s movement probably derived from romantic tendencies among critical theorists concerning the pre-capitalist past. Horkheimer’s turn to religion, Adorno’s emphasis on fine art as opposed to activism as a site of subversive potential, and Marcuse’s dismissal of all popular movements of culture and art as “desublimation” reflect their common belief that the ideological structures of late capitalism render its institutions and practices variously incapable of effecting emancipation. Because of their negative assessment of the social and psychological condition of the men subjected to these institutions and practices, the earlier critical theorists

had little sympathy with a movement that aims to open them to women's participation. Although Marcuse did hold out hope for the emancipatory possibilities of the women's movement, his vision of feminism was less one of advancing equality than of infusing an increasingly bureaucratic social order with certain distinctively feminine qualities. Because of their exclusion from the public realm, women had come to embody a psychology in which life instincts took precedence over the death instincts of the male world of business and warfare. The goal of the women's movement should thus be to alter the "instinctual needs of men and women" toward a more humanized social order.³⁴ Such a goal is in keeping with the thought of those feminists who seek to valorize women's "difference," and to retrieve their role in the domestic sphere.³⁵ It is at odds, however, with the movement for equality of social roles and may also serve to obscure the manner in which such difference is itself a function of women's subordinate role.³⁶ The strains in feminism favoring liberal or socialist equality, and those critical of any romanticizing of the patriarchal family structure in pre-modern Europe, stand in tension with certain aspects of critical theory's condemnation of post-Enlightenment subjectivity.

Habermas's shift from consciousness to communication, as well as his embrace of a model of rational discourse, significantly diminishes this tension. Perhaps most importantly, Habermas's distinction between the controlling interests of natural science and the emancipatory interests of critical theory permit him to take up a more positive appropriation of the role of reason and argument in political discourse. He can embrace feminist critical discourses as liberatory rather than as an unfortunate extension of Enlightenment leveling tendencies in the sphere of gender and the family. Habermas's work has received by far the greatest share of attention from feminists, due in large part to the fact that he has continued to develop his views at the same time as, and sometimes in response to, the wave of feminist social theory that has emerged over the past thirty years. Moreover, a number of themes in Habermas's work are consonant with the claims made by prominent feminist ethicists and political theorists. For example, Habermas's intersubjective conception of subjectivity is in line with feminist critiques of the self-sufficient subject of modernity.³⁷ Some feminists have also taken his grounding of normativity on the communicative interactions of social subjects as providing a needed criterion for feminist social criticism that avoids both the relativism of postmodernism and the abstract individualism that is implicit in most contemporary liberal theories of political justification.³⁸

At the same time, a number of feminists have called attention to various aspects of Habermas's thought that fall short of fully embracing the significance of feminist critique. Among the most contentious themes of Habermas for feminists concerns the uncoupling of system and lifeworld. As noted above, although Habermas is not averse in principle to the entrance of rationalizing tendencies into the lifeworld, he tends to interpret these as pathological insofar as they impinge on the activities of symbolic reproduction that are its proper function. In her influential essay, "What's Critical about Critical Theory?" Nancy Fraser argues that Habermas's analysis of system and lifeworld suffers because of its failure to recognize gender itself as an irreducible site of domination. This failure in turn perpetuates false beliefs concerning the oppressive nature of women's activities in the "private" space of the household and limits the explanatory power of his otherwise important analysis. In the first place, by asserting that prior to late capitalism a clear and natural distinction existed between the public activities of material production in the

system and the private symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld, Habermas ignores the manner in which the lifeworld has itself been a site of the productive work of women that is sustained by relations of money and power in the patriarchal family.³⁹ Although consumer capitalism, the welfare state, and juridical systems have certainly made their mark on the lifeworld, the family has always been a site of "systemic" injustice for women, involving unpaid labor, economic dependence, and sexual domination.⁴⁰ Likewise, while the welfare state may well have had the ambiguous effect of replacing dependence on one man with that of dependence on the larger patriarchal structure of the state, this kind of ambiguity is not captured by Habermas's interpretation of the welfare state as an incursion by the system on the putative purity of the lifeworld. To grasp the former kind of injustice, Habermas would have to expand his analysis to recognize gender as itself a systemic relation of power that works in conjunction with (and cannot be reduced to), the politico-economic system.⁴¹

