



# **WOMEN'S PHILOSOPHY REVIEW**

**(previously the NEWSLETTER)**

**Issue No 11 June 1994**

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## EDITORIAL

This year hasn't been a very successful one for SWIP organisationally; this is the first year that no conference has taken place. If you are thinking of organising a conference, but are worried about the logistics of catering for large numbers of people, remember that there is no obligation to run a large conference. Small one-day local or regional meetings (with a quota if necessary) are often as successful as large conferences and in particular offer more opportunity for participants to make contact and share views. Perhaps we need an executive committee? See P8.

In November, Janna Thompson of Melbourne University gave a paper in London on the topic 'Does Social Contract Theory Work for Women?' which fascinated the audience with its imaginative reconstruction of an alternative social contract theory, based on the fiction that the original contracting parties were women. Alternative premises, in this case, quite clearly led to a different set of conclusions.

In May, the Gender Institute at London School of Economics joined forces with SWIP to welcome Sara Ruddick who is giving a paper on 'Injustice in Families: Assault and Domination'. We hope a lot of you took the opportunity to hear Sara Ruddick in person.

In the next newsletter, we are planning to publish extended review articles on the work of Hannah Arendt (Anne Seller) and on recent work on the 'care' perspective (Diemut Bubeck). We hope there will also be another paper - but that depends on reader response. We haven't had an overwhelming response to our request for papers, nor have we had much feedback. Please let us know if this is a feature you want to be continued.

We continue to welcome responses to reviews and articles. In this newsletter, we print a discussion of sex-selection (responding to Sarah Richmond's conference report in WPR No 10) and a response to Jen Hornsby (whose paper also appeared in WPR 10).

**The deadline for the next edition is 31 October 1994.**

*Morwenna Griffiths,  
School of Education, University of Nottingham, NG7 2RD.*

*Margaret Whitford  
Department of French, Queen Mary and Westfield College, Mile End Road, London E1 4NS.*

## RESEARCH INTERESTS FOR NETWORKING

*Paula Boddington*, The Australian National University, Canberra ACT 0200, Australia. My main area is Applied Ethics, in particular: Organ Transplants, Genetic Engineering, Intellectual disability, Ethics of Research. People who know me in SWIP may also be interested to know I have a son, Reuben, born 4 October 1993. A great delight!

*Diemut Bubeck*, London School of Economics, Houghton Street London, WC2A 2AA  
Main field of interest: feminist political theory and/or gender issues in political theory. Past work on theories of women's work and theories of exploitation; current research interests include the theorisation of women's work as care, the ethic of care debate and the development of a feminist conception of justice; feminist epistemology; German feminist theory.

*J A Evans*, Dept of Politics, University of York, Heslington, York YO1 5DD. Email JAE2@UK.AC.YORK  
Equality/Difference; Politics of Justice and Care.

*Anne Griffin*, 21 Abdale Road, London W12 7ER.  
Women's Studies/Issues in Russia, Aesthetic Education, Women in post-compulsory education and training.

*Pam Hirsch*, 31 Grantchester Street, Cambridge, CB3  
I am currently writing a book on Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, the leader of the Langham Place Group. Bodichon was, as well as a feminist activist, a fine landscape painter (My article 'Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon: a disinterested eye' is forthcoming in *Women in the Victorian Art World*, Manchester University Press, 1994). My discussion of her ethics and aesthetics is in terms of Female Romanticism.

*Susan James*, Faculty of Philosophy, Cambridge University, Sidgwick Avenue, Cambridge, CB3 9DA.  
The Passions in 17th century philosophy; Feminist political philosophy.

*Patti Prior*, 27 Pasquier Road, Walthamstow, London, E17 6HB.  
Feminist essentialism and ethics; Aristotelianism; Early years education/children's rights.

*Cécile Velu* UWE, Faculty of Languages and European Studies, Frenchay Campus, Coldharbour Lane, Bristol, BS16 1QY.  
Irigaray (French feminish); Class and women; Women and popular culture; Sexual politics (gays and lesbian politics).

# SWIP BUSINESS

## Subscriptions

The possibility of starting a direct debit system is still being investigated!!! (More news in the next newsletter! Really!)

## List of Subscribers

The list of subscribers is becoming so long that we have decided to leave it off the back of the newsletter. If anyone wants a copy for any reason (networking, publicising events, etc) please write to Morwenna Griffiths, School of Education, University of Nottingham, NG7 2RD. It is available as a list, or in the form of address labels.

## Conferences

These will only happen if someone organises them! We need volunteers! Moya Lloyd is the SWIP co-ordinator and link person for conferences. She is at Department of Politics, The Queen's University of Belfast, Belfast, BT7 1NN.

## Publicity

Women in philosophy are often professionally isolated - whether or not they work in philosophy departments. Please help by publicising SWIP and SWIP events. We would be glad if you could publicise the Hull Conference (for instance, by photocopying pages) and distribute the leaflets explaining SWIP. (More leaflets are available from Morwenna Griffiths, School of Education, University of Nottingham, NG7 2RD.)

# NEWS

## Recent Developments in Feminist Theory

Diemut Bubeck (London School of Economics) and Anne Phillips (London Guildhall University) are in the process of trying to obtain ESRC funds for a research seminar on 'Recent developments in feminist theory', starting in January 1995. The programme for 1995 is provisionally as follows.

### **Seminar 1 (Lent 1995): NOTIONS OF THE POLITICAL IN FEMINIST POLITICAL THEORY**

Moya Lloyd (Queen's, Belfast): Feminist revisionings of the notion of the political

Anne Seller (Kent): Hannah Arendt's notion of the political

Terrell Carver (Bristol): De-centring men

Lucy Sargisson (Keele): Feminist utopias and their relevance to feminist political theory

### **Seminar 2 (Summer 1995): THE ETHIC OF CARE DEBATE**

Alison Assiter (North London): Feminist ethical theory

Diemut Bubeck (London School of Economics): Care, justice and citizenship

Judy Evans (York): Thinking in context: a political analysis of justice and care

### **Seminar 3 (Winter 1995): DIFFERENCE IN FEMINIST POLITICAL THEORY**

Anne Phillips (Guildhall): Issues of diversity and difference: is gender a special case?  
(Further contributions to be settled in the course of this year; offers welcome)

If you want to be put on the mailing list for these seminars, please contact Diemut Bubeck at the Department of Government, LSE, Houghton St., London WC2A 2AA. Whether or not they take place depends upon whether the ESRC agrees to fund them, so further details about time and place have not yet been finalised.

Diemut would also like to hear from you if you are interested in giving a paper at these or subsequent seminars. (The topics for 1996 are likely to be feminist epistemology and postmodernism.)

# CONFERENCES

Autumn Conference

## FEMINISM AND THE SUBJECT

(Christine Battersby, Alison Ainley and others)

SWIP and HULL CENTRE for GENDER STUDIES

November 1994

Further details from Kathleen Lennon, Hull Tel 0482 465618/46840,  
Department of Philosophy, University of Hull, HU6 7RX

## CALL FOR PAPERS

### Thinking Feminisms: Looking Forward

A one day conference on feminist thought which aims to embrace contemporary theorising in a variety of areas. The emphasis of the conference will be on developing a feminist discourse which is as far as possible self-generating, rather than on the critiquing/salvaging of the male philosophical text. Themes in feminist philosophy will be opened up and explored with a view to making them accessible, productive and empowering.

Papers and responses may be included in an anthology of feminist philosophy to be published by Avebury Press in 1995.

**Proposed date: Thursday September 8 1994**

**Venue: Manchester. The venue chosen will have disabled access.**

**Non-conventional modes of presentation welcome.**

If you are interested in giving a paper, please let us know by indicating possible title. Expenses for speakers provided.

**All correspondence to Amanda Trevor-Roberts and Emma Martin  
Thinking Feminisms, Department of Philosophy,  
University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL.**



**INVITATION TO JOIN  
WSN (UK) ASSOCIATION**

**ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES**

Annual income in excess of £12,000	£35	<input type="checkbox"/>
Annual income between £5,000 - £12,000	£20	<input type="checkbox"/>
Annual income less than £5,000	£7	<input type="checkbox"/>
Institutions	£60	<input type="checkbox"/>
Overseas <u>minimum</u> (Sterling only)	£20	<input type="checkbox"/>

Subscriptions are renewable yearly on June 1st. and may be paid by banker's order or cheque.

Application on reverse side.

Please make cheques payable to Women's Studies Network (UK). Send to:

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**Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Nene College**  
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**NORTHAMPTON NN2 7AL**  
**Tel: 0604 735500**  
**Fax: 0604 720363**

**WOMEN'S STUDIES NETWORK (UK) CONFERENCE  
WOMEN'S STUDIES IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT**

**BED & BREAKFAST** : Must be booked by 1st June 1994

	Fee payable	Amount Paid
Friday night (Twin or Triple bedded)	£14.50	£
Friday Night (Single bedded)	£16.50	£
Saturday Night (Twin or Triple bedded)	£14.50	£
Saturday Night (Single bedded)	£16.50	£

Share with .....

**FOOD: All Vegetarian** Must be booked by 1st June 1994

Friday buffet reception	£6.20	£
Saturday lunch	£6.20	£
dinner	£11.70	£
Sunday lunch	£7.50	£

**TOTAL PAID** £

including Conference Fee \_\_\_\_\_

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION** (please circle)

Do you require creche place(s)      Yes    No  
 Number of children                      .....

Specify age and sex of children      .....

NB Creche must be booked by May 1st 1994

Please indicate if you have any other special requirements:

RETURN FORM AND CHEQUE PAYABLE TO  
**WOMEN'S STUDIES NETWORK TO:**

Cynthia Dufield, University of Portsmouth, SSHS, Milldam,  
 Burnaby Road, Portsmouth PO1 3AS

A bursary is available for WSN(UK) members (very small budget).  
 Please send letter of application with your booking form.

**WOMEN'S STUDIES IN AN  
INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT**

**Debates and Controversies**

**Annual Women's Studies  
Network (UK) Association Conference**

**8 - 10 July 1994**

**Speakers Include:**

bell hooks  
 Rosemary Auchmuty  
 Beverley Skeggs  
 Bunie Matlanyane-Sexwale  
 Svetlana Kupryashkina  
 Diana Leonard  
 Iram Siraj-Blatchford  
 Caroline Ramazanoglu  
 Elzbieta H. Oleksy  
 Jiřina Šmejkalova-Strickland

**School of Social and Historical Studies  
University of Portsmouth  
Milldam, Burnaby Road,  
Portsmouth, PO1 3AS**

The seventh Women's Studies Network (UK) Conference will take place 8-10 July 1994 at University of Portsmouth, School of Social and Historical Studies, Milldam, Portsmouth, PO1 3AS. All sessions will take place in the Guildhall.

The conference theme this year is Women's Studies in an International Context. The content of any one paper might, ideally, be related to an international or national context, or placed within current controversies and debates within Women's Studies or any of the other particular fields outlined below.

There will also be 10 conference strands (running in parallel) on

- Women's Studies and Gender Studies
- Black Studies and Ethnic Studies
- Women's History
- Lesbian Studies
- Women and Nationalisms
- Women and Cultural Production
- Women and Education
- Women and Social Policy
- Sexuality
- Open Stream

The opening session will be a Buffet Reception held on Friday 8 July 1994, 7.00 - 8.00 pm. In the Portsmouth Guildhall, followed by a plenary session. On Saturday, 9 July 1994 and Sunday 10 July there will be plenary and workshop sessions.

Accommodation is 10 minutes walk away from the Guildhall.

We would like to extend our thanks to the University of Portsmouth, and the publishers Taylor and Francis for financial support in regard to this conference.

**WOMEN'S STUDIES NETWORK (UK) CONFERENCE  
WOMEN'S STUDIES IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT**

8 - 10 July 1994  
University of Portsmouth

**BOOKING FORM**

Name .....

Address .....

.....Post Code.....

**CONFERENCE FEE:** (including coffee and tea)

Category	Fee payable	Amount Paid
<b><u>Whole Conference</u></b>		
Member -more than £12,000 pa	£68	£
-£5,000 - £12,000 pa	£35	£
- less than £5,000 pa	£15	£
Non-member	£103	£

**One Day**

Please specify: Saturday OR Sunday (circle)

Member -more than £12,000 pa	£34	£
-£5,000 - £12,000 pa	£18	£
- less than £5,000 pa	£8	£
Non-member	£51.50	£

Overseas participants who have difficulties meeting these prices please contact Mary Maynard, Centre for Women's Studies, University of York, UK.

**APPLICATION TO JOIN  
THE WSN (UK) ASSOCIATION**

Name .....

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Institutional Affiliation (if any)

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Date .....

If your name may not be released to other selected organisations please mark box

Signature .....

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Woman's Studies Network (UK) Association

Account Number: 70988754

at the Co-operative Bank PLC, Islington Branch,  
1 Islington High Street, LONDON N1 9TR

on June 1st. 199\_

and annually, the sum of: £ .....

(words) .....

.....

## VIEWS

### **Small Changes: The Progress of Women in Australasian Philosophy**

In Australia and New Zealand, as elsewhere, philosophy departments continue to be dominated by men. In tenured positions there is one woman for every eleven men. For over ten years our Women in Philosophy group has attempted to educate heads of departments and others about the importance of giving women 'a fair go'. The Australasian Association of Philosophy adopted an anti-discrimination policy in 1983, and members of WIP have the task of monitoring jobs: keeping track of what is advertised, reminding departments about AAP policy, keeping track of who gets jobs, and asking questions about appointment procedures (which sometimes heads of department refuse to answer). A few years ago a general meeting of WIP decided to do a survey of philosophy departments in universities and colleges to find out what kind of progress women have made since 1983 (if any).

We discovered that in the period 1983 to 1989 women have done reasonably well in the employment stakes (given that there are many more men applying for jobs in philosophy). Out of 19 tenurable appointments on record, 11 went to men and 8 to women. In the case of one of these jobs (one in logic) no women applied. Untenured lectureships went to 20 women and 32 men. Of these jobs there were three for which no woman applied, and there was one which was offered to a woman and later filled by a man. The advertised tutorships of more than six months were filled by 10 men and 7 women.

On the other hand, women are not very successful at getting professorial chairs. During this period one woman and six men became a professor. (She is the first and only woman philosophy professor in the whole of Australia and New Zealand.) But excluding chairs, two out of five advertised positions were filled by women. Does this mean that in the long run - perhaps in ten years time when a lot of the men retire - that 2 out of 5 philosophy positions in Australia and New Zealand will be filled by women? Our respondents gave us a number of reasons for thinking that this projection from the figures is too optimistic.

For family and other reasons women continue to leave the profession in disproportionate numbers. This means that the total number of tenured women staff has remained fairly constant in spite of the relative success of women in obtaining jobs. Moreover, some of the women who wrote to us complained that discrimination still exists, and that not all jobs of interest to women are advertised (though the heads of departments we contacted often expressed a desire to hire more women).

