
WOMEN'S PHILOSOPHY REVIEW

WPR – Issue no 21 Spring 1999

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EDITORIAL

WPR 21 represents a return to the standard format for *Women's Philosophy Review*, after the special issue on Political Philosophy (*WPR 20*) edited by Diemut Bubeck and Alex Klaushofer. However, if the format of *WPR 21* is by now familiar, that does not make the contents any less exciting.

WPR 21 offers an exceptionally rich range of reviews, as well as Janice Richards' fascinating interview with Adriana Cavarero, Italy's best-known feminist philosopher, who is based at the University of Verona. Cavarero is the author on *In Spite of Plato*, and two of her other books on feminist philosophy will soon be translated into English: *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood* and *Figures of the Body*. This year she and Franco Restaino also edited and introduced *Le Filosofie Femministe* (Torino, Paravia, 1999): an anthology, and historical and theoretical overview, of feminist philosophy so popular that the first printing sold out in a week. (Oh, if only the UK provided the feminist with an audience so attracted to the promise of philosophical debates! Perhaps then bookshops and libraries would gain enough confidence to place works of feminist philosophy under the heading of 'Philosophy', rather than reinforcing traditional stereotypes of the discipline by confining so many works on feminist philosophy to the shelves relating to 'Women's Studies', 'Gender Studies', 'Literary Theory' or 'Sociology'—anywhere except under the category of 'Philosophy' where such works belong.)

Cavarero has taught at the Universities of Warwick, California (Santa Barbara) and is currently completing a short (and soon to be annual) spell in the Italian Department at New York University. Although familiar with English-language debates in feminist philosophy, her approach nevertheless needs to be understood against a distinctively Italian training in philosophy. It is one of the merits of Janice Richards' interview that it casts light on the differences—as well as the overlaps—between Cavarero's work and those of philosophers and feminist theorists writing in English-language contexts. The interview was conducted in English, but both the interviewer and the editor have taken particular pains to check with Adriana Cavarero that her

English (a language which was acquired relatively recently) correctly represents the thoughts underlying her Italian work.

Another exceptional piece in this issue is **Alessandra Tanesini's** review essay on feminism and the philosophy of language. The essay explores an apparent paradox: on the one hand, issues relating to language have been central to the debates in feminist theory since the early years of second-wave feminism. On the other hand, although questions relating to language have been deemed central to twentieth-century philosophy (both within the analytic and continental traditions), there appears to be a dearth of feminist work that has been categorised as 'philosophy of language'.

As in her important recent book *An Introduction to Feminist Epistemologies* (Blackwell, 1999, to be reviewed in a later issue of *WPR*), Tanesini moves between the analytic and continental traditions of philosophy as she explores the philosophical puzzles that emerge once the apparent universality of philosophy is fractured through raising questions relating to feminism and sexual difference.

Another distinctive feature of this issue is the reviewer/author dialogue in the new Discussion Point section. Here **Pamela Sue Anderson** and **Tina Beattie** debate the issues raised by Anderson's *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion*. The discussion is particularly interesting in the way it seems to draw a distinction between the 'feminist theologian' and the 'feminist philosopher of religion'. Both participants in the dialogue seem to feel that it is useful and necessary to discriminate these two fields, but the editor was left wondering if that this is one of the questions for continued 'potentially fruitful debate' that Beattie refers to at the end of this exchange of views.

There is always a question about whether an Editor should allow space for authors to respond to any implied criticism of their work. In general, since space is valuable (or, rather, expensive), the Editor believes that it is only in exceptional circumstances that an authorial reply is justified. (I have, therefore, carefully refrained from replying to the questions that **Diana Coole** puts to me in her review of my *The Phenomenal Woman* which appears in this issue. I would have liked to respond, but felt that it was a transgression of Editorial responsibility to give myself a right of reply that I might refuse others.)

The case of the Beattie/Anderson dialogue was different, however, in that the reviewer approached the Editor early on in the reviewing process, saying that what she wanted was a dialogue with the author whose work she was assessing. In such circumstances, the Editor will always welcome suggestions from reviewers for opening up a dialogue with an author for inclusion in a Discussion Point section. So, come on all you reviewers, let the Editor know if the book that you are reviewing seems significant enough—and to raise important enough questions relating to feminism and philosophy—to merit extended treatment. Put in an initial review to me, and I will see if I (and other members of the Editorial Board) agree.

Such a suggestion should always come from the reviewer, never from an author or publisher. A right of reply will only be granted to an author when she or he can show that the reviewer or commentator has seriously misrepresented her or his work.

Enough editorial homilies for this issue. Enjoy!

Christine Battersby
University of Warwick

WPR 20 (the Special Issue on Political Philosophy) is being reprinted.

If you are a member of SWIP, please contact Kimberly Hutchings (address on the back-cover).

WPR 20 is available at the discount rate of £5 to paid-up members of SWIP.

Non-SWIP members should order extra copies via Alessandra Tanesini (address on front cover) and pay at the standard rate

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We can also accept back orders for issues 17, 18 & 19 on the same basis.

Women/Philosophy—In Conversation
no 5 in a series of *WPR* Conversations

UNIQUE, SEXED SELVES AND RADICAL
DEMOCRACY:
An Interview with Adriana Cavarero

Janice Richardson

The following is a transcript of a conversation with Adriana Cavarero, jointly edited by Janice Richardson and Adriana Cavarero. Thanks to Christine Battersby for her assistance.

Background

JR First of all, it would be useful to know something of *your* story: your background and the influences on your work—not only the philosophers with whom you engage but also your political involvement, in particular within the feminist movement as an activist.

AC It is very important for my cultural background (with regard to attending the university—and also schools—but in particular university) that I studied in Padua. Padua has a very good classicist tradition so I worked, and continue to work, a great deal on Plato, Parmenides and on the Greek tradition—but also on Hobbes and Hegel. My education was a classicist and traditional education and that allows me to have a direct approach to the texts and to feel at ease reading a text.

My feminist position was really influenced by the '68 movement. My first political activity occurred then. In Padua, the '68 student activism was very strong. After that, I was influenced by the militant position in the feminist movement, especially in Verona. We founded a feminist philosophical community, in 1984, which I left in 1990.

JR The group called 'Diotima'?

AC Yes. It was crucial to have a community that was about feminist philosophy. This was very important as a practice—not only to think of theory and to go to conferences, but to have a community in which sexual difference was discussed and was at work. To produce theory in a relational context is typical of Italian feminism and corresponds to what we call its constitutive political mark. As far of the texts were concerned, it was Luce Irigaray's work on sexual difference which was particularly influential. She is very well known in Italy.

The other aspect of feminist theory, in which I am interested, comes from Judith Butler whom I met at the beginning of the '90s at a conference in Spain. I read her first book *Gender Trouble* and then *Bodies that Matter*. She was very interesting for me just because she is very different.

What we call 'postmodern philosophy' or 'post-structuralist philosophy'—but especially the postmodern—is not as successful in Italy as it is in America. So, it is not a very important topic or school of philosophy. Of course, we know Lyotard, we know Derrida etc., but postmodernism is not something that everyone talks about. My approach to Butler's texts—she is so concerned about multiplicity and multiple identity—is that it is very interesting for understanding the connection and interference between postmodernity and feminist philosophy. I was intrigued because it is so unusual in Italy. Judith Butler and I think differently, but she is open-minded and is interested in what I have to say and her work is important to me.

The work of Christine Battersby is also important to me. She is my real link with English-language feminist philosophy—my transition from the Italian to the English speaking world. In her last book, *The Phenomenal Woman* (reviewed elsewhere in *WPR* 21 [ed.]), she is interested in the relational self. I share this interest with her, but my approach is different—espe-

cially with regard to the question of identity. I look at the relational self from the perspective of Hannah Arendt. My approach is broadly Arendtian. This is one of the differences.

I think Christine Battersby and I have many differences, but share the same problems. We both want to identify the real problem for a possible innovative feminist theory, and we both focus upon relationality and fluidity. This is not done in a postmodern way, by dissolving everything into multiplicity and plurality and fragments and so on, but by speculating upon what is meant by the 'self' and the 'other'. This also involves asking what it means to think of relationality as constitutive of the self.

Method

JR Before we explore this further, can you say something about your method of writing? You have mentioned that, as a result of your relationship with the feminist movement, you were very concerned to make your work accessible. It is a 'good read', but it is much more. You discuss this in the introduction of one of your books, *In Spite of Plato*.

AC Of course I want to be accessible. In Italy we do not have Women's Studies or Gender Studies, so I feel 'responsible', in the Latin meaning of the term: I feel the need to respond to what the feminist movement expects—not from me, but from theory. I have to be accessible because of that. In Italy, we do not differentiate between praxis and theory. Theory has to be practical and theory is constructed in practice. It is a special form of praxis that is about relationships—sometimes, a sort of narrative relationship—between women. This is one point.

Secondly, my writing is affected by the fact that I think that language is never neutral. The specific language, rhetoric, of philosophy is rooted in the phallo-

centric tradition. It is very abstract and pretends to be scientific and assertive. It is difficult to use abstract language to attack such abstraction. This is a trap.

From the beginning I thought that I could give a philosophical narration—a narrative style—that does not proceed by arguing analytically in the manner of Aristotle. Instead, I use a kind of story-telling. I also utilise stories, such as that of Penelope, or of the maid-servant of Thrace who laughed at Thales—one of the first philosophers—when he fell into a well, because he was staring at the sky and was unaware of worldly things. This philosophical narration is more accessible than the traditional way of arguing in very obscure language.

JR Your view of abstraction, as that which has been used by men, is linked to the next question I wanted to ask. This is about your view of the pre-political 'given' of the body that seeks symbolisation. In your paper 'Thinking Difference' you talk about Hannah Arendt's differentiation between knowing and thinking. You argue that the 'givenness' of sexual difference has to be symbolised and has only been symbolised by one side (by men).

Would it be right to say that the texts you have chosen work for you in two ways, not only by providing examples of what you are talking about, but also by allowing you to rework those particular texts which were written—as you put it—at the beginning of the male symbolic order? Thus I know that you think it significant that Plato was hostile to Homer.

AC Yes. The hostility of philosophy to narrative is clear in Plato. It is very interesting. Narrative in Ancient Greece was oral. As I show in my last book, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood* (trans. Routledge, forthcoming 2000), what is at stake in this hostility is the rejection of a relational narrating voice by a non-relational written text.

Another point is that narrative always deals with uniqueness. The story of Achilles or the story of you or me—Janice or Adriana—deals with a unique embodied human being who is different (similar but different) from everyone else. So, in my opinion, what is—and was—extremely disturbing to philosophy about narrative is that in narrative you deal with voice and uniqueness. Relationality occurs through the voice in oral traditions. Through the use of the voice you deal with singularity which I prefer to describe as 'uniqueness' because this is an Arendtian term. The whole metaphysical tradition is based on the rejection of what is singular and unique; what is not reducible to abstract ideas or constructs. This involves reliance upon general terms of language, such as 'man'. So, I am puzzled by this original hostility to oral narration which is primary in the history of philosophy.