A related area of contention for feminists concerns Habermas's critique of the particularity that supposedly animates contemporary social movements, including some aspects of feminism. As noted above, this follows from his claim that contemporary political organizing is primarily motivated by the colonization of the lifeworld. While Marcuse saw liberatory potential in the claims of a feminine ethic against the death instinct implicit in masculine economic and political power structures, Habermas criticizes this and similar movements for failing to universalize their critique of culture, and for advancing a politics of insularity and separatism. Writers such as Jean Cohen question this analysis, arguing that the partisanship and separatism that characterized early feminist consciousness-raising were indispensable in pursuing certain universalist ends: "The traditional understanding of women's place and identity had to be changed and new identities constructed, before challenges to sex discrimination could appear as a legitimate issue and women could be mobilized around them."⁴² While some cultural feminists might be taken to task for lacking a normative vision beyond that of a separate women's culture, the process of identity formation can play a critical psychological role in mounting an effective political challenge to entrenched injustice. Once again, Habermas's failure to consider this possibility is consistent with his general analysis of contemporary social movements as reactions against the colonization of the lifeworld rather than as autonomous emancipatory movements in their own right. Although Habermas goes further than earlier critical theorists in recognizing the possibility of genuine emancipation in the absence of an allegedly unrealizable worker's revolution, his reading of social movements as conservative reactions to the system rather than as radical attempts to transform it suggest a lingering assumption that changing the "system" is reserved for a politics of class.

While some feminists have welcomed Habermas's universalism as an antidote to the problem of relativism in postmodern and poststructuralist theories, even sympathetic readers have criticized certain aspects of his account. Agnes Heller argues that Habermas's focus on rational argumentation in his conception of discourse carries on the Kantian tendency to ignore the moral significance of feelings.⁴³ In her influential writings on critical theory and the feminist ethics of care, Seyla Benhabib further develops this theme, arguing that Habermas's ideal of communicative interaction requires that we assess the arguments of our interlocutors from the standpoint of the "generalized other." In taking up this stance, "We assume that the other, like ourselves, is a being who has concrete needs, desires, and affects, but that what constitutes his or her moral

dignity is not what differentiates us from each other, but rather what we, as speaking and acting rational agents, have in common.”⁴⁴ She contrasts this standpoint with that of the “concrete other,” in which the other’s moral demand on us includes her distinctiveness as a person with a history, an emotional life, and a set of capacities that are distinct from, and not assimilable into, my own.⁴⁵ While the Kantian tradition has identified respect for the humanity of the other with honoring her as a generalized other, Benhabib argues that this treatment effectively excludes concern for our emotional and inner well-being from the sphere of moral responsibility. Taking up similar themes, Johanna Meehan credits Habermas’s grounding of normativity in discourse with recognizing that bonds of mutual respect and relationship are essential to morality. Although Meehan agrees with Benhabib’s criticism of the generalized other implicit in Habermas’s ethics, she argues that his approach can be “complemented” by alternative ethical stances that integrate a recognition of the concrete other.⁴⁶

By placing communicative action rather than production at the center of critical theory’s emancipatory project, Habermas overcomes the impasse occasioned by Adorno and Marcuse’s assumption that emancipation requires a revolution in productive relations that—on their own account—the ideological apparatus of late capitalism renders practically impossible. His separation of economic and political systems from a lifeworld, however, and his conception of emancipation as resistance to and withdrawal from that colonization, limit and distort the true scope of feminist politics. Likewise, his integration of Kantian ideals of universality and a respect for persons centering on their rational capacities occasions skepticism among feminist ethicists who are critical of Kantian rationalism’s privileging of reason over emotions.