Equally worrying is the suggestion made by a few respondents, that women are only getting jobs in limited areas: ethics and political philosophy, especially in those departments that want to run a course on women's studies. There is still a tendency in the Antipodes to regard logic, epistemology and metaphysics as 'boys' subjects', and

ethics, aesthetics and political philosophy as 'girls' subjects'.

Another factor that is likely to limit the number of women applying for and getting jobs in philosophy in the future is the fact that male postgraduate students outnumber women postgraduates by about three to one. One of the urgent questions raised by our survey is why this is so. Some of our members have in the last two years undertaken a study designed to identify the problems of women postgraduates: why good women students do not go on to postgraduate work, what makes them give up their studies or prevents them from applying for jobs. This study is partially complete.

The situation for women in Australasian philosophy is thus probably not as good as the figures from our job survey suggest. Nevertheless, it is clear that women are getting jobs. We concluded our report by making the point that it is worthwhile for women to stay on in philosophy, to do PhDs, and to persist in their search for jobs.

*Janna Thompson  
Philosophy, LaTrobe University, Melbourne*

## Visit to Palestine

On April 15 I returned from a ten-day stay in the West Bank, also known as the Occupied Territories. I could write a whole essay on the joys of staying in a Palestinian extended family, the expansiveness of Arab hospitality, and the beauty of the land, but this is not the place. While I was there, I witnessed first-hand the daily harassment of these people by the Israeli authorities: the curfews (which mean no-one leaves their house at all, day or night) announced without warning or explanation, the unpredictable sealing off of towns, the road blocks. People never know whether they will be able to get to work, get home, go shopping. Nor do they know when their land will be confiscated. Under these circumstances, the development of Palestinian Universities (all privately funded) and Women's Centres are major achievements. The University of Birzeit just outside Rammalla is Palestine's oldest and largest university (3,000 students), and is developing Women's Studies as a minor component of a degree. This year, in preparation, faculty have been meeting in a series of seminars with staff from a nearby Women's Centre in East Jerusalem. I gave a seminar on feminism and philosophy to them, in itself a minor victory for them, because of the difficulty of making this thirty minute journey through the curfews and road-blocks mentioned above. They were a terrific group, mainly concerned with the issues of the pragmatic use of feminist philosophy, (I realized in the discussion the way my agenda is dominated by the concerns of 'main-stream' western philosophy), and we had a lively discussion of the question of whether "the master's tools can dismantle the master's house". (Andre Lorde). Although none of them did Philosophy, and they said few students took it, all students do a foundation course based on the great books programme developed in Chicago. (It came to Birzeit via the American University of Beirut). So they study Descartes, Hobbes, Rousseau etc., and what Philosophy there is seems to be western. They know what they are arguing with.

This is clearly a University of international stature, and will be a fascinating place to be as a specifically Palestinian education policy is developed with the autonomy promised by the peace accords. Tragically, this autonomy only applies to people, not to land. Israeli settlement looks set to continue, and with that, peace on the ground looks increasingly remote.

The very morning of the seminar, programmes with British universities were being cancelled because insurance could not be provided to cover British nationals injured in civil strife. This means the cancellation of a programme with Bristol University as well as all ODA programmes and obviously will have an isolating effect.

I had a truly memorable time. I was enormously impressed by the sheer wit and determination of the women I met, but above all I recall their warmth and friendliness. If anyone is thinking of visiting Israel, I strongly recommend that they include the Women's Centre and/or the University in their itinerary. You will meet some extremely high-powered women, who are eager to show their country and talk about their situation. They are practised in detecting danger and avoiding it; I never felt seriously at risk despite a week of horrendous events in the country, so the risks are not as great as the media suggests.

Anyone wanting to visit can contact either  
Fadwa Labadi, Womens Studies Centre, PO Box 19591, East Jerusalem , Via Israel  
or  
Liza Terraki, PO Box 14, Birzeit University, Birzeit, West Bank, Via Israel

*Anne Seller  
University of Kent*

## **The Future of SWIP**

Some of us feel that SWIP would run more effectively with an executive committee. If response seems favourable we could organise a meeting in the Autumn to elect.

Views please to Kathleen Lennon, Department of Philosophy, University of Hull, HU6 7RX

## RESPONSES/CORRESPONDENCE

### Arguments for and against 'sex'-preselection.

Sarah Richmond's report on the BMA conference on sex selection (in WPR No 10) can be best read in the light of a recent TV programme on female infanticide and female foeticide reported by Emily Buchanan (*Assignment* BBC 2, 5 October 1993). While 'Freedom / choice vs paternalistic concern for unwelcome consequences' was the dominant framework in the BMA conference, Emily's report focuses on the socio-economic-cultural conditions in which parents make the 'choice' of ending a female human life. The perspectives of the two frameworks correspond to the administrators' in the one case and that of the agents/victims in the other. The exceptional contribution of Marilyn Strathern, who rightly points out that the very existence of the choice would make an enormous difference to people's lives even if consequences were to balance out (for whom? and globally? ) is only partially borne out by Emily's report.

The existence of certain choices can have enormous cultural significance. But they can also have a more direct transformatory power in changing the demographic balance which has very serious non-demographic consequences for some people. Consequentialist thinking needs to be looked into also because it is not confined to the moral deliberations of administrators/legislators alone. Some of those who have to make choices defend these choices in terms of consequences. This is not to vindicate a *style* of moral philosophy (consequentialism) but to draw attention to the fact that a phenomenological approach stressing the experience of making a choice can benefit from an understanding of the changing conditions within which choices are re-made. Therefore, while calculating the effect of policies impersonally as well as in terms of the effects on particular persons it is important, I think, to situate the debate in the context of *real* people.

In India, sex-selection has to be seen in the historical context of, firstly, female infanticide and secondly, female foeticide. Until recently female infanticide was practiced by a particular sub-group of the Jat caste in Punjab. The practice has died out. Elsewhere in India, in the states of Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu female infanticide is still practised. Last year, in one village alone, in the Madurai district of Tamil Nadu, 8 girls were killed shortly after birth. While in Rajasthan it is a reminder of the resilience of certain traditional customs of certain sections of the population despite modernisation, in Tamil Nadu it is more a mark of the deep-rooted sense of 'being burdened' by the responsibility of bringing up a daughter. I have not called this sense of being burdened 'misogyny' because it is not in fact hatred/suspicion/dislike of women. The deep feeling of being burdened is born out of an accepted notion of hierarchy, in which ultimately a father is responsible for the wellbeing of his children (for a daughter, until the time she is entrusted to another man, who would be her husband, and for a son until he becomes a householder himself). When does this burden become unbearable? The sufficient condition for female infanticide is provided by considerations of the welfare of the family as a whole. It is almost a defining feature of the pan Indian culture that the motivating factor in making life-plans is not the development of each individual

separately within the family but the progress/survival of the family as a whole. The rationale for practising female infanticide includes an appeal to values, such as, 'family-love' and 'paternalism', values which in other contexts could be unproblematically morally appealing. For some people arguments for female infanticide *do* have a moral justification. However repugnant or wrong-headed this may initially sound, it cannot be either ignored or dismissed. The 'moral' considerations involved in making decisions to commit infanticide must be acknowledged for what they are if any headway is to be made in transforming them into producing other choices of action.

The moral appeal of female infanticide is less hard to accept if one compares the arguments that parents of severely handicapped children give for terminating such an infant's life, with the reasons that parents of daughters give for not wanting them to survive. From the point of view of the infant, it is considered more merciful in both cases to cut short a life of misery than to sustain such a life. From the point of view of the family as a whole, it is considered in its best interests, - particularly, if there are other healthy children/boys and/or handicapped children/girls - to terminate the life of a severely handicapped child/girl. The limited family resources of money, time, and energy have to be distributed amongst all children and it seems unfair that any one of them must be allocated a disproportionately larger share.

The analogy I have drawn between the reasons offered in the two kinds of cases struck me when I read the comments of Susan West regarding her attitude towards her 18 month old child suffering from Down's Syndrome and other complications reported by Helga Kuhse and Peter Singer in Should the baby live? (OUP, 1985). It is not that she does not love her child, indeed she does. But she would have wished it that the child be allowed to die. Had it not been for a court injunction, invited by the hospital where her child was born, to provide corrective surgery to the infant, it would have died. Susan West defends the parents of handicapped children against the charge that they did not love them. Were they merely concerned about the burden of caring for them, they would readily give them up for institutional care. But they do not do so because it is out of love for their child that they wish it dead. "To choose death does not mean that the child is not loved: 'On the contrary the person is loved enough to be "let go" instead of being forced to continue with very probable pain, suffering and severely limiting handicaps.'" (Kuhse and Singer, p.16)

Susan West's comments were reminiscent of several voices from Emily Buchanan's Indian report. The young mother whose second daughter was killed said "I did feel sad but I would have felt sad even if I had let her live. One has to consider that unhappiness too; that's why it's done." Her husband adds that if one kills, the pain lasts for a day, otherwise one sheds tears everyday "watching her suffer as she grows up". Their main reason for killing their daughter is poverty. It is more expensive to bring up a girl compared to a boy, a poor woman argues, considering that among other things she needs more clothes to cover her body than a boy!

But what about the "sin" of killing? Religious reasons vary. A grandmother who has rescued her granddaughter thinks that she will be blessed if she can help the little girl survive. But there are strong sentiments on the other side when adoption is offered by the government as an alternative to killing: an old Indian woman says that giving seven

baby girls to the goddess of Death is better than giving one off to be cared by strangers. (*Assignment*).

To be born a girl in the Indian subcontinent is a handicap. To have a daughter is predominantly seen as a handicap. The extreme measure that some parents take is to kill a female child immediately after birth. Most Indians would try to 'understand' such behaviour, as I have tried to do in drawing a parallel with the case of termination of the life of a victim of Down's Syndrome. But most Indians will not themselves resort to killing an innocent. Female infanticide is restricted to specific sub-groups within some caste-groups. In the case of the very poor, *utilitarian* considerations force the parents to opt for selective killing. In the case of the well off upper caste groups, men *choose* to maintain a macho family culture by getting rid of the liability of a daughter who would become a source of their weakness.

I have dwelled on the background conditions in order to show that with changed socio-economic circumstances, within a broadly common culture of family-love and paternalism, the moral discourse surrounding female infanticide changes. The shift from utilitarian considerations to those of liberty to choose to design one's family, becomes more clear if one considers the more modernized parts of India, for example, Punjab.

It must be added that within the common culture of India a girl child is almost never a wanted child. (To that extent the feminist slogan 'every child a wanted child' in support of abortion is liable to be misapplied if held universally.) But the conditions under which a girl child becomes unwanted to such a degree that her death becomes a choice for her parents, vary from people to people. And for some people no conditions can ever dictate the choice of taking an infant's life. Barring a particular caste grouping, such was the case in Punjab.

Circumstances of "choice" have changed. Before one can begin to speculate about possible scenarios if sex-preselection is on offer in Punjab, it would be very useful to take stock of the actual changes a grosser form of 'choice' has brought about in the reproductive lives of Punjabi women.

My hometown, Ludhiana, the most industrialized city of Punjab, can boast of a large number of doctors. People come for treatment from far and wide. Better medical facilities overall have meant that selective care/neglect of male/female children is less blatant. Although, as Dr. Raj Sachar notes, admissions in the emergency ward of the hospital he works in, show that critically ill baby girls are not brought in (only 1/10 admitted are girls). Being a big business centre, located in the heart of Punjab, Ludhiana is a perfect setting for private doctors competing for the wealth of the city and rich farmers in surrounding villages and small towns. The biggest boom for some such doctors came in the form of the Scan machine.

In 1987, when I left Punjab, I had collected newspaper clippings of adverts of about 8 clinics offering a scan to determine the sex of the foetus. Since then, the numbers of such clinics have multiplied. People who would never have contemplated killing a female child can now, without much soul-searching, opt for aborting a foetus found to be female. *Assignment* reports that one Dr. Baldeep Singh alone has identified 30,000 female

foetuses, virtually all of whom have been aborted. (As it is, Punjab has one of the worst female to male ratios amongst the different states of India). A pregnant woman argues that just as she has suits of different colours, she would like to have a son along with the two daughters she already has. The choice to abort an identified female foetus could not be justified in a cruder way.

Jonathan Glover seems to have asked that "if parents who already have a daughter, say, prefer their second child to be a male for the sake of 'variety', is that preference reprehensible?" (Sarah's report). In the light of the comment of the young Punjabi woman, does the preference seem innocent? Or is it that a rapidly growing consumer consciousness has provided a vocabulary for expressing deep-seated male preference in a way that a liberal society might find acceptable. A 'need' for boys has been transformed into a 'choice' for boys. The latter seems less objectionable because the 'choice' for boys is presented as if it was a 'choice' for boys or girls. Outside the abstract world of the liberal, amongst real people, the disjunct 'girls' in this particular 'choice' serves no other purpose but to convince an already convinced liberal of the virtues of a society that expands the scope of individual freedom.

But which individuals become more free as a result of the availability of more 'choices'? Consider a woman who has three daughters, and then three further pregnancies each of which is terminated after the detection of a female foetus, finally succeeding in begetting a son after a total of 20 years of trying. Is she any freer? Dr. Promela Jindal's comment with regard to this case is telling. Earlier when they had 3 daughters, she says, the family was considered complete, now they think if we can have the choice why not have a son also. "Now it is less acceptable to have a female child." (*Assignment*)

If the negative impact of the new technology on the women already existing is unconvincing, a further example might bring home the point. In the capital city of Punjab, Chandigarh, a few years ago, three young girls (16-10 years) committed suicide the day after their mother had a son after years of 'trying'.

Intuitively, one would think, if sex-preselection were on offer, foeticide would decrease. In an analogous way, Prof. Dharma Kumar, has suggested ("Should one be free to choose the sex of one's child?" in Ruth Chadwick ed. *Ethics, Reproduction and Genetic Control* Routledge, 1987, p172-182) that if foeticide is made unavailable the probability of infanticide may increase. "It is difficult to tell how widespread female infanticide is; the point is that it may well increase if amniocentesis and hence female foeticide are not possible, and the size of the family is restricted." The "point' is meant to be a general one, although it is illustrated with the help of an example from China, where the government's one-child family drive made the sex-ratio more unfavourable to girls. In two years from 1979 to 1981 the ratio changed from 51.5 percent to 48.5 percent in favour of boys to 58 percent to 42 percent in favour of boys; peasant couples had taken recourse to female infanticide. The generalizing move is made when Prof. Kumar argues "*In such a situation*, it seems difficult to make a case against tests for sex- one would have to argue that foeticide is morally worse than infanticide." (emphasis mine). Against the Indian feminists who demanded a ban on clinics offering tests for sex-determination, Prof. Kumar, argues that they "would have to admit that the ban may *increase the probability* of female infanticide - the Chinese example is proof of that." (emphasis mine). The

generalization connecting foeticide and infanticide is totally misleading. The 'Indian' situation, is not "such a situation" as the Chinese one. Indeed, there isn't an 'Indian' situation as such that can provide any stable basis for comparisons. It is amply clear, that foeticide and infanticide are not options for the *same* group of people. Different groups make different 'choices'. In Punjab, Dr. Baldeep Singh's patients, choose to abort female foetuses or keep male foetuses. The poor villagers of Tamil Nadu, choose to kill an infant girl or keep her alive. The members of one group do not *have* the other's 'choice'. Collating the effect of different practices/courses of action - infanticide and foeticide - as if unlike groups of people have the same options - is a serious mistake.