To come back to the question about method and the idea that abstraction is viewed as male, this involves an Arendtian topic which I think is important and which I use. The distinction between 'thinking' and 'knowing' occurs because knowing deals with truth, with abstraction; and thinking (pragmatic thinking, not pure thought) is related to comprehension and to the world. In other words, thinking is concerned with what happens in the world, what happens in relationships.

Most of all, what I appreciate in Hannah Arendt is the fact that she says that there is the world and it is full of things, both artificial and natural, which appear and which display their existence. This is a pre-given. She says that these 'data' ask for—and demand—to be thought, understood, symbolised. The philosophical/political attitude of human beings, as creatures capable of speaking and thinking, consists in being 'responsive', that is, in giving back to the data the sense (the understanding) that they demand.

To give an example, sexual difference exists. Sexual difference demands that we make sense of it, that we represent it adequately. If the sense you give to sexual

difference is that 'males are superior', you are not giving back the sense that sexual difference demands. You are betraying sexual difference. The fact of sexual difference does not deal with hierarchy. If you symbolise this datum within a hierarchical model, this is wrong because you are betraying the way in which sexual difference displays itself. Each embodied human being from the beginning exists to be different, but not hierarchically, so you have to think differently from the phallogocentric tradition of philosophy and politics that privileges hierarchy.

I prefer this to the view that all that exists, for example the body, is just constructed by words, by *logos*. This is argued by several postmodernists and poststructuralists, but this is just the position of Plato and Parmenides. In the *Timaeus* Plato explains how the *logos* constructs bodies. He explains how *logos* constructs sexual difference. So what is new about saying that bodies are constructed? It is in keeping with the phallogocentric tradition.

JR One final question on method: is your argument that the maidservant of Thrace is closer to the true representation of what sexual difference actually is than the abstract ideas of the classical texts?

AC I would not use the term 'truth' or 'true representation', but the maidservant's understanding is more adequate or sensible, closer to the data. You can never be definitive about the sense of the data. You can have a sensible report, that is, something responding close to the demand of the data but not definitive.

JR So the data are active in some way?

AC Yes, the data continuously demand. In my opinion, the work of philosophy is to respond continuously to that demand. Philosophy involves an interactive connection with the data concerned with human beings. I think

that the servant of Thrace is close to this position. Underlying the texts that comprise Western philosophy, we have a phallogentric system of representation, but there is within it also some traces of resistance—which are the traces of the data, resisting this false/inadequate representation. When you read philosophers—especially Greek philosophers because they are closer to this transition from narrative to philosophy—you can detect these traces of resistance which I call 'the irreducible'. However, it is not 'the irreducible' as such—a thing that is clear in front of you—but the resistance of the data which cannot be reduced to a completely adequate representation.

JR This seems like Adorno. So, you have a model in which, instead of having a Kantian subject which imposes a grid upon matter, you have active matter.

AC Yes, in a way. I want to quote Hannah Arendt when she says there is something good in what is as it is. In the world all existent beings (which also includes things that are artificial) are good in as much as they are as they are. So the approach is to accept things as they display themselves and to try to be in an 'innocent' relationship with them. This involves trying to understand, to feel what it is that the things demand, in being what they are, and to respond to this demand. The data play an important role which is not a static role.

You cannot, for example, give a perfect final definition of this metal bin. (*She points to a small metal bin which she has been using as an ash tray.*) It is something displayed. It demands a sense and you have to try to respond to it. We are symbolising animals; we have language. You are Janice, you demand to be Janice and to say that you are a woman—employing general categories—betrays your demand.

JR Earlier, in your paper 'Thinking Difference', you seemed interested in the question, 'what is woman?' and now you are focusing upon the question 'who are you?'

AC The question 'what is woman?' was in a paper in which I was deconstructing the language of Western philosophy, which is always about the 'what'. The question 'what is woman?' lies inside this horizon and is a forced question, because philosophers said that 'man' is the universal species of human being. 'Woman', being a specification of the general human race, is the animal without language. In that earlier paper, I was just deconstructing that. The revolutionary/innovative question is to ask 'who?', and this is the main question of Hannah Arendt.

In Spite of Plato

JR I would now like to ask a few questions about the first of your books to have been translated into English, *In Spite of Plato* (Polity, 1995). It is interesting how the main themes in this are so closely interlinked and are also related to the concerns you have now. Would you agree with that? I don't see a break in your work at all.

AC The point of this dynamic coherence is a fidelity to the philosophical framework of Hannah Arendt. For her, the question of uniqueness is linked to the question of birth. *In Spite of Plato* was about the centrality of death in the history of philosophy and this possible new perspective beginning with birth—a symbolic link to the way that birth deals with uniqueness. You cannot say that the human race is born: that can only be said of individuals. Writing about birth emphasises uniqueness, and involves a deconstruction of the history of metaphysics as constructed on and around the centrality of death.

In Spite of Plato is not my first text. My previous work has been to produce much more traditional philosophical texts. I am not a novelist but, in so far as I can, I write artistically, as narrative. I tried to do this in *In Spite of Plato*. My last two books also employ narrative and use a lot of stories and poetry, for example: Muriel

Rukeyser, HD (Hilda Doolittle), Borges, Isak Dinesen (Karen Blixen), Sophocles, Shakespeare. It is not enough to write in a narrative way but also to look at the style of narrative texts. These two books are going to be published in English in soon: *Corpo in figure*, Feltrinelli, Milan, 1995 (*Figures of the Body: Politics and Imagery*, Michigan University Press, forthcoming 1999) and *Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti*, Feltrinelli, Milan, 1997 (*Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, Routledge). I am curious to see how the English speaking feminist audience will react to this privileging of narrative.

JR The mind/body split is undermined when you focus upon birth. It is interesting to see how it fits together. I really liked your reference to the irreducible—to what will not fit into the texts of Plato and Parmenides. What is irreducible is not 'woman' in the abstract, but the active bodies of real women. Is that also linked with Italian consciousness-raising groups, with whom you have been involved?

AC This is important. You are right. Generally when feminists speak of the 'irreducible', they mean something which is outside the *logos*: that is, the external, the chora, the matter.

JR Something abstract?

AC Yes. Something in a way very abstract. What I mean is that the irreducible is in everything, all data, everything which exists and cannot be reduced to a final definition. Of course, things are all irreducible in their materiality, in their existence, but they play different roles. However, the female body, which was reduced to an abstract concept and was betrayed and reduced to a false representation, was covered by philosophical chatting about female 'natural' inferiority.

The female body has an important role in displaying its irreducibility because there is strong resistance in it. If philosophy involves quasi-scientific texts, then the female body is irreducible to such texts. This body is not some abstract body, but is mine and yours.

I always felt, as a student of the classics, that these works were not about me. It is a fascinating tradition but I am not represented there. I felt alien, extraneous. I read *The Politics* of Aristotle and thought, 'I am not there': not because I am not an ancient Greek, but because there was something about it hostile to my existence; charming but hostile. I think this was my door to philosophy: to make clear to myself this feeling of being extraneous and of hostility.

JR It is not only the lack of representation of female bodies, but the lack of representation of what women can do?

AC Yes.

Feminist Metaphysics

JR You designate your position as involving a rejection of both the classical and the postmodern subject. There are a few philosophers who would say that they are in that area but are doing quite different work, for example Christine Battersby, Moira Gatens, Genevieve Lloyd. In your work, there seems to be a greater emphasis, coming from Arendt, on the human.

AC Arendt is extremely concerned with human existence in the world. When I speak of 'the other', I never mean 'the Other' in a psychoanalytic or postmodern sense.

JR Nothing abstract?

AC I hate that because it is cancelling the existence of humans. There is no 'Other'. By referring to 'the other'

I mean the other human being in his or her uniqueness. I think this is a legacy from Arendt. The metaphysical tradition of the subject is always promising to speak of the uniqueness of human beings because the subject assumes to work for every one. (There is a singularity.) But this tradition never keeps its promise. This is the position of Jean-Luc Nancy, and I agree with him, as he claims, 'who comes after the subject' is precisely the 'who' and his/her demand for meaning.

The modern subject frustrates this promise by the use of abstraction. What is cancelled; what is made unsayable/inconceivable is the self as uniqueness. What postmodernism does is just a con trick, a sham, because it aims to deconstruct or to destroy the modern subject; to say there are only fragments: no subject, no self, no identity and that all is a play of multiple identities. What is made unsayable again and again is the uniqueness of the self. Symptomatically, the question of the core of the modern subject is 'what is?': 'what is man?' 'what is the speaking subject?'. The question at the core of postmodernity is 'what is identity?'. It continues this interest in 'what is?' and apparently the question of 'who is?' is considered not only superfluous but unsayable.

There is no way to approach this question from a postmodern point of view or from a classical point of view. The other feminist metaphysicians that you mention have their own responses to postmodernism, but these are not answers that focus upon the question of the 'who?'.

JR

Is there a tension in your work between approaching the question of 'who is?'—which is always open—and saying that sexual difference is always an important difference or, indeed, *the most* important difference? So, for example, in certain circumstances racial difference is more relevant. This does not mean that we do not have sexed bodies but that there are not two bodies but different bodies—each unique.

AC The question of race is important. I have recently visited America and have discussed this with feminists and students in California. There are two different approaches to this question. Suppose that a human being is in front of me, and she is a black Caribbean. The first approach would involve a kind of curiosity, since I am not black. (I am a white European.) This first approach involves interestedness linked with the 'what?'. What does it mean to be a black Caribbean? Although I am very interested in that question, to focus most of all on this difference is dangerous because the 'what?' allows people to be hierarchical and to say 'white is better than black'. A similar point can be made with regard to religion. What happened in the old Yugoslavia is concerned with the 'what?' in that those in conflict defined the other in terms of group characteristics, rather than as individuals.

Another approach—which I think is the only approach for a radical democracy—is to say 'she is in front of me; she is black Caribbean, but she is also different because she is a unique human being'. My interest is in the question 'who are you?'. I expect that she will look at me, demanding 'who are you?', first of all. This is the better approach: one that recognises the uniqueness, the irreducible existence, of every human being and one that demands that we find a meaning, a personal story. This is the only approach for a radical philosophy and a radical, not hierarchical, democracy. Of course, in asking *who* we are, we are also interested in *what* we are, because you cannot separate sharply these two questions. If your starting point is the 'what?' question, you risk setting up a hierarchy. The risk is lessened if the initial question is 'who?'.

JR So in your latest work the emphasis on the question of 'who?' does not prioritise sexual difference in the way in which parts of your earlier work appeared to do, for example when you talked about there being two bodies that require symbolisation?