Conclusion

Perhaps the most profound source of the tension that has existed between feminism and critical theory derives from two incompatible ways of conceiving the relationship between the two movements. From the perspective of critical theory, the women’s movement is a political phenomenon of late capitalism, the understanding of which requires the tools of ideology critique. For all the differences in their respective assessments of the women’s movement, for example, Horkheimer and Habermas both assume that feminism, like all other contemporary liberation movements, is the proper object of a critique. Feminists—with the possible exception of orthodox Marxist feminists—on the other hand, take social criticism from a women’s point of view to be bona fide critical theory, a thoroughgoing critique of the institutions and practices of male dominated societies. As such, it cannot simply be an object for critical explanation without losing its autonomy as a theory. Part of the feminist appeal of Habermas’s account comes from its being a source of insight about the nature of political legitimacy, as opposed to an attempt to subsume feminism within a supposedly more global critique of society.

If feminism is conceived as part of critical theory, as a necessary complement to past critiques of ideology in late capitalist societies, however, the possibility of a mutually enlightening set of critiques emerges. As noted above, such a move is suggested in Fraser’s “What’s Critical about Critical Theory?” where the absence of a critique of gender in Habermas’s account is exposed as impairing the explanatory force of his account. Moreover, to the extent that feminist and other contemporary critical theories (e.g., that of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender liberation) can be effective in actually moving society to accept reforms that run counter to

or at least in tension with the dominant ideology, this may offer a way out of the generally pessimistic outlook accepted by the earlier Frankfurt School theorists. Once again, to make this new conception possible, Marxian critical theory would have to acknowledge that the limitations that capitalist ideology places on class revolution need not exclude the possibility of radical change coming from other places.

Endnotes

1. Max Horkheimer. “Traditional and Critical Theory.” In *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, translated by M.J. O’Connell, et al. (New York: Continuum, 1972), 242.
2. Georg Lukács. *History and Class Consciousness*, translated by R. Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1970), 51-52.
3. See Horkheimer. *The Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Continuum, 1974), 94; and Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, translated by J. Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1972), 7-9.
4. Horkheimer and Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 31-36.
5. See Douglas Kellner. *Critical Theory, Marxism, and Modernity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 90-93.
6. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 9.
7. Seyla Benhabib. *Critique, Norm, and Utopia: A Study of the Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 169.
8. Horkheimer. *Critical Theory*, 129.
9. Horkheimer. *Dawn and Decline: Notes 1926-1931 and 1951-1967*, translated by M. Shaw (New York: Seabury, 1978), 135. See Joan Alway. *Critical Theory and Political Possibilities: Conceptions of Emancipatory Politics in the Works of Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, and Habermas* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995), 147.
10. Adorno. *Negative Dialectics*, translated by E. B. Ashton (New York: Seabury, 1973), 32-42.
11. Adorno. *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Damaged Life*, translated by E. F. N. Jephcott (London: New Left Books, 1974), 89-90.
12. Marcuse. *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon, 1964), 140-41.
13. Marcuse. *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (New York: Vintage, 1955), 90-95.
14. Marcuse. *One Dimensional Man*, 5.
15. *Ibid.*, 58.
16. Marcuse. “Marxism and Feminism,” *Women’s Studies*, 2 (1974): 281.
17. In *Knowledge and Human Interests* (translated by J. J. Shapiro, Boston: Beacon, 1971), Habermas adds a third “practical interest” in seeking mutual understanding that guides the hermeneutical sciences. Raymond Geuss attributes this to the influence of Gadamer. Geuss. *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 55n.
18. The precise standing of the ideal speech situation in Habermas has been a subject of extensive debate. Benhabib identifies at least four distinct