If X's doing A is bad, and Y's doing B is worse than X's doing A, it does not follow that X's doing A should be allowed as a lesser of two evils. It does not follow because the group X, in the real world, may be such that X will not do B in any case. Preventing X, from doing A is preventing a bad thing from happening, not increasing the probability of a worse thing, Y, happening.

So even if everyone agrees in the abstract that infanticide is worse than foeticide, it does not follow that banning sex-determination tests that lead to female foeticide may increase the probability of female infanticide. The actual identities of the people who make these 'choices' must be kept in mind. That includes not only their moral values but also their purchasing power. Is it any wonder that Dr. Baldeep Singh does not move his practice to the villages of Tamil Nadu in the hope of replacing infanticide with foeticide? For a poor Tamilian, the moral difference between foeticide and infanticide is far less than the economic difference between the cost of a scan and the cost of a handful of unhusked rice sufficient to kill a baby girl.

Having completed the background, what do I have to say about sex-preselection? The present context for this discussion is the opening of a clinic in London, offering the 'choice' of having a child of the desired sex. I should like to know more about who the consumers of this offer are likely to be. Perhaps, the researcher who described attitudes of different ethnic groups in Britain could illuminate us here. I suspect that the target group of people is more than likely to be those who have a pronounced male-preference. Indeed having said what I have about the mushrooming of sex-determination clinics in Punjab leading to the inevitable abortions of female foetuses, I can well imagine well-off Punjabis (who can spend the £650 as fees) filling the booking register of the clinic.

On 22 January, 1993, *The Independent* carried a report on the opening of the clinic by Lydia Slater, informing us that last year, Dr. Ravi Gupta, from Walthamstow, East London, attempted to open a gender clinic "but claims he was prevented from doing so by the GMC." Would we have any doubts about the clientele, if Dr. Gupta had succeeded? I'm afraid the clientele would be the same even though, not Dr. Gupta, but Dr. Alan Rose and Dr. Peter Liu are offering the service. Promises have been made about monitoring and taking action, if there is a complaint. The clinic has been running for a few months now. Should we demand that given the controversial nature of the services it is offering, information about the number of people being serviced, their preferences, etc. should be made available? Only then can we make informed judgements.

And what happens if this simple technique is allowed to be imported by the likes of Dr.

Baldeep Singh? For one, Prof. Kumar might write in defence of the service that has comparative advantages over the techniques of sex-determination already available to some consumers. She believes that "Reducing the number of girls slows down the birth-rate, and has the additional advantage of meeting the desires of the parents." (ibid, fn12, p182). Her answer to the question, 'should one be free to choose the sex of one's child?' cannot but be - yes.

The other, more serious likelihood, I think is that a whole new class of consumers will emerge, who were far too modern to practice infanticide, too upper class to resort to abortion of female foetuses for fear of appearing incapable of bringing up daughters, who would have done the latter only surreptitiously, if they did it at all. (Not go for it, like buying suits in a sale!) This new class, will not replace the existing numbers of those who commit foeticide, but *add* to them. A small number of purchasers of sex-determination (followed up by foeticide, if the 'wrong' sex was detected) might switch to sex-preselection (again, followed up by foeticide if the 'wrong' sex was selected). As for the BMC ethics committee's reservation that abortion for sex-selection is unethical, it is not even shared by the distinguished Prof. Kumar who has thought through the issues, let alone the sellers of techniques of sex-selection. According to some estimates, over one million female foetuses are aborted every year in India. Sex-preselection might only add to the numbers, when the desired selection of a male offspring fails.

Several other strands of arguments need to be explored. I shall pause here to wait for responses to what has been discussed so far.

*Meena Dhanda*  
*Lecturer in Philosophy*  
*University of Wolverhampton*

## **Sex Selection Conference: A Note**

I found Sarah Richmond's Report of the BMA conference both useful and stimulating, particularly on the question she raises at the end of how the debate might be differently conducted. It is that which I wish to respond to.

Firstly, when questions of widening choice are raised, we must always ask whose choice. These debates are often conducted in terms of: more choice is necessarily a good thing, and cost-benefit analyses are generally done in the abstract, often constrained only by considerations of fundamental liberal/human rights. Commonly, mainstream applied ethics uses a utilitarian and/or Kantian framework which does precisely this. But if increased choice significantly increases the power of one group at the expense of another already relatively disempowered group, this in itself may be a ground for rejecting it. World trade agreements, technological developments, privatization, deregulation, consumerism, and doubtless much else can be criticised for this even if it can be shown that they increase the wealth of the world, or the range of choice available to individuals. So one approach to the debate is to ask which individuals will be making

the choices, and whose power is increasing or diminishing. And this will, of course, raise questions about the different social/economic contexts in which such choices operate. Most of the above comments are made with a market-economy in mind in which both power and choice often operate in a zero-sum way.

Secondly, we need to think more carefully about what is meant by choice in these circumstances, (and this seems to be Strathern's point). I'm always bemused by the labels in butchers' shops which say "the choice is yours". These are either obviously true (how could I not have the choice?) or clearly false ("I'd like a joint shaped like a leg of lamb and tasting of beef"). It is the genius of the market to continuously change these falsehoods, but it is in the nature of choice to be between alternatives, rather than of what you wish for. You choose your partner, but cannot make him/her into your personal specification, for to do so is to presume a control over the world that would either render it utterly boring, or result in Hobbesian war of each against each. We may choose to get pregnant, carry the foetus to term etc., but there comes a point at which to demand more choice requires a control destructive of delight, joy, love . . . the quality of life that depends on the continued existence of a world and others independent of our plans and intentions. Choice is between alternatives, within a context of givens which structure values and meaning in our lives. We need to look at these structures when discussing the extension of choice. This means using imagination, feeling, and perhaps narrative techniques, for example, to imagine how we will conduct discussions which begin "It's your fault I'm not a boy."

In summary, I would like to see the debate over sex selection conducted within specific and explicitly identified contexts, with a focus on power and control, and with the use of imagination and narrative as well as analytical techniques. That way, we can explore the meaning of this choice for those whom it will most profoundly affect. Only then can we judge.

Anne Seller  
University of Kent

## Response to Jennifer Hornsby

Jennifer Hornsby offers a very interesting reading of the idea of pornography "silencing" women. "Silencing" someone, for her, is an act of rendering difficult or impossible their illocutionary acts, through a necessary failure of reciprocity. Thus, she argues that the woman of whom Judge Wild said "*Women who say no do not always mean no. It is not just a case of saying no.*" was silenced insofar as her act of refusing is not so recognised by the judge.

I fail to understand, however, why pornography silences in this sense. Is it because it represents women in a sexist way? Is it because it operates in a social structure in which its purveyors (often but not exclusively men) are in relatively powerful positions? Or is it because it represents women as sexed beings? If it is the first of these three, then why is sexist literature (Shakespeare?), Hollywood films or art which depicts women in conventionally low status positions not also silencing of women? If the second, then

there are very many more powerful individuals, institutions and structures - members of the law courts, prisons or chair people of powerful committees. If it is the third, I would simply ask why should the representation of women as sexed beings be inherently silencing of us? One might argue, by contrast, that some pornography (remember that there is lesbian porn and porn for women) has empowered some women to become illocutionary actors. It has helped empower lesbian women, for example, to be recognised by straight men as having sexual desires.

*Alison Assiter  
University of North London*

## **A letter from Dr Carole Haynes-Curtis**

With reference to your invitation for comments and/or suggestions for input into the Society, and taking note of your comments regarding the isolation women in philosophy are subject to, I wonder if there are any up to date figures available detailing the number of women employed full time academically in philosophy departments in Britain? I ask this because I am currently seeking academic employment and am amazed at the number of philosophy departments to whom I apply that do not appear to have even the token woman member of staff. If such figures are available it might also be interesting to survey how many qualified women [those with Doctorates in Philosophy] are currently seeking employment and at what percentage is their success rate in comparison with similarly qualified male applicants. Although most philosophy departments in Britain declare themselves equal opportunity employers, the suspicion is that they are merely paying lip service to such a notion of equality. Until detailed figures are available however this much remain purely a suspicion, hence a detailed survey in this area would be invaluable, and who better to initiate it than the Society for Women in Philosophy.

While I understand that such figures could not of course be held as conclusive evidence of discrimination, I do feel that the results would probably show such a vast proportional percentage discrepancy between successful male and female applicants that any defence offered by these departments in terms of, for instance, 'a lack of suitably qualified female applicants' etc. would be seriously undermined. Whatever your feelings on the above proposal I would appreciate your comments, and if they are favourable to such an undertaking, as I have a vested personal interest in this matter I would, of course, be happy to help in any way I could.

Finally, on a point of how women in Philosophy or indeed in any academic discipline are portrayed in the Media, I wonder if you or any of your friends had the misfortune to see a recent episode of BBC 2's 'Notes and Queries' in which Auberon Waugh and Paul Johnson were invited to discuss the question of whether or not 'intellectuals' were necessary to a society. While the choice of the above named men to represent the 'intellectual' in society was already an example of the worst sort of sexual stereotyping

viz middle aged, middle class, white males, their subsequent discussion produced an even more overt sexual stereotyping which labelled all attractive women as 'bimbos' who lived in awe of such powerful male intellects, and who could not of course be seen to compete intellectually with such male intellectual giants. I was tempted to write to complain about this programme at the time, but have not as yet, as I wondered if a complaint from such an organization as SWIP might not carry more weight, hence I bring the matter to your attention. If you do not feel it warrants a complaint from the society itself, I might still write and complain myself. If I do, may I mention that I am a member of SWIP?

You might think that my complaint on this matter is somewhat petty considering that the programme is intended as rather light weight 'entertainment', nevertheless I feel it is precisely this sort of media coverage that serves to reinforce a negative public attitude not only towards 'intellectuals' in general but also towards intelligent women in particular. It is particularly surprising that such a programme should serve to reinforce such negative images, as the format originates from the pages of 'The Guardian'. I would be interested to know if SWIP has any policy on such matters as the media's coverage of academic women, and if so what this policy involves. Thank you.

*Dr Carole Haynes-Curtis*

The editors would particularly welcome comments on these suggestions for the next WPR, or to pass on directly to Carole Haynes-Curtis.

## BOOKS RECEIVED

If you would like to review any of the books received (described below) please write to Margaret Whitford promptly at the Department of French, Queen Mary and Westfield College, Mile End Road, London E1 4NS.

**Sandra Harding (ed.), *The "Racial" Economy of Science: Toward a Democratic Future*, Indiana University Press.**

*The "Racial Economy of Science* encompasses a range of crucial issues, including a critical evaluation of the sciences in pre-modern high cultures of China, Africa, and the Andes; how science legitimates culturally approved definitions of race difference; the dependence of Third World research on First World agendas; race, imperialism, and the application of scientific technologies in health and reproduction; developmental agriculture and applied biology in the Third World; environmental racism and environmental crises in developing countries; and visions of programs that create sciences for democratic world community. [Blurb on back cover] NB There are 34 articles and 526 pages in this collection, so please do not volunteer unless you are committed to this research area and must read this volume. MW.

**Judith Grant, *Fundamental Feminism: Contesting the Core Concepts of Feminist Theory*, Routledge.**

What makes feminist theory feminist? How did so many different feminisms come to exist? In *Fundamental Feminism*, Judith Grant addresses these questions by offering a critical exploration of the evolution of feminist theory and the state of feminist thinking today. Grant provides a lively assessment of the major problems of contemporary feminist thought and identifies a set of common assumptions that link the wide varieties of feminist theories in existence. Grant identifies and critiques three core concepts of feminist theory - 'woman', 'experience' and 'personal politics' - from their origins in pamphlets and writings from the early women's liberation movements to their current construction in feminist thought. She then connects a number of major debates in feminism today to the longstanding influence of these core assumptions. These debates include the hegemony of the white female perspective, the tension between anti pornography and pro-sex feminists, and the discussions surrounding the challenges presented by postmodernism. [Blurb on back cover]

**Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres and Elizabeth Mittman (eds), *The Politics of the Essay: Feminist Perspectives*, Indiana University Press.**

As a genre that has been defined and theorized extensively, the essay raises particularly interesting questions for feminists. While it has often been described in "feminine" terms - e.g. open-ended, non-linear, personal - it simultaneously carries the weight of an elite male tradition, beginning with its first practitioner, Michel de Montaigne. *The Politics of the Essay: Feminist Perspectives* examines the intersection of gender and genre that presents itself when women write essays. Employing gender, race, class and national identity as axes of analysis, this volume introduces new perspectives into what has been

a largely apolitical discussion of the essay. Representing various national literatures, the contributors investigate the work of women essayists over the past two centuries. Also included is an original essay by Susan Griffin. The contributors include: Tuzyline Jita Allen, Margret Brüggmann, Ruth-Ellen Boetcher-Joeres, Amy Kaminsky, Pamela Klass Mittlefehldt, Elizabeth Mittman, Lourdes Rojas, Barbara Sichtermann, Eileen Boyd Sivert, Katherine V Snyder, Nancy Saporta Sternbach, Constance A Sullivan, and Arlene A Teraoka. [Blurb on back cover]

**Claire Goldberg-Moses and Leslie Wahl Rabine (eds), *Feminism, Socialism and French Romanticism*, Indiana University Press.**

In 1830s Paris, the working-class women of the Saint-Simonian movement organised the first separatist women's movement. In this volume Moses and Rabine translate *Saint-Simoniennes* documents previously unavailable in English and examine notions of "text" and "context" by drawing on feminist theory to link critical theory and social history. This provocative study questions the representation of "reality", the recovery of historical experience, and the extent to which the author preexists the text. Reacting with ambivalence to theories on woman and sexuality conceived and practiced by men, the French women utopian socialists of the 1830s appropriated and reinterpreted Saint-Simonian and Fourierist ideas. They developed unprecedented forms of women's writing, culture, and politics that make them the unmistakable predecessors of today's radical and poststructuralist feminists. They were sexual radicals who analysed the repression of women's bodies as fundamental to a system of socioeconomic oppression. They chose as a primary strategy of liberation a feminine practice of the written word, which Saint-Simonian Clair Démar called the 'parole de femme' ("word of woman"). They organised the first consciously separatist feminist group, meeting regularly to debate theory and to publish a journal, whose first issue announced that it would "include articles only by women". [Blurb on back cover] NB The book consists of an introduction and two theoretical essays [144 pages] followed by translations of Saint-Simonian texts by women [pp. 147-330] MW.