- AC This is an interesting question. My response is that the 'who' is sexed. I do not use the 'who' as spiritual. The 'who' has a face, a singular unique face and voice, smell, shape and also a sex.
- JR And is this 'who' also racially differentiated?
- AC Yes, but if you focus upon race this is dangerous within so-called modern democracy. If the 'other' is a woman, I feel affinity—it is affinity, and this is marked in language as we vocalise the question of 'who?'. If you ask who she or he is, then you mention their sex. When you ask 'who?', she could be black or white; but this is not marked by language in the same way.
- JR But the language—just as we have discussed patriarchal language—may not give adequate expression to what is.
- AC No. I think that in the language there are some correct and irreducible traces, and sexual difference is one of them. It is in the grammar; sex and gender play such a crucial role that each thing is gendered. In the Italian language even an abstract noun such as 'Being' [*essere*] is gendered. That might seem strange, but it is because sexual difference is such an important piece of data that it infiltrates the language. In ancient languages, like Greek and Latin, nouns are gendered in a very remarkable way. The more languages evolve towards rationality and functionality, the more they lose the gender of nouns. This is why English is very 'modern' and very successful.

Public/Private Divide

- JR In *In Spite of Plato* you describe how Penelope and her weavers manage to create a separate home for themselves that does not fit within the public sphere. Obviously it is a story but you use it again in the chapter on Demeter to think about new reproductive tech-

nology. Isn't this reinforcing a problematic public/private divide?

AC There is a danger there, but, on the other hand, I share with Hannah Arendt a distinction between the private and public. The private is what is not displayed in the light; what does not appear. The public is what appears in a place and time that you share with other people. The private is not shared. It is invisible: what is not displayed.

One example of what is private is the inside of your body, the belly. By contrast, what is seen on the outside of your body, your face, shape etc., appears in a shared space and therefore is public because it belongs to the displaying quality of the world. This is why I think that all the legislation on abortion and maternity is just an intrusion into the private. The inside of the body is outside—structurally, constitutively outside—the field of legislation.

So, what I am looking for is not better legislation on abortion, but the freedom of the mother to choose in this private matter. As such, I deny the legitimacy of any legislation about abortion.

Abortion is a private thing: a matter for the woman who is pregnant. You may object, 'but she may decide to have an abortion when she is seven months pregnant', but I don't think such a thing would happen. That is just science fiction. If a woman decides to have an abortion she decides early in her pregnancy. When I give birth to a child and the child is born, immediately the child becomes public. It belongs to the world. When he or she is inside my body, he or she does not yet belong to the world; the foetus is not yet a citizen. This is a radical position, but it is my position. Of course, pragmatically it is better to have better legislation on abortion than to have bad legislation on abortion.

JR You make the distinction between 'public' and 'private'

by saying what is public is what comes into the light. This can be related to the question of the narrator of your story. If you are in a household with people and they narrate your story, for example if your partner is the narrator, that is still private. So your emphasis upon the life story cuts between both the public and private spheres?

AC This is an interesting question. To narrate a story is an important point between the private and the public. A typical scenario of people narrating each other's stories involves friendship or family or lovers. These relationships are not private or public, but in a special place which is between the private and public. This dichotomy between the private and public is typical of the tradition of the West. There are fields in which you do not have such an opposition.

There is a place for the private and the public. The private is obscure in a good sense of the term: it does not display itself. There are special spaces for friendship, for lovers, for family which is neither private nor public but a different experience. In Italian feminism, friendship has an important role; also consciousness-raising groups which are close to the public, being political. Friendship is both public and private.

JR So the public/private distinction starts to break down as you apply it in different areas? How does your position relate to that of Seyla Benhabib (whose *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* is reviewed elsewhere in *WPR* 21 [ed.]?)

AC Arendt makes too rigid a distinction between the public and the private. I think that Benhabib is correctly Arendtian. I am always using Arendt, but I feel free to betray her. My work on Arendt is not just a work of interpretation. For me, her work is not simply a text to interpret. It is more than that. Hers is a position characterised by anomalous terms and concepts which open

new horizons. So the question is not whether I am true to Hannah Arendt, but how her work allows me to move on.

I think that Benhabib offers a reading of Arendt that allows her to distinguish different scenarios for democracy. Benhabib's reading remains close to the text of Arendt, but I disagree with Arendt in many ways.

JR To take up this point of disagreement. Benhabib's reading of Arendt distinguishes between different narratives. There is a narrator of the great deeds performed by heroes, in the public sphere and this is linked to a civic elite. Alternatively, there is a narrator based upon communication more linked with democracy.

Your approach undermines Benhabib's distinction in a way because it cuts across this dichotomy. Would you say that you were more radical in terms of your emphasis upon alterity, in thinking about radical democracy, compared to her more Habermasian position?

AC Yes. Democracy deals with the ethics of communication, with a common rationality: the possibility of respecting the other in communication. This is very interesting, but it is a position inside the traditional model of democracy. What I am thinking of is, not democracy like that, but democracy in which the main principle which is respected and upon which the democracy has to be constructed is the uniqueness of human beings. If you start from this, you have to think of a democracy which can get rid of hierarchies.

You may say that democracy has no hierarchies, but it has a lot of hierarchies. By contrast, the democracy which I have in mind does not deal with political representation. It is a new way of thinking the public as concrete, and pragmatic, relationships between human beings and a public space which must not be crystallised in a model of administration and government. This way of thinking is difficult, but I think it is possible. It is a way to look to the future.

JR So, it is an anarchic vision?

AC Yes.

JR And this anarchism does privilege the human?

AC From the very beginning, from the scene of your birth, you are unique, a new human being different from everybody else; but when you are born, from the very beginning, you enter a pre-given web of human relationships. To be born in Italy or China is something completely different. Who you are and what you are going to be is contingent. There are many such contingencies in life. Despite this, it does not follow that the self is just the result of many different elements and is just a construction.

The uniqueness of the self is there from the very beginning to the end. I mean that I am 'I' from my birth to my death. I am a dynamic self. I am not fragmented. I am dynamic. I was strongly influenced by family and political relationships, everything that happens in my life.

One of my points, with which both Christine Battersby and Judith Butler disagree, is that I focus on the necessary link between the 'unique' and the 'one'. But, in my position, to be unique does not mean to *be* one, to be self-consistent, fixed like a substance. To be unique corresponds to the fact that people *desire* to be one, to have a unity, a sense of a life which is a unity. There is a unity in your life but this is not in a material sense or something that you can possess. It is only something that you can desire.

One of the possible responses to this desire (or demand) is the telling of your life story. I can tell your life story which gives a sense of your life as a unity. I want to be clear that this unity is just an object of desire; it is not data. The unique self desires to have a sense of a life which is a unity. This is why people go to the psychiatrist to tell their story. What they expect is

that the psychiatrist gives back their story as a unity, making sense of it.

JR Where does this desire come from? We now automatically think of Foucault and the issue of power in relation to the telling of our stories. Also, what about distortion? Thus, for example, your achievements are likely to be attributed to luck if you are a woman, and to skill if you are a man.

AC This desire is an endless desire. It is underlined in one of the short stories of Isak Dinesen (Karen Blixen): the one about patterns that seem to fall into the shape of a stork. However, Dinesen underlines the fact that everybody asks 'who am I?', and the classical answer consists in telling a life story in which what is shown is a unitary figure (a stork, she says). I am longing for a story which speaks of the unity of my life. People can tell it to me in very different ways and nobody can tell the *real* unity of my life because that does not exist. There is a tension between the desire of the person and the story told.

The narrator is often the mother, grandmother, lovers and friends. Lovers are great narrators. They say, for example, 'I was always searching for you'. This is fantasy. I realise this, but the desire itself is a serious desire and a figure of the specificity of what is human. This uniqueness and demand for meaning is not just romantic. I don't like the term 'natural', but there is a need to have your story told. There is a need for meaning.

JR There is something similar going on between that desire for unity through narrative and the image that you gave before of the data, of the givenness of things, that demand representation. There is a sense in which both demand representation. Is one a special circumstance of the other?

AC One difference is that, what distinguishes one human being from the other is this *uniqueness* (what Hannah Arendt called 'distinction') which is different from difference. Unity is rooted in uniqueness. Uniqueness demands unity. But unity is not what is real, it is rather what is demanded.

Adriana Cavarero, University of Verona (Italy)
Janice Richardson, University of Staffordshire (UK)
Lancaster University, September 1998

THE POWERS OF WORDS: FEMINISM AND PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

A Review Essay by Alessandra Tanesini

The paradox disappears only if we make a radical break with the idea that language always functions in one way, always serves the same purpose: to convey thoughts—which may be about houses, pains, good and evil, or anything else you please.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §304.

Reflections on language occupy a peculiar position in feminist philosophy. A superficial survey of this literature seems to reveal a dearth of work in the area. For example, the recently published *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy* (1998) edited by Alison M. Jaggar and Iris Marion Young includes only two short articles on language. It has, however, six articles in epistemology, and eight on ethics. Feminists, it might appear, are not very concerned with language.

Appearances, however, are misleading. A sizeable proportion of feminist works contain some reflections on language. For example, the linguistic notion of a performative speech act has played a central role in recent feminist debates about political identities. Women of colour have developed sophisticated theories about patois languages, marginal speaking positions, and resistance to Western cultural imperialism. Some feminists have provided analyses of pornography as a speech act. And the list could continue.

One may thus want to ask why this literature has not generally been thought, even by feminists, as pertaining to the philosophy of language. The problems addressed in it are certainly at variance with what is more traditionally classified as pertaining to this area. Feminists have been more concerned with what can be done with language, by whom and to whom, rather than with traditional semantical issues. They have pointed out that there is more to language use than mere description. They have also noticed that description is not univocal, that it can play different

functions. Further, they have been concerned with linguistic authority. For example, they have analysed the contextual conditions which prevent or facilitate granting individuals some authority over their assertions.

This shift in focus, however, is not sufficient to explain why feminist work is not been considered by feminists themselves to be part of philosophy of language. For instance, there are some influential pieces in feminist epistemology which, despite their difference from traditional theories of knowledge, are correctly understood by feminists to belong to epistemology. Further, although the examples I have mentioned above are concerned with very different issues, such as reason, marginal speaking positions, and political identities, there are useful similarities and connections between what they have to say about language.

There is, in my opinion, an alternative explanation for language's centrality to feminist work, and the marginality of philosophy of language as an acknowledged area of feminist research. Feminist work on language contains no universal theory. There seems to be a recognition of the great variety of linguistic practices, and a sense that there is no single theory that can explain it all. Rather, there is a focus on some concrete linguistic practices as they are developed within historically specific cultural contexts. I fear that, despite claims to the contrary, even feminists expect a grand theory from anything that aspires to be part of a philosophy of some topic or other. And language is no exception.