- interpretations of it, all with differing normative implications. See *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*, 287-88.
19. Habermas. "A Postscript to *Knowledge and Human Interests*," translated by C. Lenhardt, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 3 (1973): 168.
 20. This grounding in *praxis* also generates certain differences with Rawls's narrower conception of public reason. See Thomas McCarthy, "Kantian Constructivism and Reconstructivism: Rawls and Habermas in Dialogue," *Ethics*, 105 (October 1994): 44-63.
 21. Habermas. *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Modern Democracy*, translated by W. Rehg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998). See also Kenneth Baynes. "Deliberative Democracy and the Limits of Liberalism." In *Discourse and Democracy: Essays on Habermas's Between Facts and Norms*, edited by René von Schomberg and Kenneth Baynes (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).
 22. Habermas. *Theory of Communicative Action 1*, translated by T. McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1984), 288. For Habermas, linguistic interaction represents a norm-governed sphere of human activity that is related, but not reducible to, productive relations. In his view, the failure to recognize this fact has led some Marxists to see Marx's "brilliant insight" into the relationship between human relations and the forces of production as no more than a mechanistic reduction of the former to the latter. See Habermas. *Theory and Practice*, translated by J. Viertel (Boston: Beacon, 1973), 169.
 23. Habermas. *Theory of Communicative Action 2*, translated by T. McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1987), 146.
 24. *Ibid.*, 367.
 25. *Ibid.*, 356-73.
 26. *Ibid.*, 355.
 27. *Ibid.*, 392.
 28. Habermas. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, translated by F. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 364.
 29. See Habermas. "Modernity versus Postmodernity," translated by A. Huyssen and J. Zipes, *New German Critique*, 22 (1981): 13.
 30. Simone de Beauvoir. *The Second Sex*, translated by H. Parshley (New York: Knopf, 1989).
 31. See Asha Varadharajan. *Exotic Parodies: Subjectivity in Adorno, Said, and Spivak* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).
 32. The same holds for lesbian, gay, or queer revolution movements. See Jennifer Rycenga. "Queerly Amis: Sexuality and the Logic of Adorno's Dialectics," in *Adorno: A Critical Reader*, edited by Nigel Gibson, and Andrew Rubin (Melden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 362-363.
 33. Horkheimer. *Dawn and Decline*, 176. This idea is closely linked to the view that late capitalism, in diminishing the patriarchal role of the father in the family, brings about a bruised, weakened, and isolated sense of self. To the extent that it participates in this diminishment of masculine authority, feminism contributes to the problem. See Jessica Benjamin, "The End of Internalization: Adorno's Social Psychology," *Telos*, 32 (1977): 42-64.
 34. Marcuse. "Marxism and Feminism," 281. See also John O'Neill, "Marcuse's Maternal Ethics," in *Herbert Marcuse: A Critical Reader*, edited by John Abromeit (New York: Routledge, 2004).
 35. See, e.g., Carol Gilligan. *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983) and Jean Bethke Elshtain. *Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981).
 36. See, e.g., Catharine MacKinnon. *Feminism Unmodified* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 8-10.
 37. See Johanna Meehan, "Feminism and Habermas's Discourse Ethics," *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 26 (2000): 39-52; and Jane Braaten. "From Communicative Rationality to Communicative Thinking: A Basis for Feminist Theory and Practice." In *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse*, edited by Johanna Meehan (New York: Routledge, 1995).
 38. Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*, 15. See also Amy R. Baehr, "Toward a New Feminist Liberalism: Okin, Rawls, and Habermas," *Hypatia*, 11 (1996): 49-66.
 39. Nancy Fraser. "What's Critical About Critical Theory?" in *Feminism as Critique: On the Politics of Gender*, edited by Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 50-51.
 40. *Ibid.*, 42-44.
 41. *Ibid.*, 52.
 42. Jean L. Cohen. "Critical Social and Feminist Critiques: The Debate with Jürgen Habermas." In *Feminists Read Habermas*, edited by Meehan, 76. See also Fraser, "What's Critical About Critical Theory?" 54.
 43. Agnes Heller. "Habermas and Marxism." In *Habermas: Critical Debates*, edited by John B. Thompson and David Held (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), 21-22.
 44. Benhabib. *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*, 340.
 45. *Ibid.*, 341. Benhabib sees some progress in Habermas's recent statements on this issue. See Benhabib. "The Debate over Women and Moral Theory Revisited." In *Feminists Read Habermas*, edited by Meehan, 192.
 46. Meehan. "Autonomy, Recognition, and Respect," in *ibid.*, 242-245.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters

Karen Warren (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000). 253 pp. ISBN: 0-8476-9299-X.

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Karen Warren's *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters* (2000) is by now already becoming a standard, but it deserves attention here as a combination of authoritative overviews and innovative contributions in several overlapping fields: ethical theory, feminist ethics, environmental ethics, and ecofeminism. With a few exceptions, the book is beginner-friendly, assuming little background in the above fields, especially in feminism. In fact, at points it reads something like a basic apology for feminism, explaining very plainly the definitions of patriarchy and domination, what it means to use a "gender lens," why both environmentalism and social justice theory benefit from a feminist perspective, and why ecofeminist ethics (and, by implication, feminist ethics) is in fact a legitimate theoretical enterprise. Many of the chapters can stand independently, and several are valuable for a range of course syllabi.