**Mary Bryden *Women in Samuel Beckett's Prose and Drama*, Barnes and Noble/Macmillan, h/b.**

Beckett's early writing is structured upon very sharply defined gender polarities. Objects of alarm, lust, derision or indifference, women incarnate the "Other". Beckett's shift from fiction to stage and media drama - giving a voice to women - unsettles this adversarial structure. From then on, the otherness of women is gradually eroded. In the later prose and drama, gender qualifies Beckett's people for neither fear nor favour. Mary Bryden's analysis, drawing on the insights of such French writers as Deleuze and Guattari, and Hélène Cixous, traces how gender dualisms are undermined over the course of Beckett's writing career. It is informed not only by Beckett's published prose and drama, but also by the rich manuscript resources of Reading University's Beckett Archive. Mary Bryden examines the status of sexual indeterminacy in Beckett's work, and concludes with a remarkable case study: that of the mother figure whose profile alters from dread to tenderness. [Cover blurb]

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Teresa Brennan *History After Lacan* Routledge 1993, p/b £10.99.**

Teresa Brennan's *History After Lacan* offers a rich source of argument and reflection on the meaning of social psychosis in the modern world. As the title suggests, the book makes a significant move away from the preoccupation of many contemporary writers with the structuralist, ahistorical Lacan. Here the psyche, whilst characterised by rigidity/fixity of direction and end, is not transhistorical, immutable, but subject to transformation and re-structuration by the energetic dimension of the natural world. Brennan brings Spinoza, Heidegger, Derrida as well as Klein and Freud to this analysis. She also engages significantly with social theory - particularly Marx and the logic of the finality of capitalism. Indeed the book may reopen, in more pertinent form, the debate between psychoanalysis and the political which apparently saw its death in the late 1970's with the emergence of poststructuralism to the scene. The text also places her recent book *Interpretations of the Flesh* (1991), which argued for a radical reappraisal of the logic of psychical containment, firmly upon socio-political and economic arguments.

Brennan begins by identifying a number of limits to both contemporary feminist and poststructuralist theory, particularly its Anglo-American variety. Both share a similar disdain for 1) the concept of history which is said to preclude specificity, 2) the level of 'general' analysis which tends, proponents argue, towards totalisation and exclusion of difference, and 3) the question of foundations which partakes in a logic of self-presence and completeness. The text is punctuated with weary criticisms of feminism's unrelenting focus on identity and difference, and on heightened abstracticity to the detriment of the concrete and the flesh. Such criticisms are in some ways timely ones and they are based on two lines of arguments neither of which are limited to feminist theory alone.

The first general point of argument (which occupies the preface) concerns the tendency for much contemporary writing to mirror the founding logic of its master-texts (mostly of the French kind). It thus takes on the secondary role of commentary, elaboration, exegesis, or at best, critique and application, rather than risking what Brennan calls the 'propositional mode of writing'. This latter style of writing is one which transcends the boundaries of existing ideas and categories to think creatively. To think in such a way is "to risk going beyond the fixed points governing social approval . . ." (xiii) [I trust the current state of the academy is partly responsible for the former direction . . .].

The second more substantive argument situates these theoretical trends within psychoanalytic discourse. It is the ego's tendency toward objectification, containment and control of both the psychical and the physical environment (they are intricately related both psychically and materially) which accounts for rigidity and abstracticity in knowledge. It is this argument, and its socio-political resonances, which become the central focus of the book.

Lacan's theory of the ego, Brennan contends, provides us with a lever for thinking through the trajectory of modernity (p.7). This thesis draws upon Lacan's rarely acknowledged historicisation of the imaginary (both in the context of his critique of

American ego-psychology and his interpretation of the historical unfolding of the ego through Hegel's master/slave dialectic). It is argued that through increasing spatialization in the (late) modern world, territorially through the colonisation of the environment, and technologically through economic expansionism and commodification, our temporal relation to the world is denied.

Utilising Spinoza, Brennan argues that there is both a "natural living reality" (p.21) and an "original logic of the flesh" (p.109) or an "origin *before* foundation" (p.88) which has been turned over, re-channelled into territory where the ego can be made more at home. This contortion of the natural environment is analysed firstly through a consideration of the psychical energies which must be quite literally 'held together' by the subject, and secondly, via an economic analysis of the commodity as a means of gratification.

To grasp precisely how this formulation of the ego is a symptom of modernity requires an understanding of what Brennan ambiguously calls the "foundational fantasy" (see Ch 3; also a speculative summary in Ch 1). It is ambiguous in the sense that an appeal to foundations is always illusory but nonetheless remains a precondition for the containment of subjectivity. The foundational fantasy is a general psychical event which signals the birth of a psychosis which reigns over the social/collective as well as the individual. It is along this subject-social axis that the fantasy takes shape and sets to work, hence Brennan's claim that we need to move beyond the energetic containment of the subject embraced by both Freud and Lacan, to think of psychical energy as an intersubjective/interactive economy (p. 87), as psychically and socially malleable (p. 46). The foundational fantasy is built up by the subject's efforts to conceive itself as psychically contained, by binding energy, constructing boundaries around the ego, hence securing its omnipotence but repressing maternal origin. These repressive manoeuvres can only cause physical blockage within/between subjects, reify social relations and reinforce a subject-centred 'drive for knowledge' which has been prevalent within modern philosophy.

This same fantasy is mapped onto socio-economic life. The globalisation of economic structures and relations, the environmental destruction entailed by the ruling *techne* of the production process and the acquisitive, consumptive culture so characteristic of modern capitalism all signal the pervasiveness of the foundational fantasy. Marx's analysis of the tendency for the production process to outstrip its capacity for profit was based, according to Brennan, upon a theory of labour value which failed to recognise the resources available in the natural world that could be turned over in favour of expansionism. Developing a detailed argument/intervention in the Marxist debate about value (which is outside the scope of this short review), Brennan maintains that the energetic form of the natural world enables the logic of capitalism to extend its territory. Of particular significance, is the spatio-temporal argument Brennan develops in this context. The economic mechanisms of production/consumption privilege space over time. The natural, symbolic time which offers *some* of us a sense of historical consciousness and connection with the world, is squeezed out by economic demands. The desire for profit-maximization, fuelled in part by a desire for gratification through consumption, must always outstrip nature's capacity to reproduce itself.

The logic of the foundational fantasy as an appeal to both a natural order and as an

unrepresentable energy (which is always present in its effects), moves beyond the philosophical opposition between foundationalism and anti-foundationalism. Brennan's interesting reading of Spinoza shows how it is possible to construct a logic without a transcendental or subject-centred imperative. Moreover, Brennan's analysis reveals how our fantasies - particularly masculine fantasies - delimit the symbolic boundaries of the social. The sites of transformation become many, but not in a postmodern sense. Brennan emphasises the need for a vocabulary which can constrain the manifestations of a destructive psychical fantasy (p.174) and here her work has something in common with the project of Luce Irigaray. To overcome the dominant economic logic is even harder; we must attempt to place limits of scale upon businesses and industry; small-scale business are thus a site of resistance. Surprisingly, given the force of the economic dimension of her argument, Brennan gives almost no consideration to the importance of transnational capital and its capacity to transgress the movements of the small firm, but clearly, this does shape the contours of the modern fantasy. However the focus of the text is not explanation and analysis per se but the drawing out of the ethical implications of this psychoanalytic interpretation, an area which still requires much work within a contemporary framework. To this end the book is an important contribution to philosophy and social and political theory. It should be of valuable interest to a very wide audience.

Caroline Williams  
University of Southampton

Mary Caputi, *Voluptuous Yearnings: A Feminist Theory of the Obscene*, Rowman and Littlefield 1994, h/b \$48.50, p/b \$18.95

Harriett Gilbert (ed.), *The Sexual Imagination from Acker to Zola: A Feminist Companion*, Jonathan Cape 1993, p/b £14.99

The two entries on pornography in Elizabeth Wright's *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary* (Blackwell 1992) indicate that feminist writing on pornography is not for the most part informed by psychoanalytic perspectives. This book marks a shift, then, in that it seeks to use Freudian drive theory (eros and thanatos, the drives towards pleasure and death respectively) to examine the feminist critique of pornography. The question it sets out to explore is: How can a feminist analysis of pornography explain the human need for the obscene? The thesis is that obscenity has a crucial social function in a world ruled by technology, rationality and the stress on scientific progress and efficiency. The ultra-technological world of late twentieth-century capitalism does not allow for the human need for dedifferentiation, i.e. the sense of loss of self or loosening of ego-boundaries. The obscene highlights the provisional nature of the reality principle and allows for some contact with the world of primitive and archaic drives which is closed off by our socialisation into a super-industrialised and individualistic society. (The implication is that not all societies would have such a powerful need for pornography.) Obscenity is essential to culture, Caputi argues, because it calls into question the limits of that culture. And it is particularly women's bodies that figure in pornography because women represent the archaic maternal, the time before socialisation and ego-formation. The feminine evokes vulnerability, loss of control and morality. Pornography, then, acts as a form of containment, or shield, against society's inchoate and

inarticulable fears. It is a phenomenon which needs to be understood in relation to religion and to the aesthetic.

The book is a work of synthesis which presents itself as more original than it actually is. At a guess, I'd say this was probably a dissertation turned into a book. Cf. for example Caputi's rather unfocussed sense of her audience (in a contribution to the pornography debate it should not be necessary to explain who Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon are); her dutiful mentioning of the obligatory big names like Derrida and Irigaray, although they only have walk-on parts and don't seem essential here. On the other hand, she is reasonably accessible, and students would probably find her book a useful place to start elaborating the connections between psychoanalytic theory and the pornography debates. My main objection is that in her account of the human need for the obscene, the author doesn't seem to register that this need is distributed rather unevenly between the sexes. Drives may be innate, but they are differently socialised, as even Freud pointed out. Irigaray, for example, argues in *Speculum* that women in a sense *bear* or *carry* the weight of the death drive for men. Her analysis is that in an economy such as ours, women will have difficulty sublimating their own death drive. (Similar kinds of argument can be found in the work of Elisabeth Bronfen and Teresa Brennan.) Since Caputi doesn't raise the question about women's need for the obscene (as distinct from men's) and how it might be addressed, or not, her argument sometimes seems curiously pre-feminist.

In contrast, *The Sexual Imagination* is impeccably feminist, but I wasn't quite sure what the *point* of it was. According to the introduction, it is intended as 'a tourist guide to the structures that contain, explain and express our sexualities.' The selection of entries, says Harriett Gilbert, 'is inevitably governed by a mixture of circumstance, chance and whim.' 'A tourist guide' is about right; it's enjoyable and informative, and tells you a bit about a lot of things. Dictionaries, encyclopaedias and companions of all kinds are much in evidence nowadays. This may have something to do with the 'knowledge explosion' and the necessity for interdisciplinarity; it's perhaps also to do with the post-modern condition, as defined by Lyotard, where connecting bits of information becomes a survival strategy. As such books go, it is certainly more entertaining than most. Recommended for bedtime reading.

Margaret Whitford  
QMW, London

Donna Dickenson, *Margaret Fuller: Writing a Woman's Life* Macmillan, 1993.  
£40 h/b.

Margaret Fuller (born 1810) was an American journalist, critic and pioneer feminist. She was the eldest surviving child of the Fuller family and was educated by her lawyer father, as though she had been a boy. When her father died in 1835 she took over his role of providing for the family and educating her younger brothers and sisters. She taught at Bronson Alcott's Temple School 1836-7 and 1837-9 at Greene Street school, Providence, where she translated Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe* and began work as a critic. Moving to Boston in 1839, she began a series of *Conversations for women*; she was one

of the earliest exponents of Women's Studies. In 1846 she became foreign correspondent for the *Tribune*; in 1849 when the Roman Republic was proclaimed and Rome was besieged by French troops she ran a hospital. In 1848 she had met Marchese Giovanni Ossoli, a captain in the Civic Guard and had a son, Nino. Returning to America all three drowned in a shipwreck in 1850. As with Mary Wollstonecraft there was subsequent controversy over whether she was or was not married when her child was born.

Donna Dickenson seeks to rescue Margaret Fuller from the role assigned to her in earlier biographical studies as the 'Dark Lady' of the Transcendentalists and to construct her instead as the heroine of a quest narrative. The subtitle of her study signals that the model she is using to explore this gifted woman's life is that of Carolyn Heilbrun (see *Writing a Woman's Life* 1989). This model suggests that many gifted women have experienced a marked sense of incipient talent, which, as it were, lies in waiting for their vocation to present itself. This period of waiting or 'moratorium' is not unknown to talented men, but often endures over a longer period in women's lives, until it is revealed by some accident. The 'accident' in Margaret Fuller's life, according to this model, is falling into the company of the Transcendentalists, Emerson and Alcott, and subsequently taking on the editorship of *The Dial* in 1840. This journal's influence in setting the canon of nineteenth century American literature has been widely accepted, but has resulted in Margaret Fuller being considered more as Muse to the male Transcendentalists than in her own right/write. This 'relational' view of Margaret Fuller has been further exacerbated by the general assumption that she was the model for Zenobia, the visionary feminist of Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*, written two years after Margaret Fuller's death.

Margaret Fuller's most famous work, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845), was clearly an idea, or set of ideas, whose time had come. The first print run sold out in a week. Although it was not programmatic, it nevertheless influenced the Seneca Falls convention of 1848 and the subsequent American Women's movement. This in turn influenced the Langham Place circle of feminists in England in the eighteen-fifties. Not surprisingly Marian Evans (her vocation as 'George Eliot' yet to come), wrote an article considering Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft together. Broadly speaking, Marian Evans identified Mary Wollstonecraft as a 'rationalist' feminist who seeks to end women's subordination via equal rights arguments. Margaret Fuller's Romantic feminism, closer to the kind of feminism which George Eliot was to articulate in her fiction, appealed to her more strongly. Margaret Fuller's confident assertions of the importance of intellectual endeavour and sensitivity of feelings in women and men, was taken up by the mid-Victorian feminists in England. I mention these connections because, although Donna Dickenson does not claim to be writing a conventional biography, it behaves like one in the sense that it places one individual under the spotlight, which inevitably casts others into the shadows.

Donna Dickenson's study begins with the treatment of her life after her death and admirably rescues Margaret Fuller from the critical downgrading which then began. It is also admirable in its practice of letting Margaret Fuller speak for herself, primarily through extensive use of her letters. My only cavil is that, at times, the quest narrative

overdetermined the production of an isolated heroine. I would have welcomed more development of the web of connections which socially, intellectually and emotionally construct the subject.