Yet, it is altogether possible that, as Wittgenstein believed, there cannot be any single philosophical theory of language. What would take its place are a multiplicity of accounts of different linguistic practices; accounts which should be attentive to the richness and variety of linguistic use. However, whilst Wittgenstein might have been content with describing this variety, feminists, on the whole, have engaged also in the project of creating new linguistic practices and modifying old ones. This position does not entail that there is nothing general one can say about language. Instead, it involves a commitment to the view that abstract theory can only provide guidelines, rather than a substantive account.

Hence, I shall not try to look at feminist philosophy of language with the aim to extract one or more general theories out of the various positions. Instead, I shall look at the different ways in which feminists have talked about, and used language for political, epistemological, and other purposes. My survey is of necessity partial. What I discuss is only a sample of the work which I believe should be seen as part of a developing feminist philosophy of language. In the first section of this essay I present the 1970s feminist debate on the alleged neutrality of 'man', as well as criticisms of French structuralism and of representationalist analytic philosophy of language. In the second section, after a discussion of the frameworks offered by feminists for the philosophical study of language, I analyse accounts of linguistic practices.

I) Opening Moves

From its beginning feminist philosophy of language has been primarily concerned with specific linguistic practices rather than general theories of language. It has also been keenly aware of the numerous ways in which these practices can facilitate the continuation of oppressive power relations (Tirrell, 1998). Thus, early feminist work on language in the Anglo-American world was part of a political struggle to promote the use of non-sexist language (Spender, 1980). Janice Moulton (1992), in a piece originally published in 1977, argued that 'man' and 'he' are never used in a truly gender neutral way. Moulton claims that when these words are used to denote the whole of humanity or an individual irrespective of his or her gender, their reference is parasitic on their core denotation when they refer exclusively to males. Parasitic reference, thus, occurs when a term which is often used to refer to items belonging to a subclass is also used to refer to every item of a larger class (1992, p. 231).

Moulton offers some uses of brand names as another example of this phenomenon. For instance, she mentions the use of 'kleenex' to refer to tissues whether or not they are produced by Kleenex. In these cases, the items belonging to the subclass are treated as paradigmatic of the whole class. In other words, these items are assumed to instantiate all the properties which are

stereotypically attributed to members of the class. Hence, according to Moulton, when one uses 'man' to refer to all human beings, the usage presupposes that males are the paradigm of humanity.

As Moulton points out, this linguistic effect is independent of the intentions of the speaker since what a word means is not determined by what a speaker means by it (1992, p. 227). We must, instead, understand meaning in terms of the practices of communities of language users. It is, however, not sufficient to describe these practices, one must also find a way of changing them. Hence, feminists did not limit themselves to discuss the widespread use of sexist language, they also engaged in the projects of coining new words, such as 'her-story', and recovering lost meanings (Daly and Caputi, 1987).

If we think of speaking as a kind of doing, the debate about sexist language can be interpreted as revealing the commitments undertaken by speakers who use 'man' as a generic term. Although, these speakers might not consciously endorse the view that males are the paradigm of humanity, their speech acts commit them to this view. In other words, feminists discovered that linguistic performances, such as asserting 'man is a rational animal', contribute to licensing other performances, such as claiming 'men are more rational than women', and this occurs even against the expressed intentions of the speakers. However, at least to my knowledge, the feminists engaged in this debate in the 1970s did not discuss in any detail the equally important issue of linguistic authority.

I shall return to the issue of authority in the second section of this article. However, for the time being I shall provide a brief elucidation of this notion. When making an assertion we take ourselves to be entitled to our claim. In other words, we treat our asserting as authorising others to assert the same content, and as authorising ourselves and others to make some other claims which follow from it. For example, if I assert that 'women are under-represented in philosophy departments', I take myself to be entitled to my claim. I also take my assertion as authorising others to repeat it, and perhaps to defer to me for providing a justification in its support. Further, I treat my assertion as contributing to the justification of other assertions I might make

concerning the position of women in academia. Whether and how my assertions on this and other topics are challenged depends on whether I have been granted the status of expert (authoritative assessor) on the matter at hand.

The distinction between bare and assertional challenges is relevant in this context.¹ Bare challenges are cases where interlocutors question an assertion, merely by asking 'how do you know?'. This kind of challenge seems inappropriate when the assertor is commonly taken to be authoritative on the matter of the assertion. Hence, the incredulous stares one receives from students when one is trying to play the role of a Cartesian sceptic. An assertional challenge, instead, requires a commitment on the part of the interlocutor. The challenger in this case disputes the original claim by making an assertion which is incompatible with it. The speaker is, thus, granted some authority on the matter at hand, her assertions are not dismissed, since the challenger has to assert an alternative viewpoint for which she might have to provide reasons. Assertional challenge is at the core of genuine discussion and disagreement.

In the linguistic practices of racist and sexist communities, women and all non-white people are generally granted less authority than white men. It is easier to issue bare challenges to, or even completely ignore, their assertions. This widespread, but unjust, attitude can prevent some individuals from acquiring the status of fully fledged members of a community of speakers.

When feminists claim that it is difficult for women to achieve the position of speaking subjects in language, they are pointing to this phenomenon. It seems to me, although I will not defend my claim here, that nobody could be a speaker whose assertions are always appropriately open to bare challenges no matter what they are about. Consequently, somebody whose assertions are always met with bare challenges is considered not to be a member of the speaking community by her interlocutors. However, the community could be mistaken on this matter, and the bare challenges could themselves be inappropriate. Much more would need to be said here about communities since we all belong to many different ones. I will return to these issues in the second section when I consider the contemporary debate about marginal speaking positions.

What I have said so far might be aligned with an, undoubtedly eccentric, interpretative angle on Luce Irigaray's views on the sexualization of discourse and *on parler-femme* ('speaking (as) woman'). Irigaray's *parler-femme* is not immediately concerned with the semantic contents of utterances, but with linguistic performances.² In her view women are not granted sufficient linguistic authority. They are not treated as fully-fledged members of the linguistic community. They have not, as yet, become 'I's in language. That is, their acts of assertion have always been subjected to bare challenges. As it stands, this last claim is, in my opinion, false. Linguistic practices and communities are multiple, and women have authority in some of them. Here, Irigaray is unduly influenced by structuralist views of language as a unified structure, rather than as a collection of many different practices created by specific communities.

It would be a mistake to read Irigaray merely as advocating a 'woman's language' which would be a direct expression of the body. She is not simply proposing a feminine language of the body and desires. Rather, she is convinced that we must bring about the conditions under which women can speak as authoritative assessors. What Irigaray wants is a language *par les femmes*; a language spoken by women. She also adds that meanings would not remain unchanged in the process.

One may, however, raise doubts about the sort of semantic changes which Irigaray advocates. For example, she claims that new linguistic practices will abolish subjects and objects, proper meanings, and 'proper names' (Irigaray 1985, p. 134). I am rather sceptical about this view. In this regard, Margaret Whitford's comments are illuminating. Whitford takes Irigaray in this context to talk about culture and society, she would thus refer to a sort of cultural grammar (Whitford 1991, p. 46). If so, Irigaray does not only homogenise linguistic practices but the whole gamut of sociocultural practices present in communities. Such a move is unhelpful.

Irigaray is especially critical of one feature of masculine language, namely, its frequent recourse to constatives. Declaratives, she holds, often efface an important aspect of linguistic performances. They conceal responsibility. When speakers make assertions they have the responsibility to defend their claims. They

avoid this responsibility by hiding behind the mask of impersonal constructions, such as 'there is ...' or 'it is ...' (1993, p. 137). Further, the primacy given to acts of assertion tends to occlude the importance of the expressive function of language. Irigaray, instead, underlines the continuity between gestural expressions and language (1985, p. 137). There is an unusual similarity between Wittgenstein's view on the language of sensations, and the connections Irigaray draws between hysteria, 'sufferance', and speaking (as) woman. For him, 'words are connected with the primitive, the natural, expressions of the sensation and used in their place. ... The verbal expression of pain replaces crying and does not describe it'.³ Irigaray would add that there are psychological sufferings which are a consequence of identifying oneself as a woman which now find expression in gestures for which we only possess a descriptive language of pathology. *Parler-femme* would not describe those gestures, but replace them. It would give verbal expression to those sufferings.

Nancy Fraser (1992) raises against Julia Kristeva criticisms which are similar to those I have made about Irigaray. Fraser notices that, due to the influences of Lacanian neostructuralism, Kristeva often lapses into 'treating the symbolic order as an all-powerful causal mechanism and conflating linguistic structure, kinship structure, and social structure in general' (1992, p. 188). She contrasts this position with Kristeva's earlier views about signifying practices, and speaking subjects.

In the paper 'The System and the Speaking Subject', originally published in 1973, Kristeva argues against the structuralist tendency to reduce 'signifying *practices* to their systematic aspect' (1986, p. 27, original italics). Kristeva claims that a theory of meaning must rely on a study of the variety of historically and culturally situated signifying practices (1986, p. 32). Further, Kristeva elaborates a notion of a speaking subject who is bound by linguistic norms, and capable of transgressing them precisely because she acknowledges their force (1986, p. 29). These transgressions in turn facilitate the introduction of new linguistic practices.

In this manner, as Fraser points out, Kristeva advances a new pragmatics of language. This model is concerned with signifying practices 'in which speakers interact by exchanging speech acts'.

It takes 'signification as action rather than representation', and deals with 'how people "do things with words"'. Finally, it postulates a plurality of practices and speaking positions (Fraser 1992, p. 185). These views are opposed to the unifying formalism which seems to be typical of structuralist thinking.

Formalism is not the preserve of structuralism; Fregean philosophy of language is also guilty of it. Frege has been influential on twentieth-century analytic philosophy of language and this tradition does not seem to have much to offer to feminist thinking. However, the recent 'Pittsburgh School Neo-Hegelians', such as Robert Brandom, is an exception to this trend. The Fregean tradition on language and logic has been subjected to severe criticisms by Andrea Nye. Whilst I value Nye's project of unearthing the shortcomings and the sexism of analytic philosophy of language and I share some of her conclusions, I find myself disagreeing with several of her arguments.

In *Words of Power* (1990) Nye provides a feminist reading of the history of logic. In it Nye develops a detailed criticism of Frege's work. She holds that with Frege, and his more recent followers, everyday language has been forced to conform to the rules of formal logic (1990, p. 148). In this manner language is evacuated of much of its meaning. What is forgotten, I would add, are the many non-declarative uses of language, as well as the cognitive function of metaphorical talk. Thus, I agree with Nye that we must look beyond logic to understand language. Yet, I find several of Nye's consciously provocative claims unhelpful and irritating. For example, when discussing Frege's and others' attempt to treat language as truth functional, she claims:

[W]e may learn a way to control wife beating. We may find a way to prevent women from provoking their husbands, ... or we can improve the economy so that there are more jobs for men, or discourage feminism. In this way functional logic prepares the way for action. It tells us what to do so there will be less wife-beating.