The first chapter's title, "Nature is a Feminist Issue," Warren says, "might well be called the slogan of ecofeminism" (1). It is full of solid examples and statistics (especially emphasizing international and environmental justice) that just might convince the average environmentalist of the importance of a feminist perspective. This argument makes another appearance in Chapter 4, where Warren summarizes it particularly well. "What difference does it make whether an analysis of environmental issues is feminist or not?" First, she says, there is the issue of scholarly responsibility. One would not want to overlook (and therefore misrepresent) "the historical and empirical realities of the interconnections among the dominations of women, other human Others, and nature." Second, there is the issue of a complete philosophical understanding of the conceptual frameworks that "justify" both the dominations of women and of nature. Third, the prefix "feminist" "serves as an important reminder that in contemporary sex-gendered, raced, classed, and naturalist culture, an *unprefixed* position functions as a privileged and 'unmarked' position" (91-92). Warren illustrates these three points and effectively grounds ecofeminist philosophy in real-world issues. This is followed, in Chapter 2, by a well-organized survey of ecofeminist literature up to the mid-late nineties.

In Chapter 3, "Quilting Feminist Philosophy," Warren begins making her own theoretical contributions. "The logic of domination" is analyzed meticulously, although its target audience seems to vary. For example, the section "Concept of Patriarchy" (64) seems directed to undergraduates, while the following section, "Theorizing as Quilting" (65), seems directed to professional philosophers. The latter section mostly defends the reasons her theory does not follow a conventional

philosophical form (something that undergraduates would not know to be concerned about). The form that her theorizing *does* take, she says, is analogous to the ongoing task of quilting. Quilting provides a great way to visualize a contextually-oriented theory-in-process. Warren explains, "quilts are a form of discourse...quilts are practical...quilts are historical records...quilts are political statements" (68). The quilt of ecofeminist philosophy has border conditions (e.g., nothing that supports the "isms of domination" [67]) but its exact internal components and design cannot be known in advance.

Chapter 4, "How Should We Treat Nature?" provides a helpful overview of most of the dominant theoretical positions in the field known as Environmental Ethics. Warren's compelling presentation uses the terminology of "house," "reform," and "radical" to show how each position builds on or departs from traditional Western ethical theories.

In "Ethics in a Fruit Bowl," Warren argues for a pluralist, care-oriented ethic, supported by insightful accounts of "loving perception"¹ and "situated universals." "The ecofeminist ethic I defend involves this shift in attitude of humans toward the nonhuman world from arrogant perception to loving perception" (104). Loving perception attends to and respects differences rather than trying (as many environmental ethicists do) to reduce morally relevant properties to sameness. Feminist and environmentalist ethicists share this problem of how to include *dissimilar* entities in a moral community with one another. "Humans *are* different from rocks in important ways, even if they are also both members of a shared or common ecological community" (105). This clarifies the idea she introduces in the previous chapter that "the moral considerability of nonhuman nature may be 'groundless'" (74-75). In other words, it may be impossible to "prove," by establishing a univocally shared ground (e.g., sentience or goal-directedness), that nonhuman nature is, like humans, worthy of moral consideration. Instead, Warren asks that we cultivate a *willingness* to see it as such. This willingness might be influenced by "well-supported, conceptually clear reasons," but its necessity is only felt, not logically proven (76). Warren further characterizes this attitude shift, loving perception, as a spiritual leap in the final chapter.