Pam Hirsch  
Cambridge

[Pam Hirsch is currently writing a biography of Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon to be published by Chatto and Windus].

**Kathy E Ferguson, *The Man Question: Visions of Subjectivity in Feminist Theory*, University of California Press 1993, p/b.**

**Jane Flax, *Disputed Subjects: Essays on Psychoanalysis, Politics and Philosophy*, Routledge 1993, p/b £11.99.**

Given the enormous range and disparity of feminist theories, the impulse to attempt a typology and classification is almost irresistible. Kathy Ferguson has attempted to assign feminist visions of the self to two main types, or metanarratives, which she calls, respectively, *interpretation* and *genealogy*. Interpretation includes articulations of women's experience and women's voice, genealogy refers to deconstructions of the category of women. The book is organised around the dialogue between the first (attempts to make women central) and the second (the project of decentring everything, including women). Although these two narratives more often than not seem locked in an irreconcilable struggle, Ferguson wants to argue that, despite the irreducible tension between them, nonetheless they need each other (20).

The first chapter is devoted to presenting and arguing for her typology. The second chapter presents a breakdown of three sub-categories of interpretation and genealogy (praxis feminism, cosmic feminism and linguistic feminism), and Ferguson suggests that they can be seen as corresponding to one or more of the feminist responses to the legacy of the Hegelian account of subjectivity. According to this post-Hegelian typology, praxis feminism claims that Hegel's notions of relationship are impoverished, overly invested in conflict and separation, cosmic feminism criticises Hegel's imperialistic account of nature, while linguistic feminism objects to his faith in self-reflection and language, and his obliteration of difference (63).

Subsequent chapters go on to flesh out and refine these broad accounts while the final chapter on 'Mobile subjectivities' puts forward a further thematisation of subjectivity, which arises out of 'the productive field of frictions and invitation' offered by the shifting relations between the three different types of feminist theory - praxis, cosmic and linguistic - described in the body of the book. 'Mobile subjectivities ride on the ready-made conversations/contestations among linguistic, praxis and cosmic feminisms, on the struggles of interpretive and genealogical metatheories, but with an ironic twist - they trouble fixed boundaries, antagonize true believers, create new possibilities for themselves' (154). The stress on irony in the final chapter to a certain extent cuts across the author's 'will to classification' and provides a refreshing antidote to taking all this too seriously.

The book is very clearly written and would provide a useful introduction for women's studies and philosophy students to the wealth of feminist debates around the concept of subjectivity. I suspect that many readers will feel that they don't fit neatly into any of the classifications, but that, after all, is the point of the concluding chapter on 'mobile subjectivities'.

In 1990, Jane Flax published *Thinking Fragments* (California University Press) in which she, like Kathy Ferguson, organised a dialogue - in Flax's case between psychoanalysis, feminism and postmodernism. As she explains in the preface to *Disputed Subjects*, the latter is a collection of essays written in response to questions provoked by *Thinking Fragments*. It addresses the challenges raised by readers of *Thinking Fragments* which she outlines as follows: 'postmodernists are necessarily politically irresponsible nihilists; they can make no contributions to useful notions of subjectivity; psychoanalysts must maintain allegiance to a unitary notion of a core self; and successful struggles against male dominance require a solid, empirical, and collective sense of female subjectivity' (p.x). The essays in *Disputed Subjects* set out to present a defence of Flax's position against these arguments, which she continues to find unconvincing. She does not forge ahead into a new domain of thinking here, but rather extends, clarifies and expands some of the points made in *Thinking Fragments* and attempts also to expose some feminist phantasies: unconscious beliefs and scenarios which inform current feminist thinking.

*The Man Question* and *Disputed Subjects* could usefully be read together since Flax's distrust of metanarratives read alongside Ferguson's typology of feminist metanarratives could perhaps generate the 'productive field of frictions and invitations' that Ferguson's book evokes.

Margaret Whitford  
QMW, University of London

Rosemary Hennessy, *Materialist Feminism and the Politics of Discourse*, New York and London: Routledge, 1993 p/b £10.99.

Concerned with the current crisis of feminism in view of the implications of the general crisis of knowledge for the category 'woman', and the effectivity of feminism as an oppositional and emancipatory movement, Rosemary Hennessy argues here for a materialist feminist theory/practice that combines aspects of both postmodernism and materialism: discourse theory and Marxist systemic analytics.

Echoing (though not herself referring to) some of the most trenchant criticisms of poststructuralism which stem from those who like Terry Eagleton, point to its complicity in the perpetuation of the iniquities and inequalities of a now globally expanded late capitalism, Hennessy's major concern is with the materiality of discourses; both those to be appropriated and her own and other feminist discourses. She argues that a reflexive attention to the materiality of discourse is essential to a materialist feminist project which seeks global transformation, which is why she examines and finds lacking the materiality of the self-defined materialist theories of discourse in Foucault, Kristeva

and Laclau and Mouffe. All are deemed complicit in a regressive global politics. Nevertheless she argues that reading Foucault, Kristeva and Laclau and Mouffe critically both with and against each other is the first step in developing a materialist feminist theory of discourse; one which aims to understand the discursive construction of "woman" across multiple modalities of difference including race, class, gender and sexuality. She develops a notion of the discursive construction of the subject (of feminism) that is disarticulated from their social logics of contingency and inserted instead into a systemic analysis. That is a global social analytic that without being totalizing retains a notion of non-discursive social totalities such as patriarchy and capitalism. This, she insists, is necessary in order to *explain* rather than merely *describe* the discursive construction of difference and its relation to the exploitative social arrangements that shape it. In other words she wants to situate the discursive construction of difference within, and relate it to, the sphere of productive relations that comprise multinational capitalism.

Hennessy sees feminism as a political movement for social transformation aiming at the elimination of exploitation, dismantling of patriarchy and the equal distribution of resources and power (p. 128, 178). This for Hennessy is the 'revolutionary vision', the *telos*, of a materialist feminist analytic. Moreover she sees the current crisis of feminism as an enabling condition for transformative change.

The next step she takes (in the third of four chapters) is to develop standpoint theory as a materialist critique of western epistemology that not only calls into question the empiricist notion of the subject and the discourses of modernity but also (unlike cultural or empiricist feminist epistemologies) involves a systematic explanation of reality while avoiding privileging or universalizing woman's position. One of the primary theoretical questions considered is how to understand the relationship between "women's lives" as at least in part discursively constructed and the subject of feminism. The question thus becomes: "How can the grounds for feminist knowledge be formulated congruently with new notions of the subject in language so as to maintain both some oppositional power and specificity for feminism as a political practice" (p.74). The way to address these issues Hennessy suggests is to consider discourse as ideology (p. 74).

Hence drawing on postmodern Marxist theories of ideology which develop Gramsci's conception of hegemony (i.e. Laclau and Mouffe) she advocates understanding discourse as ideology (because a theory of ideology allows systemic analysis) and feminist practice as ideology critique (p. xv11). Thus the feminist standpoint becomes not so much an experiential ground for knowledge as a critical practice (p. xvii). Hence the shift, as she puts it in the title of the third chapter, "From women's lives to ideology critique".

Ultimately, therefore, she wants to develop standpoint theory as a critical practice which intervenes in and rearranges the construction of meanings and the social arrangements they support (p.91). She does this by proposing a symptomatic reading as developed in recent Marxist hermeneutics that politicizes Freud's concept of the symptom. She argues "As a critical practice symptomatic reading has an enormous potential for feminism in that it develops at the very specific level of the discursive articulation of particular texts of culture, and by way of a systemic mode of analysis, a theory of

subjectivity as ideological positionality" (p.93).

While I'm not quite persuaded by all that she says (e.g. I'm not entirely convinced of the utility, feasibility or plausibility of redefining discourse as ideology) this eminently readable book makes a challenging intervention into contemporary feminist debates and tackles some of the most intractable issues that currently face feminist theory and practice.

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***Hypatia* Special Issue on 'Lesbian Philosophy', Vol 7 No 4, Fall 1992. Distributed by the Open University Press.**

While the editor, Claudia Card, outlines a very broad intellectual context for this book, its basic cast is American utopian separatist. It does not adequately address the contemporary, historical or inter-cultural meaning of 'lesbian', and the 'identities' it can connote. Possibly as a result, it fails to shed light on fundamental questions such as whether 'lesbian' is sufficient grounds on which to base a philosophy. As Judith Roof put it in *A Lure of Knowledge* (Columbia, 1991): "Expecting lesbian sexuality to carry the burden of . . . epistemological positions is like asking a specter to support the weight of critical challenges to ideology." (251) Roof's metaphor of disembodiedness is more apposite than it might at first appear, since it locates the definitional paradox on which many of the other issues eventually turn.

Card's introductory essay kept raising Roof's specter: "I treat 'lesbian' as first of all an adjective, a modifier, a qualifier of experiences, relationships, dreams, imaginings, practices, communities, philosophy" (1). Card says her philosophy is "Socratic in a very particular respect: I think of philosophy as fundamentally a kind of self-knowledge." (1) Many of her contributors share this approach, which is fair enough if subjectivity or 'selfhood' are at issue. But as a definition of philosophy I find it troubling. Philosophy concerns " 'the work of the universal' with stringent ethical requirements". (Whitford, *Luce Irigaray, Philosophy in the Feminine*, Routledge, 1991, 2).

The 16 essays are divided into sections on '*Lesbian Creativity*', '*The Sex Wars*', '*Constructing "Lesbian"*', and '*Lesbian Community and Responsibility*'. The notes and references after each chapter not surprisingly have the same American cast as the three bibliographies - Jaquelyn Zita on '*Jeffner Allen*' (12-13), Maomi Schemann on '*Jewish Lesbian Writing*' (193-4) and Claudia Card's more extensive '*Selected Bibliography of Lesbian Philosophy and Related Works*' (212-222). I find that in a European or international context, which is implied by some of the citations, there are some strange omissions - nothing by Luce Irigaray, Elizabeth Grosz, Margaret Whitford or Rosi Braidotti, for instance.

This uneven book may have a place within Women's Studies as a way into exploring the historical and social issues raised by the assumption of 'lesbian community'. But I would beware of any broader claims, as I would of some of its literary methodologies. Bat-Ami Bar On and Ruth Ginzberg on '*The Feminist "Sexuality Debates" and the Transformation of the Political*' and Audre Lorde's '*(Nonessentialist) Lesbian Eros*' are useful introductory

essays on their respective topics. But too many of the contributors betray 'a nostalgia for that Difference we as lesbians can call our own' (6) and for 'a freely chosen subjectivity' (7). Both these phrases require scepticism before sentiment, as does the contention that difficulties with the terms 'lesbian' and 'philosopher' always vary because 'no-one else has just the same stories' (44). Anecdotal appeals either to commonalities or to a uniqueness that requires ceaseless renaming will do very little to advance the cause of rethinking philosophies of difference, lesbian or otherwise. I hoped for better from *Hypatia*.

Penny Florence  
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**Kathleen Jones, *Compassionate Authority: Democracy and the Representation of Women*, London: Routledge, 1993 p/b £12.99.**

Aiming to investigate what a concept of sexual difference would bring to bear upon our notions of political authority, Kathleen Jones raises important questions for both feminist and political theory. Her adoption of a self-consciously "iconoclastic" approach (ix) is aimed at avoiding what she sees as the root cause of the current propensity within American academic and political contexts for the "ranking of oppressions" (x) - namely, a conceptual confusion of authority with sovereignty. Attempting to negotiate the theoretical terrain within feminism between proponents of equality or difference as viable political goals for women - referring to the former as attempts to negate "women's distinctive gender characteristics" and the latter as attempts to uncritically affirm gender differences (ix), Jones sets out to provide us with a "symbolic history of gender" taking into account such diverse topics as contract theory, the body politic, and women rulers, all as a means by which to reconceptualize authority and women's relationship to it.

If there is any unifying theoretical position throughout this work, it is the position that Jones consistently attempts to occupy between schools of thought or interpretive schemas often considered to be at odds with each other or mutually exclusive. Her very insistence upon authority as the conceptual problem, and not the question of difference itself, is an attempt to transcend the paralysing effects of charges and countercharges of essentialism and ethnocentrism (p.218). However, while Jones' insistence upon maintaining this theoretical position at the crossroads often leads to stunning and original insights, it also leads to a fair amount of conceptual confusion - and often both at once. Especially strong on debates concerning the divide between cultural feminism and post-modern feminism, as well as the relationship between racism and sexism, Jones 'symbolic history of gender' suffers from a lack of attention to the works of Michel Foucault which hover ghost-like throughout the book and which receive mention but never any systematic analysis.

While her focus is initially on Hobbes, she also considers modern theories of authority and sovereignty and in so doing deals primarily with Weber and Arendt. In considering a 'feminist response' to what she sees as the conflation symbolically between authority, sovereignty, and masculinity, Jones proposes we move beyond this to a conception of compassionate authority. This conception of authority would 'pull us into a face-to-face

encounter with a specific, concrete other' (143) and 'subvert the universal point of view by a refusal of the totalizing and dehumanizing effects of a transcendent rationality' (143-144). Such broad claims notwithstanding, Jones provides feminist theorists with an interesting attempt to reconstitute prevailing conceptions of political authority that does go beyond a mere critical assessment of contemporary debates.

Monique Rhodes  
University of Massachusetts

**Kelly Oliver, *Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the Double Bind*, Indiana University Press p/b £12.99.**

In *Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the Double Bind*, Kelly Oliver's project is to rehabilitate Kristeva's writings into a specifically feminist context. She recognises Kristeva's ambivalence towards feminist theories and the subsequently cool response from some of those women working within this context and attempts to provide for them a "feminist" Kristeva. This is an interesting project, and although I still remain skeptical about the ultimate possibility of this, it is indeed worthy of attention.

Oliver's interpretation remains firmly within the parameters of Kristeva's theoretical discourse and deliberately so: "the frustration and excitement of reading Kristeva's writing makes my own relation to them similar to what she describes as the relationship to the abject mother." (p2) Whilst she has specific reasons for doing this, as I will outline shortly, this can render her position somewhat limited as everything which seems to move against the Kristeva who is useful to feminism becomes interpreted as part of a clever subversive strategy in itself; this makes real criticism of her work very difficult from this perspective.

However, as stated, Oliver's is a very sympathetic reading. She views moments when Kristeva seemingly rejects the "feminine" Semiotic in favour of the world of masculine identity in the Symbolic as this disruptive strategy. She maintains that Kristeva's aim is to move away from the dominant constrictive dichotomous theoretical discourse (a double-bind). Therefore, Oliver's Kristeva is political and radical: by harnessing her strategy, real socioeconomic changes seem to be possible, through a reconceptualisation of identity in which alterity, negation and difference co-exist. Oliver evaluates Kristeva's representation of the mother and her conceptualisation of psychoanalysis and of poetic language in order to support her interpretation.