But what cannot be part of the functional 'logic' that is to help us understand abusive marriages are the institutional relations in which these words, 'abuse', 'marriage', 'domineering', 'wife', 'husbands', 'beating' have meaning (Nye 1990, pp. 149-50).

Nye's conclusion is that logic alone will not help us to understand the meanings of words. Without a study of cultural practices and institutional relations, we will fail to understand the significance of linguistic performances. However, Nye supports this conclusion with claims that suggest that logic is a cause of abuse and of women's oppression. I find these claims to be simplistic. They attribute far too much power to philosophers and logicians.

Equally simplistic is Nye's association of formal logic with Nazi viewpoints. As far as I can tell, her claim is based on the fact that Frege was a Nazi. I whole-heartedly agree with Nye that a consideration of the 'social concerns or the personalities of those who voice them' are relevant to the merits of the ideas discussed (Nye 1990, p. 175). It would be very interesting to find out which aspects of Frege's philosophy were influenced by his Nazi beliefs. Unfortunately, other than some brief comments about 'an authoritative unitary truth' (p. 176), we do not get any help from Nye.

In recent articles Nye develops further her attack on analytic philosophy of language. She claims that this work is exclusively concerned with the language of natural science (Nye 1998b, p. 277), thus ignoring important aspects of everyday language such as the existence of intensional contexts. She also claims that the language of assertion and representation is inimical to feminist purposes (p. 289). It is hard to see how this can be the case. One may want to reject standard semantical interpretations of assertions, as I have done in this essay. One may also want to reject the view that the main purpose of language is to represent reality. But, feminists would be ill-advised to reject assertion. It is, instead, fundamental that we state our views.

On these matters Nye's position is particularly puzzling. She believes that the semantic notions of reference and truth should be central to any feminist study of language (1998b, p. 289; 1998c, p. 160). Further, she rejects any holistic account of semantics. For example, she criticises structuralist accounts of meaning in terms of relations between words (1998b, p. 266) and Quinean accounts of webs of beliefs (1998b, p. 282). Therefore, Nye would seem to be committed to the view that bits of language get their meaning by referring to bits of reality. If so, contrary to her explicit claims, she is committed to the view that the main purpose of language is to represent reality.

II) Linguistic Practices

Unlike Nye, most feminists who have engaged in the study of language take pragmatics rather than semantics as their starting point. They do not begin their analyses with semantic (word-world) notions like reference. Instead, they consider speaking and writing as kinds of doing. They try to understand linguistic practices in their cultural contexts, and, perhaps, derive from this understanding their accounts of the traditional notions of truth, meaning, and reference.

Although the notion of practice is frequently employed in feminist work, it is often insufficiently explained. There is a tendency to use 'practice' to encompass any kind of action, or to restrict it to examples of following or breaking either a convention or some explicitly codified rule. In my opinion, the first definition is too broad and the second is too narrow, whilst neither is particularly useful for feminist purposes. Instead, I suggest we think about practices as ways of doing things about which there is a right and wrong.

Practices are instituted by communities, and individuals get inducted into them. We have a practice when performances (doings) are sorted out in terms of their significance. That is, actions are individuated in accordance with how it is appropriate to respond to them, in accordance with the practice. For example, what makes an action an instance of voting at an election is a matter of its significance, of how it is appropriate to respond to it in accordance with the practices of a community. It does not matter whether one voted by raising a hand, drawing a cross on a piece of paper, or writing a name. Linguistic performances are also categorised in terms of their significance. Something is a questioning, or an asserting in virtue of how it is appropriate to respond to them in accordance with the practice.

In her superb essay 'Forms of life: Mapping the Rough Ground' (1996) Naomi Scheman fleshes out this notion of practice in ways that make manifest its political dimensions, and its relevance to feminist debates about political identity. Wittgenstein's notions of forms of life and of practice constitute her starting point. Scheman attributes to Wittgenstein an account of social practice along the lines I have sketched above, and she

identifies a form of life as the way of living which is adopted by individuals who share practices and a whole range of judgements (1996, p. 384).

Unlike many other Wittgensteinian scholars, Scheman is keenly aware that we cannot merely presuppose that communities speak in one voice. Rather communities of individuals, who share a form of life, are internally fractured. Often, this is a 'fractiousness that makes sense only on the supposition that there is something to be arguing about, that one's antagonists are wrong' (1996, p. 397). Hence, for Scheman the practices of a community are open to question.

An example employed by Scheman in her article helps us to appreciate the richness of her theoretical position. She reminds us of a scene in the film *Torch Song Trilogy* in which the gay protagonist, Arnold, and his mother are at the cemetery where both Arnold's father and his lover are buried. Arnold's mother is infuriated by Arnold reading the Jewish prayer of the dead at the site of his lover's grave. When she challenges him as to what he is doing, he replies that he is doing precisely what she is doing at her husband's grave. Arnold's mother, instead, claims that whilst she is reciting Kaddish for her husband, Arnold is blaspheming his religion (1996, p. 392).

Current practices attribute very different significance to two actions that might superficially appear to be the same. In other words, the norms embedded in current practice license treating Arnold's mother's behaviour as an act of devotion, and Arnold's behaviour as blasphemy. And yet, one might want to add that these practices are wrong. On these matters the community does not have the last word. Instead, our practices are open to revision (1996, p. 386). Revision is something that is initiated from within current practices. Appeals to transcendental notions of what is right are futile. Nothing outside what we do determines the rightness of our doings. Nevertheless, it still makes sense to say that what we do is wrong (1996, p. 389). In other words, extreme relativism is rejected (1996, p. 397).

Thus, for example, one might want to change current practices so that both Arnold's and his mother's actions acquire the significance of acts of devotion to one's dead partner. One can attempt to achieve this goal in many ways. Some will involve pri-

marily the use of language. So one can attempt to justify one's dissent with the current social significance attributed to Arnold's actions. When one does so, one engages in the practice of justification (1996, p. 388). Concurrently, one might engage in many different types of direct political action which also aim to modify the norms embedded in current practice.

These political interventions are not without dangers, some of which are illustrated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's analysis of the Indian practice known in the Western world as *suttee*. Spivak does not approve of the killing of widows; she does not endorse this traditional practice (1988, pp. 299, 301). Nevertheless, she argues that its criminalisation by the British has been rather problematic. She points out that British intervention has had the effect of transforming the significance of these actions from ritual to crime. Thus, under British law Indian women are conceived as the object of protection from brown men's actions (1988, pp. 298–9).

Further, by an ironic twist, '*sati*'—the term which has been rendered in English as '*suttee*'—signifies 'good wife'. Hence, the practice in question was described in Indian society as the immolation of the *sati*. By using '*suttee*' to identify the practice, the British have re-enforced the connection between being a good wife and 'choosing' self-immolation (1988, p. 305). Thus, for Spivak there is no space for the female subaltern to speak in the context of either traditional or colonial practices. In either case, the female subaltern cannot speak.

However, Spivak's identification of the injustice perpetrated against Indian women with the Lyotardian *différend* (Spivak 1988, pp. 300–1) betrays a diffuse pessimism about the possibility of improving social practices. For Lyotard, a *différend* is something which cannot, as yet, find an expression in discourse. An example is provided by acts of injustice that, given current practices, cannot even be understood as such. Thus, despite Spivak's intentions, her identification of the position of Indian women with the *différend* implies that their situation is currently unintelligible.

This conclusion relegates Indian women to a position of complete otherness, since others have no means to understand them. In other words, Indian women would stand outside

Western and Indian forms of life. Further, since there are no words to convey their situation, they cannot even speak for themselves. Thus, there would seem to be no way to revise current practices so that this injustice could be redressed.

In this context, it seems preferable to follow Scheman's account. She claims that the project of changing our practices requires 'a politically conscious placing of ourselves within, but somewhere on the margins of, a form of life' (Scheman 1996, p. 387). On this matter Scheman is not as clear as one may wish. Could marginal positions just be those occupied by dissenters, so that white supremacists might count? Or, as she seems to imply sometimes, is marginality inextricably linked with oppression?

I prefer the second interpretation which takes marginality as an essentially political notion. So interpreted, it becomes clear why the attempt to correct our current practices requires that one takes up a marginal position. In order to right what is wrong with our current practices one must stand in an act of solidarity with the people who are wronged by current norms. This standing, however, does not take place outside current practices, it is instead generated by a sense of unease with them.

Political engagements to change current practices often involve the use of words. Drawing on Stanley Cavell and Wittgenstein, Scheman talks of this process as one of bringing home our words (1996, p. 401). What is attempted is nothing less than the creation of a form of life which bears connections with the one we are leaving behind but constitutes a modification of it. In this new form of life our words would be at home, they would acquire the significance we want to attribute to them. And, in the example of recitative mourning above, Arnold's actions too would abandon their state of exile.

These issues are beautifully articulated in Maria Lugones' notions of a world, of world travelling, and of playfulness. A 'world' is a form of life, and 'world travellers' are those individuals who inhabit different worlds, often being not at ease in them (1996, p. 427). Lugones' analyses allow us to understand the different ways in which one might not be granted full membership in a community of shared linguistic and non-linguistic practices. They also highlight the multiplicity of the communities to which we all belong. Further, Lugones' discussion of the loving attitude

of playfulness necessary to be the sort of word traveller she endorses provides some guidelines for the avoidance of well-intentioned, and yet oppressive, interventions on the practices of a community. Lugones, thus, provides an antidote against Spivak's claim that the subaltern cannot speak.

The project of allowing the subaltern to speak is furthered by the work of those feminists who attempt to create new linguistic practices in which women of colour can be heard. In these practices old claims acquire new significances, and women of colour have the status of authoritative assessors. Sometimes, as in the case of Gloria Anzaldúa, feminists create a revised linguistic practice to express the nature of oppression whilst resisting to it. Thus, Anzaldúa speaks of the linguistic terrorism which has oppressed Chicanas and Chicanos in the following terms:

Deslenguadas. Somos los del español deficiente. We are your linguistic nightmare, your linguistic aberration, your linguistic mestisaje, the subject of your burla. Because we speak with tongues of fire we are culturally crucified (Anzaldúa 1987, p. 58).

With these words, Anzaldúa reclaims her tongue of which she had been deprived—a tongue that had been considered poor Spanish. Similarly Carole Boyce Davies (1996) addresses the work of Caribbean writers who are creating new signifying practices that give voice to black women.