Chapter 6, "Must Everyone Be Vegetarian?" makes a great case-study for the fruit-bowl ethical system outlined in the previous chapter. I recommend reading Chapters 5 and 6 together toward the end of an introductory ethics class, or along with Chapter 8, "With Justice for All," in a more advanced course on the justice and care traditions. Warren concludes that moral vegetarianism should *not* be made a universal ethical principle, and endorses instead what she calls "contextual moral vegetarianism." She offers reasons why a person from a Western industrialized nation is likely to have more responsibility to consider moral vegetarianism including factory farming and the economic and environmental exploitation of colonized countries by Western meat production. Warren's moral pluralism (a contextualism), unlike moral relativism, demands responsible and thorough attention to the details of each particular situation. In certain places, Warren might have modeled this kind of responsibility better. A case in point is the problematic use of the beliefs about meat-eating attributed to third-world and/or indigenous peoples that are second-hand accounts filtered through a Western anthropologist or philosopher. Nevertheless, Warren later shows how the science of ecology itself in fact affirms the kind of pluralistic orientation that Warren's ecofeminist philosophy espouses.

"Surviving Patriarchy" is the most original and exciting chapter of the book because it attempts to reconcile

ecofeminist spiritualities with ecofeminist philosophy. A rift between the two occurred in the 1980s and 1990s as part of the feminist philosophical critique of essentialism: “[Ecofeminist spiritualities] are rejected insofar as they rest on claims about women as naturally more caring, more nurturing, and closer to nature than men. I agree with ecofeminists who reject such essentialist and universalizing assumptions about women. But I have also come to believe that the subsequent inattention to ecofeminist spiritualities by feminist philosophers is a mistake” (194). Warren lists historical, political, ethical, theoretical, methodological, and epistemological reasons why ecofeminist spiritualities are in fact philosophically important.

Warren’s earlier discussions of loving perception and groundless attitudes of care already primed us for the idea that an adequate ecofeminist ethic demands something beyond rational argumentation. “Daring to care involves more than getting the right beliefs. It involves a willingness to be present to ourselves, others, and the realities of domination and oppression. This is *spiritual care*” (212). Here she appeals to Søren Kierkegaard’s idea of the “leap of faith” to illustrate the limits of rational thinking and conscious willing. She asserts that “It is only in relinquishing one’s attempt to will something that, in fact, one is powerless to will, that courage, humility, wisdom, and emotional intimacy can blossom” (197). Warren asserts that “daring to care” has to do with relinquishing control. This idea has interesting resonances with Luce Irigaray’s idea of wonder (“Wonder...is both active and passive”²) and, more recently, Carol Bigwood’s idea of “being-moved.”³ In each case there is a willingness to see the other as worthy of respect not because of its/her/his sameness (which would be arrogant), but because of its/her/his difference (which would be loving).

At the same time Warren also emphasizes that this letting-go of the desire to understand everything on one’s own terms paradoxically cultivates a spiritual understanding of ourselves as part of everything else, which contributes to a new vision of our commonalities. Warren ends this chapter by discussing ecofeminist spiritualities as potentially socially transformative.

In a spiritual sense, developing the capacity to care involves having the courage to see in ourselves “the bad person”—the tyrant who kills, the rapist who rapes, the parent who abuses. If we are to heal the wounds of oppressive systems, if our presence to another is to be a healing presence, we may need to develop this capacity to see the ‘humanity’ in other humans and to care about earth others. This is more than a psychological ability to empathize, since the courage involved is, as the Cowardly Lion learned, a combination of willing and letting go, being receptive and receiving grace (203).

This lesson seems particularly poignant considering all the talk of “evildoers” in the aftermath of 9/11. The ability to match such an insight about care and difference among humans with an insight about how to approach the more-than-human world strikes me as the most original and valuable contribution of *Ecofeminist Philosophy*.

Endnotes

1. See Marilyn Frye. “In and Out of Harm’s Way: Arrogance and Love.” In *Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1983), 75-76; and Maria Lugones. “Playfulness, ‘World-Travelling’, and Loving Perception,” *Hypatia*, 2 (1987): 3-19.

2. Luce Irigaray. *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, translated by Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 73.
3. Carol Bigwood. *Earth Muse: Feminism, Nature, and Art* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).

Feminist Interpretations of John Dewey

Edited by Charlene Haddock Seigfried (University Park, PA: Penn State UP, 2002). 317 pp. \$65.00 cloth; \$24.50 paper. ISBN: 0-271-02161-6.