It is, however, Kristeva's representation of the mother and of the maternal function that has become the stumbling block for many of those who wish to use Kristeva's theoretical discourse in the context of feminist debates. Oliver sees Kristeva's concentration on the maternal function in the context of subjective development as an antidote to the over-reliance on the dominance of the paternal function in the Symbolic. This is, as noted, an important reason why Oliver considers Kristeva to be of great use for non-phallographic theories of identity. However, it does seem to be the case that too frequently in her writings Kristeva falls back on the traditional conflation between femininity and maternity as well as the equally unsatisfactory celebration of the male child and his

relation to the maternal function at the expense of the female. In keeping with her "recuperative reading", Oliver does not provide a satisfactory argument which counters this reading of Kristeva.

Notwithstanding this, this is a bold, and lively project, accessible to newcomers to her work, as well as those who are familiar with Kristeva's oeuvre and is a welcome addition to the whole engagement with the concept of identity and its reconceptualisations.

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**V Spike Peterson (ed) *Gendered States: Feminist (Re)Visions of International Relations Theory*, Boulder & London, Lynne Rienner, 1992. h/b £31.50 p/b £14.95 available from The Eurospan Group.**

The essays collected in this volume were originally written for a conference on 'Gender and International Relations' which took place in 1990. Together they constitute a useful addition to the growing literature on feminist international political theory. Spike Peterson does an excellent editing job and provides a well thought-out overview of the themes of the book in the Introduction, as well as contributing a paper of her own. Many of the papers will be of interest outside of the discipline of international relations itself, since the preoccupations of feminist international relations theory overlap considerably with those of feminist political theory and feminist epistemology within the social sciences. The question which haunts the book is the question of what difference it makes to our understanding of the international realm to introduce the idea that states and inter-state relations are fundamentally gendered. In the Introduction, Spike Peterson makes a case for feminist analyses providing a critical perspective on the international which complements other critical approaches. She argues, however that by looking at the world through what she calls the 'lens' of gender our conception of the world becomes radically transformed.

To a greater or lesser extent all of the essays in this book explore the theme of the difference that gender makes. Some, like Spike Peterson's, Harrington's, Sylvester's and Walker's pieces address the question at a general level in relation to dominant traditional conceptions of states and inter-state relations. In contrast, Grant's paper on international security and Tetreault's on revolution address more specific issues; and Runyan and Elshain contribute to the well established feminist unpacking of the ethical and metaphysical baggage accompanying the masculinized self-understanding of the nation state. The feminist perspectives of the authors are not all the same, but most do draw upon what Spike Peterson labels the 'postpositivist' tradition of theory, using insights of postmodernism and being very wary of any essentializing moves in the conceptualization of either 'woman' or 'feminist'. As with so much feminist work within social scientific theory, the strengths of the analysis are still predominantly in its critical force in displaying the distortions, both analytic and normative, of traditional thinking. The implications of a feminist theory of international relations are more evident in what it will not involve than in what it will encompass more positively. However, given the very early stage of feminist theorising in the context of the international, it is perhaps unfair to expect the constructive theorising to have extended very far as yet. As it is, the

book provides sophisticated and interesting analysis of fascinating and important issues. There is something of interest here for any feminist working in the domain of social scientific theory; and for any feminist interested in the possibility of re-conceiving the world in terms that are different from the predominant image of the world as constituted by the relations of essentially self-interested nation states.

Kimberley Hutchings  
University of Wolverhampton

"Gendering Philosophy", in *Women: A Cultural Review* 3, No 2, Oxford University Press 1992.

Herta Nagl-Docekal, "Von der feministischen Transformation der Philosophie", [On the Feminist Transformation of Philosophy] *Ethik und Sozialwissenschaften - Streitforum für Erwägungskultur* (EUS) 3, No 4, 523-531. With 24 reasoned critiques, 532-576, and a reply by the author, 577-592. Westdeutscher Verlag 1992.

These two issues of academic journals cover the same field. It may be characterized as that of "rethinking philosophy by rethinking feminism" (Battersby), which is a feminist approach in metaphilosophy. The issue on "Gendering philosophy" (OUP) consists of five papers. A review of the first two, by Whitford and Battersby, is difficult to give since these articles are themselves largely reviews, state-of-the-art reports. So they can only be evaluated as such. Margaret Whitford's introduction offers a very welcome review of many recent contributions to this (old) undertaking. Reading it you will go for a pen and make up a list for books to buy. Nevertheless, one critical point in her paper makes one prick up one's ears. Moira Gatens (1991) is taken to task for under-representing "the evolution of feminist thought". It is my impression that the evolution that is alluded to here, the one in 'continental' philosophy, is largely restricted to metaphilosophy - not only in practice but in theory, too, often even where, say, epistemology is the official topic. That is a pity. However, this volume contains some exceptions. As far as I can judge, Elisabeth Bronfen's "From Omphalos to Phallus: Cultural Representations of Femininity and Death:" breaks new ground in classical studies and reflects back upon human conditions. There is a basis of historical and literary fact, combined with bold speculation, from which our deepest needs and fears are illuminated. In "The Mirror and the Womb" Susanne Scholz returns to the topic of Bacon's conceptions of the human mind and the zest for man's domination of nature. In a paper on identity thinking and its politics, Morwenna Griffiths and Anne Seller offer an impressionist sketch of the problems of Belonging and of Not-Belonging. To read such essays by other women in the academy is a soothing activity, but this sketch is too flimsy to satisfy one's craving. One can only hope that one day the authors will find the time to develop this brief sketch into a connected whole (a book).

Whitford has done a lot to clarify and to integrate French feminist philosophy into the Anglo-Saxon world and has repeatedly shown a keen desire to take in the rest of the readable world. "Gatens's account is weakened by the *exclusion* of many of the feminist thinkers who have been exploring the issues raised in continental philosophy", Whitford holds (my italics). Continental philosophy is, however, tacitly identified here as

deriving from France and/or from psychoanalysis. Even among worthwhile male philosophers this is not the case. Here we approach the problem discussed by Griffiths and Seller: the problem of Not-Belonging. Bertrand Russell called his historical volume "A History of Western Philosophy" rather than "of Philosophy". This was uncommon. The papers under review limit their attention span to America and France, with additions from Italy. But here it stops, with no mention of the fact. Last year a renowned Dutch philosopher of culture characterized the French and the American cultures as possessing the most restricted "geographical and cultural world pictures" of all. Obviously, the texts from elsewhere must be published in a readable language. The burden this entails certainly does not rest only with native speakers of English, but awareness of the problem and the Not-Belonging it engenders must be constantly attended to. Another danger is that the study of the philosophical patterns of outspoken sexists may become based - as it usually is today - on knowledge and interest restrictively derived from French, Anglo-Saxon or American experience. Thereby a wealth of empirical data on sexist philosophical styles is totally disregarded.

In "On the Feminist Transformation of Philosophy" Herta Nagl-Docekal offers a definition. "Feministic philosophizing is not an additional undertaking", she writes, and I wholeheartedly agree. We are not concerned with "an additional theme that might be simply added to the catalogue of recognized philosophical problem fields but with 'gender' as an additional analytical category, with which all philosophical disciplines and their parts are to be confronted" (524, my italics). The addition of this analytical category is of the greatest importance. It should be noted, in passing, that it was first employed in the verbal form of 'patriarchy'. The definition given by Nagl-Docekal, then, at first seems ideal, and it certainly is well suited to the idea of 'gendering' philosophy in a more or less literal sense. But is it not after all too narrow? There are other categories of thought that are traditionally disregarded by philosophers and that also make for an anti-sexist philosophy. Gemma Corradi Fiumara's work is a case in point; it is rightly included in Whitford's survey although Corradi Fiumara's book contains no reference to gender. Her *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening* highlights the conspicuous absence in European philosophy of the category 'listening'. Other and thematically related analytical categories are 'dialogue', 'emotion', and 'exclusion', all of which have been excluded from theoretical philosophy, and from its history as well. In the feminist transformation of philosophy these categories seem to be no less vital.

It is a bonus that today - since the nineteen-twenties - many men, too, are extremely interested in 'dialogue' and advocate this category in philosophy across the 'continental' - 'analytical' divide, from hermeneutics to logic. So let us not keep the definition all too literal. Beware of Not-Belonging, and of feminist philosophy as restricted to metaphilosophy! Gender philosophy!

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Sara Ruddick *Maternal Thinking : Towards a Politics of Peace* The Women's Press  
Elizabeth Spelman *Inessential Woman* The Women's Press  
Sylvia Walby *Theorising Patriarchy* Blackwell  
Elisabeth Young-Bruehl *Mind and the Body Politic* Routledge

#### NEWSLETTER 4 (JANUARY 1991)

Alison Assiter *Althusser and Feminism* Pluto Press  
Gemma Corradi Fiumara *The Other Side of Language : A Philosophy of Listening*  
Routledge  
Jean Graybeal *Language and 'The Feminine' in Nietzsche and Heidegger* Indiana  
University Press  
Lynn Hankinson Nelson *Who Knows : From Quine to a Feminist Empiricism* Temple  
University Press  
Andrea Nye *Words of Power : A Feminist Reading of the History of Logic* Routledge  
Dorothy Smith *The Conceptual Practices of Power : A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge*  
University of Toronto Press  
Gail Tulloch *Mill and Sexual Equality* Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc.

#### NEWSLETTER 5 (JUNE 1991)

Kathryn Pyne Addelson *Impure Thoughts : Essays on Philosophy, Feminism and Ethics*  
Temple University Press  
Sandra Lee Bartky *Femininity and Domination : Studies in the Phenomenology of  
Oppression* Routledge  
Joan Cocks *The Oppositional Imagination* Routledge  
Susan J. Hekman *Gender and Knowledge : Elements of a Postmodern Feminism* Polity  
Press  
Nancy Holland *Is Women's Philosophy Possible?* Rowman and Littlefield  
Mary Lyndon Shanley and Carole Pateman (eds) *Feminist Interpretations and Political  
Theory* Polity Press  
Elizabeth Kamarck Minnich *Transforming Knowledge* Temple University Press  
Kate Soper *Troubled Pleasures* Verso  
Iris Marion Young *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and  
Social Theory* Indiana University Press

#### NEWSLETTER 6 (NOVEMBER 1991)

Brenda Almond *The Philosophical Quest* Penguin  
Brenda Almond and Donald Hill (eds) *Applied Philosophy : Morals and Metaphysics in  
Contemporary Debate* Routledge  
Brenda Almond (ed.) *AIDS - A Moral Issue : The Ethical, Legal and Social Aspects*  
Macmillan  
Rosi Braidotti *Patterns of Dissonance* Polity Press  
Lorraine Code *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge*  
Cornell University Press  
Arleen B. Dallery and Charles E. Scott *The Question of the Other : Essays in  
Contemporary Continental Philosophy* SUNY Press

- Christine Di Stefano *Configurations of Masculinity : A Feminist Perspective on Modern Political Theory* Cornell University Press
- Michèle Le Doeuff *Hipparchia's Choice : An Essay Concerning Women, Philosophy, Etc.* Blackwell
- Luce Irigaray *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* trans. Gillian C. Gill, Columbia University Press
- The Milan Women's Bookstore Collective *Sexual Difference : A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice* Indiana University Press
- Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp (eds) *Italian Feminist Thought : A Reader* Blackwell
- Sean Sayers and Peter Osborne (eds) *Socialism, Feminism and Philosophy : A Radical Philosophy Reader* Routledge
- Margaret Whitford *Luce Irigaray : Philosophy in the Feminine* Routledge

#### NEWSLETTER 7 (JUNE 1992)

- Jennifer Birkett and Elizabeth Harvey (eds) *Determined Women : Studies in the Construction of the Female Subject 1900-1990* Barnes and Noble
- Drucilla Cornell *Beyond Accommodation : Ethical Feminism, Deconstruction and the Law* Routledge
- Donna Dickenson *George Sand : A Brave Man, The Most Womanly Woman* Berg Women's Series
- Moira Gatens *Feminism and Philosophy* Polity Press
- Hypatia vol. 6 no. 3 Fall 1991, Special Issue : *Feminism and the Body* ed. Elizabeth Grosz
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## **Whose Knowledge? Whose Post-Modernism?**

### **Anne Seller, University of Kent at Canterbury**

*The following paper was written for the annual conference of the Higher Education Foundation, held in Oxford in 1993, on "The Crisis of Knowledge in Education." The HEF exists as a forum for discussing the values, aims, organisation, structure and content of higher education, and is open to anyone with an interest in this. In fact, it consists mostly of academics, administrators and extra-mural teachers. Given the nature of the occasion, my focus is on education, what we should do, rather than philosophy, what we can know.*

*I found the conference hugely enjoyable. Membership of the HEF costs £12.00 annual subscription, and can be obtained from: Phillip Healy, HEF, Westminster College, Oxford OX2 9AT.*

This paper may appear to be fragmented, to speak with different voices, because that is what it does. Some of you may think that this is appropriate in a post-modern age. Writing it, I kept veering between audiences: who was listening to me? Here I am, in Oxford, the centre of the analytical ordinary language philosophy of my undergraduate days: that elegant, at times breathtakingly clever and often intensely pleasurable play with concepts and arguments. I am speaking to sharp, sceptical men, with their intellectual habits firmly rooted in an over-refined version of the common sense of the good and the great. And that means that I must meet intense scepticism over the claim that philosophy is gendered. On the other hand, I'm at a conference discussing post-modernism, and higher education. And I know that amongst you will be feminist thinkers, from the new universities, who have developed their thinking in a context of teaching students who not only demand that the knowledge they acquire be useful, but also provide a direct route to the culture of the city lacking in our older institutions. Cultural Studies, and Women's Studies can be taken for granted, feminist philosophy does not have to be put on the agenda, it's there precisely because you believe that philosophy is gendered and the issue is how it should be taught, and how it should relate to the rest of the curriculum. The discussion is at a different stage, between people with a shared political agenda. Again, it looks like a post-modernist set-piece: different people in different discourses speaking different languages, and of course, many of us spend our time speaking first one, and then the other. So in speaking to the Oxford philosophers I want to demonstrate the need for something like a feminist post-modernism, while, speaking to the feminist philosopher, we begin the discussion with the difficulties and dangers of post-modernism.

At the same time, I think of those generations of students who came to philosophy because they were excited by certain ideas, because they wanted the truth, or at least wanted to pursue certain questions with the prospect of an answer in view. They learnt some useful skills, but went to other fields, because a life-time of elegant play was insufficient. From their perspective, the discourses of academic philosophy on the one hand, and post-modernism on the other, look markedly similar: a small group, intelligible only to each other, with their own set of problems, their own language, their own rules. It may be fun, it may be exciting, it may stretch you. But at the end of the day,

none of them has much to contribute to all of those who come to the university not simply for skills, but for an understanding of the world, a grasp of it, connection to it, which facilitates intelligent responsible action.