Scheman, in the essay I have already discussed, links the revision of linguistic practices required to shepherd our words to a new home to the issue of identity formation. Scheman focuses her discussion on the identity of the 'Diasporic Jew'. She characterise this identity as 'an ethical and political imperative to create forms of life that would place our words and us in the right relation.' (Scheman 1996, p. 402). But her claims can be generalised to a normative account of identity.

According to this view, which I have formulated in another essay (Tanesini 1994), identity claims are political endorsements. They do not describe essences or even social roles. For example, claiming the identity of working mother for oneself is an endorsement of a set of commitments to one's children, co-workers, and so on. It is also a claim that one is entitled to be treated by the government, by one's employer or by one's partner in ways

that facilitate the fulfilling of one's commitments. Thus, to claim that one is a working mother as a matter of identity is not the same as making the double claim that one has children and that one also works. Similarly, it is not a matter of attributing to oneself the social role that is currently attributed to working mothers. Otherwise, one could not claim for oneself this identity whilst at the same time resisting the norms about mothers and working women embedded in current practices. Identity claims, in my view, are not based on any metaphysics. They are endorsements, and as such they can be instruments for changing current practices.

I have proposed this account of the linguistic practice involving identity claims as a way out of the impasse between essentialist views of identity and flat denials of its viability as a feminist notion. Judith Butler (1990) has formulated a different account of identity claims, which also attempts to overcome this dilemma. Her account takes identity claims to be performatives (1990, p. 25). In her view, gender is constituted by a multiplicity of doings that are standardly taken to be effects of gender—some of which are linguistic. Dressing up in an evening dress and spike heels for a dinner party is one such 'doing', claiming that one is a woman is another, according to Butler.

Although Butler's account in terms of performatives has gained widespread currency among feminists, I believe that it is ultimately unsatisfactory. I have said that practices are nexuses of performances sorted in terms of their significances. Thus, norms are implicit in practices. 'Norms', in this sense, simply refer to what is normal in society: to what the community takes to be right. Butler's proposal amounts to the claim that gender is a matter of the social significance of doings (Butler 1990, p. 141). In other words, gender is seen as a cluster of norms in the sense I have mentioned above. Butler holds that by parodying linguistic and non-linguistic performative 'doings', it is possible to subvert the current norms regulating gender. Whilst I agree with Butler that we must start with practices and the social significance of actions in accordance with them, I believe she is deeply mistaken about the subversive potential of performatives.

Strictly speaking, a performative, such as 'I promise', is a 'doing' with words. If the performative is uttered in felicitous

conditions, the mere saying constitutes the action. However, the conditions which prevent the performative from misfiring often include structures of authority. For example, only a person with a specific kind of authority can marry two people by uttering words. Performatives do not subvert this structure of authority, but rely on it to be effective. In other words, performatives cannot do the job that Butler attributes to them. She hopes that they can be used to subvert the norms of gender, and this they cannot do. My disagreement with Butler is not purely verbal. As other commentators have pointed out, her focus on performatives causes her account to lapse alternatively into voluntarism and determinism about gender.

The notion of the performative has been used more fruitfully in feminist analyses of pornography. Famously, Catharine MacKinnon has argued that pornography is performative (MacKinnon 1995, p. 15). It is a speech act that silences and subordinates women. MacKinnon's claims have been further articulated and defended by Jennifer Hornsby (1995) and Rae Langton (1993).

Langton, for example, explains that for MacKinnon pornography does not merely describe the subordination of women. Further, it does not just have this subordination as one of its effects. Pornographic speech acts are acts of subordination (1993, p. 294).

Langton employs J. L. Austin's terminology to explain this point. Consider the case of a white person saying to a person of colour 'Whites only are allowed here' whilst pointing to a restaurant. The semantic content of the claim is that only whites are allowed. This is what Austin has called the locutionary act. This utterance has several effects. By saying it the white person enraged the black person, she prevented her from entering the restaurant, and so forth. These effects capture the perlocutionary dimension of the utterance. Finally, and plausibly, the utterance is an act of discrimination towards black people. This characterisation captures the illocutionary force of the utterance. In saying 'whites only are allowed here' the speaker has discriminated against black people. Thus, whilst saying 'I promise' in the right conditions is in itself promising, saying 'whites only' in given conditions is in itself discriminating against blacks. Pornography,

for MacKinnon and Langton, does the same to women.

Langton provides several arguments in favour of her claim. Importantly, she shows that subordinating speech acts have among their felicity conditions that the speaker must have authority (1993, p. 305). Thus, if during apartheid a black person had uttered 'Blacks only here', the utterance could never constitute an act of subordination of whites. If we apply the same considerations to the case of pornography, we see that Langton's arguments could not be assimilated to crass pro-censorship positions.⁴

Once again, it seems, to be effective performatives rely on power structures that are already in place. Judith Butler addresses Langton's and MacKinnon's position in her recent book *Excitable Speech* (1997). However, because Butler focuses on the claim that speaker's intentions are relevant to speech acts, she misses the point about authority. Further, Butler's resort to the notion of perlocutionary effects to explain performatives is regressive since it encourages an instrumentalist account of language as a tool.

I hope I have been able to demonstrate the variety and richness of feminist philosophy of language. I started the essay by urging feminists to recognise the centrality of language to feminist philosophy, I wish to end by noting that some steps in this direction have already been made with the publication of the collection *Philosophy of Language: The Big Questions* (1998a) edited by Andrea Nye.

Alessandra Tanesini
Cardiff University

Notes

- 1 I borrow the distinction from Lance and O'Leary-Hawthorne (1997, p. 110).
- 2 I take this point from Whitford (1991, p. 41).
- 3 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 244.
- 4 Further, even granting that pornography is subordination it does not follow that the best way to stop it is by recourse to the law.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy and Policy

Iris Marion Young, Princeton University Press 1997

h/b £29.50 0 691 01201 6, p/b £9.95 0 691 01200 8

This title is another collection of essays from the feminist philosopher and political theorist, Iris Young, which displays the kinds of exemplary argumentation, clarity and plain speech that we have come to expect of her. Five of the essays have been published elsewhere, but this collection brings them all together in one place.

Two of the essays (chs 1 and 7) represent important theoretical interventions into the territory of identity in relation to gender as a collectivist structural determinant in our lives; two (chs 2 and 3) are quite wonderful contributions to a democratic politics of difference; and three chapters (4, 5 and 6) represent different kinds of applications of Iris Young's ideas of justice to contemporary issues of social policy which bear especially on women, gender, sexuality, parenting, and more broadly, domestic life. I will say something of each of these groups.

In 'Gender as Seriality' (ch. 1), Young usefully appropriates from Sartre the idea of seriality to denote why it is meaningful to speak of women as a collective category without essentialising what it is to be a woman. Seriality refers to structures of human action which both enable and constrain it. These structures are produced by human action, and in this way, they acquire a practical and historical quality. They constitute the 'milieu of action': 'the milieu is the already-there set of material things and collectivized habits against the background of which any particular action occurs' (p. 25).

When people share a milieu of action, they thereby acquire a collective dimension to their being. Thus, such structures as 'enforced heterosexuality and the sexual division of labour' (p. 29) constitute a collective dimension to women's existence. To the extent that this dimension has cross-cultural features, women as a series have a cross-cultural existence; by the same token, there are aspects of serial existence which are culturally specific such as the series which women of contemporary Islam constitute.

Young's principal point is that serial existence does not determine how those who inhabit a particular serial position will live it. *Structure* does not predict *identity*. If some women organise to become a self-conscious social collective, it is because some aspect of their shared seriality prompts them to organise in this way (pp. 34–5). Young's appropriation of Sartre's distinction between a given form of preconscious sociality and a form of sociality that only comes into being through self-consciousness permits her to hold on to the universal category of 'women' while simultaneously making an acceptance that women's political existence as a group is always historically and culturally specific, or, partial: 'While the gendered series *women* refers to the structured social relations positioning all biologically sexed females, groups of women are always *partial* in relation to the series' (p. 35).

At first sight this is a tempting reconciliation of an historical materialist insistence on the salience of social structure with our contemporary culturalist awareness of difference. But does it really work? Most social scientists are having great difficulty at this time in theorising what they mean by social structure. Every time they attempt to do this, they find the object of analysis already inscribed by a specific cultural meaning which is not extensible to those who do not share it. To insist that there is a dimension of social existence, such as the sexual division of labour, that is common to all the cultural specifications of it, is not a new insight for social scientists. (See, for example, Rosaldo and Lamphere's *Woman, Culture and Society*, 1974.) As a highly contested presupposition of social ontology, it does, however, deserve more philosophical reflection than Young accords it here.

The phenomenological assumptions concerning how social life becomes subject to (self-)consciousness, and what happens when it is, are suggested in this chapter, but are also not elaborated and defended as they might have been. This is especially noteworthy given the lead offered by Bartky in 'Towards a Phenomenology of Feminist Consciousness' (in *Femininity and Domination*, 1990) and given the fact that Sandra Bartky is one of the two women to whom Young dedicates this book. All said, however, this chapter is an instructive place to begin for anyone who wants to consider the difficulties of thinking about social structure, difference and identity, at this time.

The other woman to whom Young dedicates her book is her mother, who died in 1978. She is the partial inspiration of a moving last chapter of the book which asks feminist readers to reconsider their careless postmodern dismissals of the significance and value of 'home'. In this chapter, Young develops a critique of the binary of 'construction' and 'preservation' which is built into Heidegger's philosophical reflections on dwelling. Dwelling depends as much on preservation as on construction where the first term refers to the activity of 'caring for and arranging things in space' (p. 155) and across time (the work of 'remembrance'). She properly argues that the 'home-making' activities of women enter into the constitution of what, in *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt termed the 'in-between': the intersubjective world of things and meanings that connect people in space and over time. Within the collectively shared worlds of the in-between, 'home' is a dwelling which has both to be constructed and preserved if it is to provide, as it does, the conditions of individuated existence.

If we are to be individuals, we must be assured a private home-like space where we can find ourselves as individuals in connection with those few others whose identity is bound up with ours. Young is aware that empirical 'homes' do not necessarily afford the safety, privacy and nurture which successful individuation demands, and that the all too common condition of being a refugee is defined by lack of a home.

Young is correct to insist on the salience of home to individuation, claiming that 'Home is the site of the construction and reconstruction of one's self' (p. 163). It is, however, fair to say that she has not sorted through her collectivistic ambivalences with regard to the whole domain of individualisation. While insistent that 'each person's identity is unique' (p. 33), and that therefore voice is a critical democratic right for each individual as well as for each differentiated group identity, Young does not do any work on the conditions of individuation other than in this last chapter. This leaves her interventions in social policy curiously flat because they tend to evade some of the hardest issues.