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Edited by Charlene Haddock Seigfried, author of *Pragmatism and Feminism: Reweaving the Social Fabric* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), *Feminist Interpretations of John Dewey* bears the distinction of being the first collection of essays ever assembled to appraise the philosophy of John Dewey from a feminist perspective. While such a volume is long overdue, the enthusiasm of its contributors, together with the rich avenues for thought and action opened within it, plainly demonstrates the continuing vitality of Dewey’s pragmatism and its relevance for contemporary feminists. Together, its thirteen essays not only develop the unique resources Dewey’s thought has to offer in subversion of the oppressive dualisms, hierarchies, and masculine biases that mark the Western tradition, but they also offer significant criticisms and suggestions on how Dewey’s pragmatist perspective might be expanded and transformed, especially in regard to questions of power, making this collection a valuable resource for feminists and pragmatists alike.

Individually, its essays vary in topic and philosophical rigor, with a few exhibiting great acumen, and one sure to furl a few pragmatist brows. In lieu of reviewing all thirteen contributions in turn, however, which space will not allow, impressions will here be offered on themes weaving throughout the selections of this collection, with specific comments on each essay being raised where appropriate.

The opening essays of this volume situate Dewey’s thought in relation to his life as an intellectual and social activist as a springboard for ascertaining its relevance to the concerns of feminists today. A past perspective is offered in Jane Addams’s “A Toast to John Dewey,” which is interesting biographically, although it is purely laudatory and does not develop any specifically feminist themes. Such themes are vigorously pursued, however, in Seigfried’s contribution. Recounting Dewey’s bold political activism on behalf of such causes as women’s suffrage, the legalization of birth control, coeducation, and the right to equal education and pay, not to mention his ardent support for women’s voices in philosophy, Seigfried masterfully places this feminist zeal in context within the irreducible pluralism and perspectivism of his pragmatist philosophy. By developing his transactional characterization of experience and inclusive conception of social democracy, Seigfried not only presents Dewey’s pragmatism as thwarting dualisms and hierarchies, but also as taking an empowering turn towards action in a focus upon resolving problematic situations and holding theory accountable to experience. Although Dewey’s direct references to women’s subordination are scattered and often illustrative of some other point, Seigfried nevertheless portrays Dewey as offering an empowering framework for feminists to draw upon, while

also critically exposing, in addition to an intermittent masculine bias, what she regards as a very real “blindness to the virulence of...prejudice” (57).

This alleged blindness is one of several related criticisms echoed throughout this collection to the effect that Dewey’s philosophy, in Ellen Condliffe Lagemann’s words, “lacks a sense of *realpolitik*” (32). Lagemann, in her essay on Dewey and Ella Flagg Young, complains of the limitations placed upon Dewey’s educational theory by his failure to substantially address, in any of his major works on education, Young’s concerns regarding the concrete political problems involved in teaching. While this omission certainly does not overshadow the brilliance of Dewey’s educational theory, it does contribute towards the larger question of how Dewey’s philosophy, given its strong emphasis upon practice, as well as its recognition of the indispensable role played by selective interests in the formation of experience, could so consistently gloss over questions of power. Perhaps, as Seigfried suggests, Dewey simply underestimates the capacity of people to deliberately engage in mean and insincere behavior. With a penchant for “locating conflicts in different approaches to life and not in struggles for power” (55), Seigfried explains, Dewey tends to single out dogmatic habits of action and thought as the enemy of social progress while often giving the impression that such habits can be successfully combated simply by involving people in the practices of rational inquiry. While there is more to be said here on Dewey’s behalf, as is developed by Seigfried herself, it is nonetheless made evident that his investigations clearly stand to be deepened and transformed by the research contemporary feminists have made into the subtleties of power relationships and their weapons of hate. In fact, Erin McKenna’s essay takes on this project through efforts to enrich and correct Dewey’s dynamic, socially interactive self with a model of selfhood drawn from the lesbian ethics of Sarah Lucia Hoagland, which, McKenna argues, is more practically attuned than Dewey’s to dealing with the realities of oppressive social power.