Thus I am writing for at least three different people: the Oxford philosopher, the feminist philosopher, my students (perhaps the student that I was), and behind them all those who have appeared as either the victims or play things of our knowledge: the "others", objects of knowledge to be studied or ignored.

I want to notice that the grander the claims we make for higher education, the more we marginalize those who, for whatever reason, do not get it. If it were simply a minority, playing very clever and irrelevant games, it wouldn't matter to those who don't understand. If it controls access to positions of power in society, it matters somewhat. (Only somewhat, because the excluded will develop alternative routes to power). If it arrogates to itself the power to define the meaning and value of our lives and our culture, it matters desperately, because then the excluded become non-persons. This consideration means that if we aim for a democratic society, characterised by the respect with which its members treat each other, we must either take seriously the proposal that our Universities become supermarkets offering educational products which can be chosen / consumed by any customer without change in that person, beyond the satisfaction of a desire, need, or whim. Or, if we persist in the idea of education of a *person*, we must find ways of ensuring that the values implicit in that education are genuinely democratic, not simply reflective of an élite. It is this option that I am committed to.

These brief introductory remarks indicate my commitments and my agenda. I intend to tackle it by looking at a series of questions:

- 1) Why was there a need for Women's Studies?
- 2) Why was post-modernism so attractive to feminism? Was it a snare and delusion?
- 3) What are the paradoxes of being a feminist post-modernist?
- 4) If we reject post-modernism, and cannot go back to modernism, how do we resolve that crisis? How can we move forward?

In particular:

- i) How can we disconnect knowledge and power?
- ii) How can we avoid the choice between either a post-modernist epistemological free-for-all, or a model of knowledge which also legitimates the domination of particular groups.
- iii) How can we educate without dominating?

I shall conclude with a brief list of strategies for dealing with these questions. I have no answers, but my intention is to open up a discussion of whom this knowledge, about which we are so anxious, is intended for.

Before I embark on that, I want to give a preliminary context to all of this. In 1993, I was at a conference on the issue of gender in Higher Education. The discussions were wide and varied, but one theme was strikingly repeated in them: that women had gained access to the institutions of Higher Education, but that the experience has dominantly been one of disempowerment rather than empowerment. The second feature of the conference that impressed me was the way in which the speakers placed that claim

within accounts of what they were aiming at in educating students, accounts that would probably be widely agreed upon by all educators: as enabling students to scrutinize their world and their response to it, to place themselves in relationship to their culture, so that they can act responsibly, both for themselves and for their society. It seemed that although their views of how to go about this might be informed by post-modernism, you couldn't really tell that by what they thought that education was, and I mention this because I think that although no single view is possible of what goes on in Higher Education, and although our views of what constitutes or legitimates knowledge might be widely divergent, I suspect that we share significant common ground in our views of what education should do.

### 1) Why Women's Studies? (This section is for the sceptics)

When I first arrived in University, I discovered Philosophy with a kind of wild joy. In the early 60s, it seemed to me the perfect subject: all that it demanded of you was that you think clearly and carefully. So it did not matter who you were, what you were, where you came from, you were not disadvantaged, did not need any particular background to do it. For me, this contrasted starkly with most arts subjects, where, without having read any critical theory, I instinctively felt that up-bringing was all, and my perceptions and responses didn't fit. (And it also contrasted with the sciences because of the freedom of speculation it allowed, because you could play with ideas.) So I had twelve months of sheer liberatory pleasure, until one day my boy-friend, also a Philosophy student, said "You think like a man". I didn't know what he meant by this, his tone was neither clearly critical nor complimentary, and perhaps both, and it was a few years before the emergence of Second-Wave feminism, but I knew it was too dangerous to discuss: it was an invitation to either give up philosophy or give up being a woman. So I tucked it uncomfortably away, compartmentalized a little more sharply the way I talked and thought, became less comfortable in both the seminar room and my own body.

I tell that story because it is a quick and dramatic way of showing how an apparently gender-neutral subject precisely by appearing as neutral, both liberates, and makes invisible its own biases and exclusions, even to the excluded. (Characteristically, students used to say: I'm not clever enough to do philosophy. And yet part of the joy I had found in it was that I had been doing it all my life, and so had they). It is a story that is told countless times, in countless ways; nobody says "You can't do that because you are a woman", there are no closed doors with No Entry written on them, but when you go through those doors, engage in the activity, you find that you have abandoned a part of yourself in ways that make the activity increasingly difficult, and the recovery of your self hard, if not impossible.

Women's Studies was developed in response to that situation: to the recognition that women were not only invisible in the University but that the apparently gender-neutral curriculum was masculine, so we rarely discussed books by women. There aren't any, I hear the sceptics say - and then we raise the question of why not, and the dialectic that results in women's studies is under way. Or feminists asked why we did not look at women's contributions to the economy, or history: when the sceptic replies that women did not make a contribution, the masculine bias becomes a little clearer: and women's

studies develops a stage further, as it develops techniques of questioning and judging which reveal those contributions.

These brief remarks show that Women's Studies did not spring into being, ready armed as a discipline with a subject matter and method. It has been, and at its best continues to be, a process whereby (mostly) women come together to work on hunches about the way that knowledge is constructed so as to exclude most of them in that process. It became increasingly clear to me that we were opening up the discussion so that women could speak freely without having to abandon their gender.

It is very difficult to explain that to a sceptic, particularly in my own subject, philosophy. Countless male colleagues welcome us as one of the chaps, without seeing any problem in that because they have identified what chaps do with philosophy itself. And of course, so did we feminist philosophers. That was the subject we had learnt, we were simply in there with different bodies and a political view about the position of women. But we had a hunch that the problem was deeper than the bits of explicit misogyny in Aristotle, Rousseau, Nietzsche (and nearly all the others), and got together to explore what that more might be. That is, we made a space in which we could be both philosophers and women, and in which we could begin to experiment with the way that we would do philosophy if we were free. Some examples, to explain the problem to the sceptic, and indicate the solution. Every woman who came to those meetings "confessed" at some point that she did not think of herself as a philosopher, that she was not doing "proper" philosophy. But each of us thought that the others were: "proper" philosophers were always someone else. When Christine Battersby wrote her book she said that the *only* way that she could write it was by telling herself that she wasn't writing philosophy, but writing about the problems in art that *interested her*, and she could only write it because she knew that she was not doing it for an academic press. These examples show women constrained, but yet philosophizing about what interests them in ways that they feel to be appropriate. It was only with the provision of a community which validated us that we began to discover what we had to say. So, for example, instead of identifying with the men in Aristotle, and dismissing his views on women as local prejudice, (a practice still wide enough for students to carelessly assume that his views on women and slaves are alike enough to make no matter) we read Aristotle *as women*, looking at his arguments to see what is meant by the claim that in women, reason lacks authority. And that leads into a consideration of what reason is, how it is being conceptualized (e.g. reason as control?). Another sort of example: philosophy has defined the problem of abortion as the issue of whether or not the foetus is a person, and hence has rights. If you can get the definition of personhood right, then you can deduce the correct answer to the question of the woman's right to choose. And there the issue is stuck. But the crucial question for most women is not the issue of rights, but how to come to the decision of whether or not to have an abortion (legally or illegally). And that, as Gilligan has shown often turns upon a consideration of a whole raft of responsibilities and dependencies, to find the "right" answer. The question then becomes that of how to take a responsible decision so that a network of relationships is not irreparably torn. Looking at the question from the perspective of the women involved, changes the issue, not to mention the way that you will explore and develop moral philosophy with a seminar of students discussing the problem. If medical ethics were written to *include* that perspective (rather than simply seek criteria for taking hard decisions, which will

be as close as possible to dominant moral sensibilities), it would be a different subject.

The examples can be multiplied, and this is not the place to give a potted history of the way that feminist philosophy is developing. I want to pull out some schematic points from them:

1) Although there would seem to be no logical reason why men could not see the way in which they were privileging a male perspective, in *fact* it is only possible to make it visible when outsiders are looking in. It is this that leads to "stand-point" theories: the excluded and silenced have a privileged vision, because they can tell that the silencing is working. But they need more than a feeling of unease or alienation.

So

2) They can only "tell" the silencing, both in the sense of speaking about it (the last person you can tell is the one who is doing it) and in the sense of recognizing that that is what it is, through the reaction of a community where that "sense" of a problem can be articulated, where concepts can be developed, where, instead of thinking that you are the problem, you begin to see that the way your subject is defined is the problem.

You can only read a text against the grain, and get beyond the point of thinking that you are mis-reading it, if you have others to check that reading with. "Does this make sense?" is a question we continually need to ask each other in all areas of intellectual life. There is no litmus test of sense, but the up-take of an idea by others is a good indicator.

Now, as I have told the story so far, it seems to imply two possibilities: the development of a more coherent, or integrated self on the one hand, as the silenced begin to make their point of view heard, and the development of a more inclusive knowledge on the other, as that perspective is incorporated. But although many writers (perhaps most notably Afro-American women)<sup>1</sup> have testified to the recovery of the self through speaking out, developing a language, this has, as you all know, been accompanied by the developing awareness that there is no authentic self, nor a woman's voice. For just as the apparently objective, neutral rational voice of philosophy surreptitiously privileged the viewpoint of the middle/ upper class European male, rendering all other perspectives, experiences, voices, .... in brief people, simply as "other", the idea of a woman's voice made invisible all the differences, such as class, race, sexuality etc. between women. Stand-point theory collapses into a multiplicity of stand-point theories, with no way of choosing between them.

Of course, stand-point theory wouldn't, or shouldn't so collapse, if different voices were all simply incorporated into a more inclusive knowledge. But, on the whole, they have not been, and for good reasons. Firstly because the way in which they are developed is not in the form of *adding* a piece of knowledge in the appropriate form to the heap. Like Kuhnian paradigms, they constitute a revisioning of what is to count as a problem in knowledge, and a solution to it. So, for example, that Hobbesian man cannot have babies

<sup>1</sup>e.g. Audre Lorde: described by Barbara Christian

"Here insistence on speaking as her entire self whatever the consequences became the model for many women who had begun to realize that when the words "Black liberation" were spoken, they were not referring to us, precisely because we were women."

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is not really a problem for 'main-stream' philosophers, (unlike the consideration of different forms of obligation), so they do not even see the necessity to liberalism of the patriarchal family and of non-voluntary obligations for women.<sup>2</sup> Or, if we look at the abortion debate, we seem to find that the main-stream and feminist philosopher do not so much have an argument over abortion, as over how to argue about abortion.

Just as the differing stand-points cannot be incorporated into one, inclusive knowledge, so the differing parts of the person cannot be incorporated into one authentic self. For, if I can put it this way, it was I that thought like a man, and that was, and continues to be, one of the things I do. Like everyone else, I can play a variety of games, engage in a variety of conversations, and they do not all cohere. Which one I identify with at any particular point depends upon who is trying to exclude me from what. But how can I decide on one of those as my authentic self?

In conclusion to this section, I want to summarize by saying that the experience of women in Universities showed up the intimate connection between knowledge and power: that the legitimation of knowledge-claims is intimately tied to networks of domination and exclusion. The apparently neutral enquirer, seeking objective truth is in fact privileging the experience and perspective of a particular group, silencing the voices of those who understand the world differently, as he divides the world into the rational knowers and their objects, into thinking, acting subjects and the others, who are different. The way in which we have institutionalised knowledge, it seems, is to serve the interests of domination, rather than emancipation. But these revelations leave us feminists with a dilemma: our politics requires that not all views of the world are equally valid, our search for emancipatory knowledge suggests a system of values together with a critical view of the world. So here I leave my discussion with the sceptic, and move to a consideration of why post-modernism is attractive.

## 2) What is Post-modernism, and why is it attractive to Feminists?

I don't intend anything like a comprehensive account of post-modernism here, and I am certainly not going to engage with any of the theories (Lyotard, Foucault etc) which constitute it. Suffice to say that like modernism, it is a mammoth abstraction, embracing a diversity of epistemologies and theories. I am interested in the critical moments that it shares with feminism, for it is these which make it attractive - and hence my concern is with issues, rather than with a correct characterization.

My starting point must be with post-modernism's rejection of modernism: a system of institutionalized knowledge which it perceives as:

positivistic, technocentric and rationalistic - a belief in linear progress, absolute truths, the rational planning of ideal social orders, standardization of knowledge and production.<sup>3</sup>

This resonates with the perceptions I have described in the previous section: a view of

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<sup>2</sup>N. Hirschmann: *Rethinking Obligation*, Cornell University Press, 1992, Chapter 1, gives a good example of such analysis.

<sup>3</sup>T. Eagleton, quoted on p.9 of David Harvey: *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Blackwell), 1992.

knowledge and reason as exclusionary, flattening, bullying different voices into silence. And when Bernstein describes the post-modern revolt as the "revolt of nature against oppressive, purely instrumental reason" (quoted in Harvey p.13), I am reminded of Mary Daly's claim that feminist philosophy is "a form of consciousness that is in harmony with the wild in nature and the self." (*Pure Lust*, quoted in *Women's Review of Books*, March 93). Except that, of course, there is no "self" in post-modernism. It covers a range of linked claims, from the plasticity of the human personality, to pragmatism in philosophy, from the view that everything is what we make it because of the infinite malleability of appearances, with nothing behind them, to a concern with the dignity and validity of "the other." The reason for this approach is a three-fold rejection of the enlightenment project:

- 1) Epistemological: in fact, philosophers have failed to find a basis for claims to truth or objective knowledge, or any of the grand theories of social change and human nature. Neither science, nor Marxism, are epistemologically soundly based.
- 2) Political: in fact, these apparently neutral uses of unbiased reason have served the interests of a particular group, and led to oppression and domination. A critique encapsulated in the irony circulating in St Petersburg two years ago: Radio announcement "Good morning ladies and gentlemen. The experiment is over."
- 3) Sociological/psychological: thinkers/knowers are people, constructed by their class position/personal history, etc. and the knowledge that they produce, the way they understand the world is bound to reflect this. Again, it is clear how this parallels and recapitulates the growing discomfort that feminists felt with the way knowledge is produced in the academy.