For instance, with regard to pregnant addicts, Young positively invokes the feminist ethics of care which, I have argued

elsewhere, is predicated on non-individuated symbiotic relationships. (See Yeatman, 'Interpreting Contemporary Contractualism' in M. Dean and B. Hindess (eds), *Governing Australia*, Cambridge University Press, 1998.) Yet Young rejects the normalising, confessional regimes of the therapeutic disciplines of social work, psychology and psychiatry, because they are 'depoliticizing and individualizing' (p. 88). One could argue, however, that the problem with these normalising disciplines is that they are not individualizing enough: the capacity to be an individual is re-harnessed to social and moral discipline. It is difficult to see how consciousness-raising—Young's political alternative—is likely to nurture an individuality which is freer than the kind of individualised subjectivity which a disciplinary confessional regime makes possible.

In my view, it is the two contributions to theorising communicative democracy (chs 2 and 3) which are the most successful of all the essays in the book. These chapters are significant contributions to contemporary democratic theory. In ch. 2, 'Asymmetrical Reciprocity', Young offers an excellent excursus into why the reciprocity of communicative interaction must depend upon, as it is driven by, an asymmetry of perspectives. This chapter is very helpful to theorists of a democratic politics of difference. It offers some sustained and relational thinking on what it is we mean by the distinctive positioning of someone. It reinterprets Habermas' account of communicative action to bring out the asymmetry of perspectives and positioning on which communication is predicated. In so doing it makes exciting use of the idea of the gift (as used by Derrida, amongst others), and of Irigaray's idea of wonder.

Chapter 3, 'Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy', I know well, since it was included in a book I co-edited with Margaret Wilson. (See Wilson and Yeatman, *Justice and Identity: Antipodean Practices*, Wellington: Bridget Williams Books and St. Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1995.) This essay continues to be the most important critical revision of the idea of deliberative democracy by refusing to privilege the culture of rational argumentation that most have taken to be the heart of democratic deliberation. Instead, Young rightly insists upon the salience of greeting, rhetoric and storytelling to what she

reframes as the significant project at issue: *communicative* rather than deliberative democracy. By the inclusion of forms and styles of speaking that lie outside the Platonic phantasy of rational political deliberation, Young contributes to the kind of democratic co-existence which an open politics of voice and listening makes possible.

Anna Yeatman
Macquarie University, Australia

*The Phenomenal Woman: Feminist Metaphysics and the
Patterns of Identity*

Christine Battersby, Cambridge, Polity Press; New York, Routledge 1998

h/b £49.50 0 7456 1554 6, p/b £14.99 0 7456 1555 4, £13.95

h/b \$69.59 0 415 92035 3, p/b \$18.99 0 415 92036 1

Christine Battersby's splendid new book is an example of a genre currently lamentably rare in feminist philosophy: an original piece of thinking that does not merely summarise or contest familiar arguments, but dares to rethink them. Self-consciously anchored in the history of philosophy, the text attempts a real engagement with its foundational ideas and invites us to reconfigure them in a more female-friendly way.

The emphasis here is explicitly metaphysical, as opposed to ethical or epistemological. Writing within a post-Kantian framework, Battersby wants to rethink the object (as modelled on the birthing female body) in order to rethink the subject (whose constitutive and self-identical status thereby becomes untenable). Criticising what she perceives as an inadequately nuanced feminist hostility to metaphysics, Battersby would persuade us of the plural resources philosophical and scientific ontologies offer.

Woven through the ensuing exploration there is a very contemporary concern: in avoiding the rigidities of traditional metaphysics with its enduring essences, she is determined to avoid postmodern deconstructions of all identity. Although the author did not finally manage to convince me that she had succeeded in pulling off this remarkable feat, *The Phenomenal Woman* poses the sort of provocative questions that any feminist philosophy concerned with questioning women's identity and its relation with power must address.

In many ways the structure of the book exemplifies its overall argument: that we should reject logical, linear paradigms and recognise that identities are (self-)formed as merely provisional stabilisations within a field of forces. Although this is the dominant theme to be distilled from the book, it similarly emerges in a complex way, through repetitions and nuances that sustain an openness and call for further development through an active engagement on the part of the reader. This is one reason why I think Battersby's work will incite considerable interest and discussion among feminists: it participates in the process of becoming it invites us to associate with a female-figured philosophy and sets an agenda for feminist enquiry.

The underlying metaphysical argument here is that we must replace being with becoming (or, in the more contemporary language Battersby often uses, we must move from hylomorphic to self-morphing models). It is this argument that takes her to the heart of the philosophical tradition. A classical metaphysics of being takes its cue from Aristotle, where essence is associated with stable, unchanging forms and substances. This metaphysics is then attributed to Kant's account of (phenomenal) objects, whose permanence and inertia is the necessary condition for the equally unchanging transcendental subject that imposes form upon them (and *The Phenomenal Woman* could indeed be read as a protracted argument with Kant). Classical physics is then similarly ascribed this hylomorphic model of 'dead matter'.

The identification of this hierarchical subject-object relation with a logic of mastery has of course had considerable resonance for socialists and postmodernists, as well as for feminists, but this is only tangential to Battersby's critique. Her central claim is that the model is itself figured on the male body, *qua* complete and stable substance; as non-relational and self-contained although dependent upon opposition to its other (often conceived as female). In contrast, Battersby commends a 'fleshy' metaphysics where matter is self-generating and understood in terms of the female body that gives birth. She is strongly influenced by Irigaray here (although she finds her work too abstract, ahistorical and sentimental towards woman), but she also draws on Bergson, Adorno, Foucault, Butler, Haraway, Deleuze and Kierkegaard, as well as on the new physics and biology.

I found Battersby's 'raid' on these congenial resources for a new metaphysics (one predicated on 'fluidity and mobile relationships') quite fascinating, although I would have liked to ask her some questions about it. For example, I wasn't sure whether this new ontology is intended to be female in more than a metaphorical sense and even then, whether it is necessarily gendered in this way. For surely a (meta)physics of self-forming physical matter is not *necessarily* the same as reproductive flesh. After all, most of the exponents of self-morphing paradigms cited here are male, and if some of them have associated becoming with woman (albeit in ways that Battersby mostly distrusts) most did not. Given the dangers she herself recognises, of equating woman with reproduction, how can we be sure that the new paradigm is not one more ruse of patriarchy?

By the end of the book it is evident that Battersby's 'hero' (as she calls him) here has all along been Kierkegaard, through whose work she rethinks subjectivity as a complex historical becoming where self and other take shape together and identities are scored through repeated movements that produce relatively enduring patternings (identities) out of singularities. Here, then, the self is (metaphorically) birthed from a play of multiple possibilities which allow for both shared and particular identity. This model is commended over more deconstructive fluidities where no forms or agency endure (although Battersby does find interesting echoes in Deleuze's work on repetition and difference and elicits some fascinating implications from using acoustical, rather than visual, models of forming).

It is on this basis that Battersby would then have us understand the contingent yet relatively enduring nature of women's identities, and it is a perspective with which I have considerable sympathy. But it was also at this point that I wanted to raise some further questions. Is the 'fleshy metaphysics' itself the goal of an anti-patriarchal feminist philosophy, or is it merely instrumental in permitting us to rethink women's identities in a more contingent way (and in this latter sense, does it matter whether it is gendered female?).

At stake here is the political purpose of the book. The project of rethinking metaphysics is implicitly justified in political terms: substituting one paradigm for another from a perspective

of sexual difference is already to engage in a discursive struggle. This is consonant with Battersby's definition of patriarchy as a form of social organisation that 'takes male bodies and life-patternings as both norm and ideal in the exercise of power'. However she clearly finds the metaphysical substitution insufficiently political on its own and it was at this juncture that I found her move to integrate more explicit dimensions of power rather problematic.

I should mention at the outset that Battersby acknowledges the impossibility of tackling the political and ethical implications of her work here, but some of those implications are nevertheless inherent in the questions of power her new paradigm raises. I felt there was some ambiguity regarding the political purpose of this paradigm.

On the one hand, the author wants to follow Kierkegaard and Irigaray in adumbrating a becoming that is not predicated on antagonism between subject and object or self and other. Battersby cites, approvingly, Irigaray's emphasis on the mother-daughter relation and her rejection of self-other models based on repulsion and exclusion. Although she distances herself from an ethics of care or empathy, the self-morphing/birthing model does suggest a rather harmonious flowing of the formative process. (Nietzschean mobility is dismissed as too obsessed with power, while dialectics is rejected as too oppositional and Butler as too anarchic in the face of identities which also emerge from the bottom up).

This clearly has ethical implications for any feminine counter-symbolic, although Battersby rejects this route. For on the other hand, she wants to engage with real women's identities in the symbolic, experiential realm and therefore she must recognise the conflicts that also shape them here. She thus appeals to Butler and Foucault as a way of recognising power, despite her rejection of the more deconstructive aspects of their work (I am somewhat sceptical that this distinction is sustainable). But the kind of power that is at stake, and the extent of its effects, is not explored adequately, beyond some allusions to normalisation and the inequalities that structure intergenerational relationships. Nor was I sure how it fitted into the new ontology.

Methodologically, it would perhaps have been better to

identify two related projects which are elided here: a metaphysics of becoming and the phenomenology, or genealogy, that then traces women's actual becoming historically. (Battersby rightly acknowledges the significance of her work for men and minorities too, although this would provoke the question of why her philosophy is especially feminist.)

Once we accept the new paradigm, then it is the latter agenda which the book invites us to take up and a more adequate sense of power as structural (especially, perhaps, regarding reproduction, but also in terms of a political economy of which Battersby seems unnecessarily dismissive) would surely emerge, and be required, here. But can we be sure in advance that this will not entail a deconstruction of all the recognisably female threads of women's identities?

Alternatively, it seemed to me that a more sympathetic approach to dialectics could have been enormously useful here (and it is somewhat surprising that it never surfaces, given the discussion of Adorno). Battersby offers only the most cursory and dismissive references of Hegel or Marx, despite their models of becoming and her own materialism, and she seems to associate dialectics primarily with the oppositional master-slave relation as Lacan glosses it. But ontologically, dialectics could have overcome the problems that a Kantian Battersby shares with post-structuralists regarding the status of 'the real', while recognising subject and object as co-constitutive and a becoming that is both antagonistic and fertile, engendered through conflict as well as reciprocity, where encroachment and enrichment equally occur.

A more dialectical (but not teleological) approach could thus have accommodated processes of communication and power, identity and non-identity, and linked the metaphysics more convincingly to a tracing of mediations as well as to a politics.

It is impossible in a short review to do justice to the richness of Christine Battersby's book. I offer the above queries and suggestions only from the perspective of an engaged and sympathetic reader and in the hope that others will take up the fascinating questions and projects that *The Phenomenal Woman* provokes.