The easy confluence of pragmatist and feminist ideals is clearly demonstrated throughout this collection, from Marilyn Fischer’s examination of the similar social theories and critiques of capitalism developed by John Dewey and Jane Addams, to Marjorie C. Miller’s contention that contemporary feminists are already reconstructing conceptions of experience, critiques of reason, and even formulations of philosophy that overlap with those of the classical pragmatist tradition. In particular, Dewey’s deep conception of democracy as a moral ideal resonates especially well with the feminist aspirations of several contributors. Judith M. Green neatly explicates the emancipatory power this ideal holds for women over the liberal capitalistic model in its emphasis upon participatory and educational processes that empower personal growth and individuation in transaction with continual social transformation towards a richer experience for all. According to Elizabeth Kamarck Minnich, the time is now particularly ripe for us to advocate such an aspirational democracy, given that so many who have been marginalized, even after having won rights in the abstract, are nevertheless still struggling to achieve recognition and value in their diversity. On this theme, however, Ana M. Martínez Alemán’s contribution is perhaps the most illuminating. By relating her own struggles in achieving an integrated self-identity as a Cuban who was Anglo-Americanized in her education (even

having her name refashioned from Ana María to Ann Marie), Alemán movingly brings home the importance of individuality development as the “means and end” of Deweyan democracy (122), cashing out her analysis of democratic education in terms of a feminist classroom in which diverse identities are deliberately cultivated towards the realization of their unique potentials as the contextual points of departure and return for the creative and critical exploration, examination, and testing of ideas.

Other contributors draw upon Dewey’s conceptions of experience and knowledge. Paula Droege defends women’s experience as a source of knowledge against postmodern criticisms of experience-based epistemologies by raising Dewey’s distinction between cognitive and noncognitive experience, understanding the former as linguistic and socially influenced, while the latter is conceived as the nonlinguistic primary experience of what is “had” prior to reflection and social influence, which can thus serve as a testing-ground for revisable knowledge claims. Asserting that we need “a way of knowing that is liberating rather than alienating” (191), Eugenie Gatens-Robinson turns to Dewey and Donna Haraway as offering alternatives to traditional objectivism, whose severance of natural knowledge from human values is portrayed as having covertly contributed to techniques of domination and social control. Through a clean and rigorous analysis of Dewey’s conception of scientific objects as ways of getting a handle on problematic situations to the end of rendering shared experience more meaningful, Gatens-Robinson successfully saddles objective knowledge with a moral dimension, a move that nicely complements Haraway’s postmodern theory of situated knowledge in its insistence upon taking responsibility for how one comes to see the world. Moving along this same vein past traditional objectivism and relativism, Shannon Sullivan uses Dewey’s pragmatist account of truth to transform the feminist standpoint theory of Sandra Harding into a pragmatist-feminist standpoint theory that is contextual instead of foundational, transactional instead of statically atomistic, focused on questions of flourishing instead of questions of description.

Following these expositions on experience and knowledge, Lisa Heldke’s essay is critical of Dewey’s appreciation of practical activity; Heldke entreats us to be more Deweyan than Dewey by exploring how such everyday practices as child-rearing and cooking can offer approaches to inquiry quite different from the experimental method. While correctly identifying a bias in Dewey’s uncritical acceptance of homemaking activities as women’s work, Heldke further insists that Dewey marginalizes such activities, viewing them merely as a kind of kindergarten for genuine scientific activity, while she herself suggests that they possess their own methods of directing inquiry along emotional, erotic, and bodily lines in ways unrealizable through experimental inquiry, no matter how creative and collaborative and broad its habits might be. More might be said about what any such alternative method of inquiry would look like; despite its suggestiveness, Heldke’s critique leaves the skeptical reader unconvinced.

Although it would have been nice to see an essay drawing upon Dewey’s theory of art in relation to feminist aesthetics, overall, this is a refreshing collection of essays on pragmatism and feminism; hopefully, it is but the first of many.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Please send information about conferences, workshops, lecture series, and other events of interest to be held in 2006 to the editor at sally.scholz@villanova.edu. The *Newsletter* happily will publicize news that might interest our readers. Also, please note that the CSW and the *Newsletter* are committed to publishing notes on feminist conferences in the *Newsletter*. If there is a conference you attend that you think might interest others who work in feminism and philosophy, please contact the Editor.