Firstly, there is the perception that *any* theory (such as Marxism) which attempts to give a total account of history, of society, of the human subject, of knowledge, must mean the suppression of difference between people, the expulsion of some elements to the margins, the out-side, to "otherness". This implies a particular way of reading texts, which I think is *moral and political*. You scrutinize them, for who is left out, silenced or ignored. And to hear that, you need them to be read from a variety of perspectives. As Harvey expresses it:

The idea that all groups have a right to speak for themselves and have that voice accepted as authentic and legitimate is essential to the pluralistic stand of post-modernism. (p.48)

Post-modernism's rejection of "totalizing theory" or "meta-narratives" is part and parcel of its insistence on the validity and dignity of "the other," so its political and epistemological critiques are inseparable. So secondly this emerges in what I shall call *responsible knowledge*. I embrace my implication as a knowing subject in the production of knowledge. The text is what I make of it, I am not compelled to accept what it says, because the way in which I interrogate it will determine what it says. (Think of the Hobbes example again: I can turn the Leviathan into an examination of the need for the patriarchal family within liberal theory). So the crisis of knowledge in higher education is less about what texts to read, as right-wing critics in the States seem to think, more about how to read. And thirdly, it means that our readings and our knowledge, are *permanently critical, permanently shifting*. For I am continually re-reading the texts in the light of newly noticed exclusions. This appears to distinguish post-modernism from mere relativism which, with its view that knowledge is correct, true, relative to a

particular group or person, appears to be static, to leave knowledge as it is. Post-modernism is continuously unpicking knowledge claims, wherever it finds silencings.

As I have described this, it sounds a bit like the apogee of liberalism. Let everyone be heard. But, of course, it isn't, because in unpicking the rationalism of the enlightenment, post-modernism also must reject the idea that language and experience are transparent, and that the subject is clear. *All* are shifting constructions. Not only can we not have a unified and coherent account of reality (the mirror of nature), not have a unified and coherent account of "the experience of women", there is no unity or coherence within each individual subject. We, too, are the texts of our cultures, to be read in multiple ways even by ourselves. As Lennon & Whitford put it:

This subject is more like a railway junction, where signifiers, discourses and messages meet or flash past, than a source, origin, or mirror. <sup>4</sup>.

At this point, the attractions of post-modernism for feminism wane. We seem to be denied our subjectivity just as we discover it or as bell hooks put it: "It's easy to give up your identity when you've already got one." So post-modernism undermined the privileging of the white male voice, validated a variety of voices that had been excluded, those constituencies who could not express themselves. It seemed to defeat the bullying by texts and reason, so that these became what we made of them. And it demanded of us a responsibility for our own knowledge, rather than a service to, or apprenticeship in, somebody else's. In short, it seemed to share the emancipatory vision of Women's Studies as liberatory, as permanently critical, and as responsible. But in the same critical movement, it silenced us all over again. There is no truth, no knowing subject, and hence no self to be emancipated, and no emancipatory knowledge. Or if there is, we must rethink our understanding of those terms.

At this stage, two strategies occur to me:

- 1) To look at post-modernism as offering a series of useful techniques, rather than a theory of knowledge. (Listen carefully, see who is excluded etc.). This leaves open the question of *how to legitimate knowledge*, for it is clear to me that after the critiques of post-modernism and feminism, we cannot simply go back to modernism. We have to find some way of *disconnecting knowledge and domination*, of developing a system of *education* which is not an apprenticeship into a hierarchy of power.
- 2) To turn the techniques of post-modernism on itself, and ask, who does it exclude and silence? Who does it disempower?

Both of these strategies put the focus on education rather than knowledge. (And it's curious to notice how, the moment they are thinking about their students, as opposed to their research or their politics, post-modernists become didactic in ways that their theories should exclude.) Writers like Lovibond and Soper have convincingly demonstrated that post-modernism reaches the theoretical and political dead-end mentioned above. I want to question the way it works in the class-room.

Every-time that I have introduced students to post-modern texts, no matter how bright

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<sup>4</sup>'Introduction' in *Knowing the Difference: Feminist Perspectives in Epistemology*, ed. Kathleen Lennon and Margaret Whitford, London: Routledge, forthcoming 1994.

or mature, or motivated they are, their initial response has been one of total incomprehension, not just of what the writer is saying, but even of what the writer is trying to do, in the most general terms. Often, particularly amongst mature students, the response is one of anger, and I think this may have something to do with their having finally gained access to higher education, and suddenly feeling themselves excluded again, because they cannot make sense of the words in front of them. In a word, much of this material is inaccessible, and casts out the uninitiated. There is a terrible irony in Spivak, meeting such complaints with "Do your homework," and yet elsewhere arguing that she would like to talk so that the subaltern can hear her, and this is simply a reflection of the general paradox that the theory which draws attention to the silenced and excluded is at the same time one of the most exclusive conversation clubs in the world. As Said has pointed out, there are some 7,000 of us writing books for ourselves to read. Furthermore, at the same time as validating all "the other" voices it is developing a political correctness which is self-censoring. Overheard at a conference on Feminism and language "But there is a touch of the Kantian objectivist in that."

Now there are at least two good reasons why something is difficult to understand: firstly because it is articulating a difficult, or new idea and so is in the process of creating the concepts and language for that. J.L. Austin was a master of "ordinary language" philosophy, so that his papers can appear so clear that students wonder what the fuss is about. But *How to do things with words* is a hard read. And secondly, we assume that the language we are familiar with is transparently clear, but if you are not familiar with it, it's difficult to understand. Think about the way in which people with computers sounded before you had one, to see this point. The more you multiply languages, or groups, or discourses, or communities, within a university, the harder it becomes for us to understand each other. If you want to converse with physicists about physics, do your homework. But physicists don't pretend to a commitment to the oppressed, whereas many post-modernists, and especially feminist-post-modernists do, and ultimately, what physicists do becomes part of the wider culture. Feminists must have a commitment to putting their theories into the languages of those constituencies that they seek to empower, at the very least their students. Both of these occasions for the difficulty of a text must ultimately be overcome as new ideas become part of the currency of increasingly familiar languages. That is part of what is involved in education.

I summarize these points with the story of Ray, a mature student. We were discussing an article by Benhabib in a class in feminist ethics. Throughout the preliminary account he was shifting and sighing, his body language betraying anger, and finally he burst out, "I don't see what she is going on about." I split the seminar into small groups, the text into sections with questions for them to discuss about each section, and brought them back together to report to the entire group at the end of each section. By the end of the seminar, they were picking out phrases and sentences: "that is what she means by..." "that is why she says..." I finally summarized where we had got to, and Ray angrily said: "why couldn't she put it like that." At the time, I rather wearily said that I did not know (and he said, "But that was a compliment, Anne"). But on reflection, I can think of a number of reasons, from the demand that we write in a certain way in order to be published in a certain class of journal, to the impossibility of writing with clarity when you are first formulating ideas. It is then part of the work of the community to clarify, feed in examples, and if necessary, translate. A process that does not appear to belong

to any *particular* epistemological school. But this still leaves open the question: just whose language are you translating it into?

Is this genuinely an empowering education or simply facilitating the movement of our students into the elite? A friend of mine wants her extra-mural students to be able to answer back to those elites who so enforce a sense of inferiority: "But Quine says..." And that is certainly liberation of a sort - her students are no longer victims to clever chaps. Another argues that post-modernism is a back-hander for the oppressed: her students discover the liberation of reading novels from their own perspective, finding their agendas in them, only, a few months later, to discover that their voice is just one in a babble, making no more sense than anyone else's, as if, at long last one gets an appointment with the consultant only to discover that diagnosis is done by dice throwing. And, she adds, you can deconstruct the courts all that you like, they will still send you to prison. I might add: you can deconstruct the University all you like, it is still a boy's club. Which is why, at the end of the day, post-modernism serves to exclude as much as to empower.

### Post-modernism and Educational Practice

At this point, I want to break into my own argument to suggest that we are looking at the wrong crisis for Higher Education, when we discuss the crisis in the legitimation of knowledge.

Begin with a model of the University as something like Balliol College in the days of T.H. Green: a community of scholars who knew each other, engaged in what they would have seen as the same pursuit. There was contention and dispute, but within a common culture and sense of purpose that many of us today might well have found suffocating. Of course, the exclusion of people like us meant that that culture could believe in its own universal character and rational basis, and the question of the objectivity of its activities could be raised only as a theoretical/philosophical issue - an interesting question, but not a crisis. The difference today is that not only do we appear to have lost our faith in our ability to think our way through such questions in such a way that we can maintain confidence in the purpose and value of higher education, it is no longer clear that we can even understand each other enough to discuss this. As we open our doors to a wider section of society, we throw doubt on the value of what we have to offer. We can no longer point out the path to truth, apparently, because there is no truth. And so we can no longer empower. But just at the point that we lose our confidence in the idea that our *subject-matter* will direct us in what to do, (the notion of reason leading us by the nose, as it were), just as we fragment, the whole notion of an intellectual community is assaulted by outside forces of government and economy. I personally feel that this is the real crisis: at the point that we lose our clear commitments to reason and truth and empowerment, commitments which are the basis of our defence of our autonomy, we are "invited" to become industries, marketing products at competitive prices and giving value for money. That makes us vulnerable to the highest bidder for our services, and may bind us more tightly to structures of oppression than in the days when Balliol devoted itself to preparing young men to be decent and just colonial officers. One example: a University admissions officer, in the Middle East touting for overseas

students, can see a public execution from his hotel balcony. Meanwhile his hosts explore the possibility of their women, who are not allowed to mix with men students, and therefore cannot leave their single sex University to study in the West, acquiring Western PhDs through Western lecturers travelling to the Middle East to supervise their supervisors. Let the seller beware: what the market demands may not be what the discipline demands, nor what the intellectual is interested in, *nor what people need to further their understanding of their situation*. But how can any of these points be made without implicit reference to ideas of knowledge and progress? I want to give a two-fold answer to that: by reference to what constitutes education on the one hand, together with our grasp of the communities or constituencies which that education serves. The market model of education is destructive of both of these.

Now, implicit in all of that is a rejection of post-modernism, primarily for political reasons. It delivers the universities, without defence, into the service of the advanced capitalist corporate state and the multinational corporation. But it is equally clear that we cannot go back to modernism. Our question has to become: how can we find guidelines to help us to decide what to teach (and how), what to study, what to think about, and hence to defend what most of us must think are worthwhile activities, because we are here today.

Well, I have already suggested that we share conceptions of education as empowering, and liberating. Let me try to develop those.

My friend is driving around Boulder on a Sunday, looking for somewhere to buy petrol. After driving past two open garages, I ask her why she didn't stop. "Because they are self-service, and I cannot pump my own gas" she replies. I insist that we stop, and show her how to do it. This is a Marxist sociologist from an upper class Argentinian family. She can cope with exile, with hiding her PhD in a tin box in the garden from a repressive regime, but not with pumping petrol. We get back in the car, and she turns to me with a huge smile: "Anne, I feel positively liberated." A simple model of learning as not touching the self, or her understanding of the world, but simply enabling her to move around more freely, literally, to do more things (like drive up to the mountains on a Sunday). Skills-based courses might look like this (e.g. computing, law, medicine), and best fit the market model.

But think of what is involved in learning to be a doctor, or lawyer, or accountant. Implicit is not simply a set of skills: how to remove an appendix, diagnose diabetes, but an entire way of understanding the world (consider the categories of "diseased" and "healthy" for example), an epistemology, a set of values... one learns to be a doctor, not to do doctoring, and I think any attempt to do less would not only be irresponsible (to both student and wider community) but dishonest. It's almost an Aristotelian point: in teaching skills, you develop the virtues implicit in doing those skills. And, one might add, you induct into a whole set of social relations, impart a metaphysics. Yet it is precisely an invitation to buy itemised skills, without such induction, which the market model of higher education offers.

But being a doctor is contested territory. For example, there is what I term "the white coat approach": there are bodies, inconveniently inhabited by persons, which I under-

stand better than they do. (Somewhat on the analogy of the irresponsible pet owner.) Or a holistic approach - or a view that makes the development of new surgical techniques the cutting edge (pun-intended) rather than the links between poverty and low-birth-weight... and so on. One way of viewing this variety of approaches is to see them as emerging from the differing demands and needs of a variety of communities, as well as the different kinds of healthcare an individual needs. When I have a burst appendix, I want high-tech intrusive surgery. In dealing with the menopausal swings of mood and energy, I want useful advice which respects my responsibility for myself. Sudanese villagers struggling with starvation and with a system of belief in the physical effects of malevolence demand a different kind of health-care to those of British villagers struggling with pollution - and so on. The education of a doctor, then becomes a matter of learning how to solve problems: but these problems will be posed differently in different contexts, and what constitutes a solution in one context will be inadequate, if not wholly unsuccessful in another.

I cannot answer the question of *how* such an education should be provided. But: (1) it's clear that educating *all* doctors as if they were ultimately to serve the clientele of Harley Street specialists would fail. Thus the notion of educating for *one* community, or constituency, the dominant, most privileged etc. would not in itself provide a value-free, objective, neutral education. But (2) it's clear that these doctors, solving different problems in different ways, would be able to talk to each other, disagree, argue, etc. i.e. in some sense, they *share* a community or language. And (3) it's also clear that they could be *falsely* educated i.e. that they could be taught "solutions" which are not solutions at all... either in terms of physical harm (prolonged bed-rest after major surgery) or in terms of failing to respect the needs of the *patient* (rather than some other group): e.g. clitoridectomies for nervous excitation, or enforced inactivity for depression. Fundamental to such an education would be the notion of respect, in the sense of listening to, paying attention to...: another virtue that both post-modernists and modernists would agree upon, but one which the market is indifferent to: relying instead on the mechanical adjustments of supply and demand and price.

Meanwhile, our newly trained doctor is like my friend in some respects: able to do things she could not previously do, and also should have a more confident understanding, and ability to move around not only her own culture, but wider ones as well (going to the mountains on a Sunday). But, unlike my friend, her self has changed and developed. She will have a more critical understanding of her world, she will, hopefully be more respectful in the sense explained above, she will have a view of what can be improved, and how, in at least some areas in her people's and her own life.

In an ideal world, I would relate this analogy in detail back to the student. But time is running out. So I will summarize my view by saying that an emancipatory education is one which begins with the student's perspective, and behind that, a particular community which poses its own problems, background, beliefs etc. Part of our aim must be to enable the student to help solve *her* community's problems, or to help solve *our* own community's problems, and that means developing a critical understanding of our culture and the way our particular positions are constituted by it. It means recognising that explanations are social achievements, realized in people's abilities to use them. It means cultivating habits of scrutiny, of listening, of understanding, and of respect. And

it means a model of education which is based on communication and dialogue.

To date, this view of education has been ill-served by post-modern *theories*, which have excluded, disempowered, and led into blind alleys. But we should aim for a post-modern *sensibility* or practice: a recognition of the variety of constituencies or communities that the university should serve, the variety of languages it must be able to speak. At the same time, we should keep the dream of a common language, or of a common multi-lingual community: a further point where we would all understand each other without any particular language dominating. There is no such thing as a value free education, we cannot produce and disseminate value free knowledge. But there is such a thing as objectively failed solutions to problems, and implicit in my model of an emancipatory education is a rejection of the contemporary managerial practices and market place model currently being imposed on universities.