Diana Coole
Queen Mary and Westfield College
University of London

Etre Deux

Luce Irigaray, Paris, Grasset 1997

p/b FF 98, 2 246 55901 4

The presence of the Buddha, in calm contemplation of a flower, aptly presides over this most recent of Irigaray's reflections on contemporary cultural crisis in the West. If, as a culture, we were attentive to the exercise of perception rather than falling back on a crude satisfaction of sensation, there is a chance, she argues, that we might find a way out of the sterile self-repetition induced by a technologically-driven patriarchal economy.

Her tone is reflective rather than provocative. Incantation, meditation, though also, necessarily, lamentation, colour these variations on a theme whose scope encompasses a range of registers and concerns: personal conviction, philosophical critique, mystical vision. I am reminded, on reading them, of the atmosphere of the *Song of Songs*, for Irigaray's text is also a hymn to the creativity which love between human beings is potentially capable of if cultural conditions, instead of crippling our ethical and spiritual 'becoming', provided instead an enabling environment. 'What we have to overcome in order to become free is not only a natural pre-given, but also a cultural pre-given' (p. 161).

The text centres on relationship, whether between individual and environment, or human subjects. The framework of *Prologue* and *Epilogue* introduces the reader to an imaginary space in which *Elle* (She) and *Lui* (He) encounter each other fully in the context of a nourishing and supportive coexistence with air and earth; spiritual health lies in remaining open to love in a sense of a state of non-possessive harmony with the other. In contrast, the realm of human intersubjectivity, as we at present know it, constitutes an exile.

The main themes developed here rest on a familiar set of oppositions. Western historical development, left to men, has moved away from the concrete singularity of experience, preferring abstraction and universality in positing an ideal; human subjectivity, according to male philosophers, defines itself by projecting objectivity as external, alien to nature and corporeality; culture under patriarchy is inevitably in conflict with nature and so we now inhabit a 'constructed world' which separates reason from passion, spirit from body, subject from other, *je* (I) from *tu*

(you). Since transcendence is posited as vertical, the *entre deux* (the 'between-two') is devalued, the 'amorous relation' reduced to the immediacy of the natural, with children as the only product envisaged.

Although these themes are characteristically Irigarayan, the mood of hope, dream, prayer in which such recognisable concerns bathe, binds them into a discourse governed by renewed ethical urgency. In a context of crisis and cultural under-achievement which provokes her despairing: 'We lack the human; we fail to respect the human' (p. 24). Irigaray's plea for a new conception of human intersubjectivity, 'being two' [*être deux* or *être à deux*], offers a phenomenology of the caress as an ethical alternative to the appropriative if not downright destructive gestures of phallogocentric power.

Dialoguing with her philosophical predecessors, Irigaray uses their obsessions to highlight the scope for improvement in this domain. A reliance on violence to arouse the sensibility (the Kantian sublime); an inability to conceive of any ethical content to male/female relationship (Hegel); a view of the human subject as unique, male, endowed with a consciousness whose goal is to reduce or possess the distinctiveness of the other (Sartre, Merleau-Ponty); a conviction that perception of the other is only accessible through God (Levinas); all serve as counterpoint to her own vision of *noces spirituelles* (a 'spiritual wedding') yet to be celebrated between the genders.

Women—who are, in Irigaray's opinion, spiritually better endowed than men—have a key role to play here as guides on the path to a more fully realised humanity. In relating to the other, I acknowledge her/his presence here and now as body and not just consciousness; I maintain a necessary distance while remaining attentive to her/his distinct energetic and spiritual needs; I encounter her/his gender as separate, sexually specific, in an ethically-rooted encounter [*face-à-face*] that perceives the other as valuably and irreducibly 'not I'.

Irigaray's possibly utopian yearning for a model of transcendence firmly located in the *entre deux* between reciprocally respectful subjects draws on Eastern and mystical thought. Although clearly opposed to the Buddhist pursuit of fusion between self and other, Irigaray emphasises the value to be

derived from the yogic cultivation of energy and the breath as linking body and consciousness, and from an approach similar to the *via negativa* of the mystics. The essential mystery of the other should remain veiled; silence is to be valued as enabling each gender to safeguard the singularity of its perspective; the recognition and valorisation of an aporia—*être deux* ('being two') as what does not exist, cannot appear and lies beyond the reach of language—provides precisely the locus of values which could redeem our fallen state.

Rather than breaking new ground, *Etre Deux* offers a different emphasis. There is less here on women's specific predicament, more on the imperative to rethink the nature of community, the relationship between love and thought, ethics and truth. The book's weaknesses are also its strength. We are dealing here with abstractions—silence, mystery, aporia—which border on dream. Yet the positive effects of creative visualisation are desperately needed and the images which remain after a reading of this text—the fertility of the caress, the vital importance of the protective gesture [*sauvegarder*], the scope for nourishment and growth, the place for measure—alert us as a culture to those values which can and must be realised.

Kirsteen H. R. Anderson
Queen Mary and Westfield College
University of London

Textures of Light: Vision and Touch in Irigaray, Levinas and Merleau-Ponty

Cathryn Vasseleu, Routledge 1998

h/b £40 0 415 14273 3, p/b £12.99 0 415 14274 1

In Irigaray's *Ethics of Sexual Difference*, there are two dense and allusive chapters on Merleau-Ponty and Levinas respectively, which present particular challenges to the reader, who inevitably feels that in order to understand Irigaray here, an in-depth understanding of Merleau-Ponty and Levinas is also required. Since many readers lack the necessary background, these two chapters have been relatively neglected. Cathryn Vasseleu's book sets out to offer a reading of those two chapters (along with Irigaray's other Levinas essay, 'Questions to Emmanuel Levinas'), which would provide a sufficiently thorough and extensive dis-

cussion of Merleau-Ponty and Levinas to enable readers to grasp the point and the force of Irigaray's readings. Her context is the history of light in philosophy, and modern readings of that history, notably Derrida's argument that 'light is not just one metaphor used in philosophy, but the metaphor which founds the entire system of metaphysics or metaphoric truth' (p. 7).

Irigaray's argument about the ocularcentrism of the West and the complicity between photology/the language of metaphysics and the masculine imaginary is elaborated in *Speculum* (1974) and is reasonably well-known: metaphysics effaces its own conditions of possibility/the maternal origin. However, *Speculum* was largely a deconstructive project. By the time she writes *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1984), Irigaray is already shifting towards a more constructive reading of the history of philosophy, related, as Vasseleu indicates, 'to a more politically directed figuration of feminine visibility in the symbolic order' (p. 17).

With this shift in mind, Vasseleu is interested in examining woman's participation in a 'genealogy of light', i.e. 'the continuous reinscription of light's origination as an always already present "first light" [G]enealogy attends to the traces or the material conditions of [light's] articulation' (p. 11). Irigaray's challenge to the sexual division of labour instituted in metaphysics by the split between sensible and intelligible leads her to question the split and implicate touch in vision (light's texture). Vasseleu argues that one can draw from Irigaray's work a concept of vision that is open to or affected by the touch of light, in which 'tactility is an essential aspect of light's texture' (p. 12).

The bulk of the book is devoted to clarifying the work of Merleau-Ponty and Levinas, taking 'light' as a guiding theme, and examining the success of their attempts to tackle the split built into the history of philosophy. The exposition is pursued with great care, and stays close to the textual sources. Vasseleu also juxtaposes the views of other theorists (Benjamin and Derrida on Levinas, Lingis, Judith Butler, Derrida, Foucault and Bataille on Merleau-Ponty, along with comparisons with Sartre, Lacan and Iris Young). These juxtapositions seems designed principally to bring out the specificity of Merleau-Ponty and Levinas; although they often indicate criticism, they seem to be less assessments than illuminating comparisons, while Vasseleu's own position is often quite difficult to see.

There is a recurrent difficulty in writing about Irigaray's work, arising from the way in which she weaves her own voice into the warp of other philosophical voices. One either focuses on the philosophers with whom she engages (thus missing Irigaray in order to clarify the other side of the conversation) or one focuses on Irigaray herself (but then one can miss the dialogue altogether). Vasseleu has opted for the first solution, and has certainly produced some very significant clarification, but in contrast, does not elaborate on her reading of Irigaray, which is quite sketchy. I was left feeling I would have liked to have had more discussion of the Irigarayan 'intervention', and to have heard Vasseleu's own voice emerging more strongly.

Textures of Light is a book for someone who already knows quite a bit about Irigaray, rather than for the beginner; it will be essential for serious students of Irigaray's work. I particularly appreciated the subtle counter-argument to Martin Jay's assessment of Irigaray in his *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (1993), where he reads Irigaray purely and simply as an anti-visual theorist—a reading which seems like a reworked version of the earlier and equally simplified criticism of Irigaray as an anti-rational theorist.

Margaret Whitford
Queen Mary and Westfield College
University of London

Embodied Practices: Feminist Perspectives on the Body

Kathy Davis (ed.), Sage 1997

h/b £40 0 7619 5362 0, p/b £13.99 0 7619 5363 9

The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty

Spivak

Donna Landry & Gerald MacLean (eds), Routledge 1996

h/b £50 0 415 91000 5, p/b £15.99 0 415 91001 3

Embodied Practices brings together a diverse collection of articles all of which have been published previously in *The European Journal of Women's Studies*, which is not, I think, widely noted for its contributions to feminist philosophy. Not surprisingly, then, although the book promises an eclectic range across both nationalities and disciplines, the major bias is towards sociology with very little acknowledgement of the important advances made in philosophical theory with respect to the body.

While Judith Butler does warrant a passing nod, major theorists like Elizabeth Grosz and a whole host of other Australian feminist philosophers who have put the body, and the embodied subject, at the centre of their research are almost entirely absent. Given feminism's commitment to the transdisciplinary production of knowledge, I find this rather depressing and certainly at odds with the book's claim to focus on the significance of the body in contemporary feminist scholarship. Nonetheless, in terms of a more narrowly defined social theory, there is much of interest.

The editor's introduction 'Embody-ing Theory' is among the most thought-provoking—as indeed is her own chapter on Orlan. Starting from the point that feminism has been responsible for the elevation of the body to the forefront of analysis, Davis sets out to trace the problematics of difference, domination and subversion that she sees as central to that concern. As she makes clear, whether the body is seen as originary or wholly constructed, the cultural and political practices of embodiment are never separable from those of power. Moreover, what feminism specifically underlines is that the theorist herself is never outside those practices, but is herself embodied.

It is here, however, that Davis sounds a warning in her claim that the body in theory remains a highly abstract concept, out of touch with the materiality of lived experience; and that feminism is insufficiently prepared to forego closure and explore instead the inherent contradictions of embodiment: dominance *and* resistance, biological matter *and* symbol, political *and* aesthetic object. More particularly she calls on theorists to embrace precisely those aspects of embodiment which most disturb us.

In this light, the chapters that follow exhibit mixed success. Several take an overtly empirical approach, which can be properly reflexive in the way Davis approves—as in Anne Aalten's study of the body of the female dancer which asks questions of performativity as well as of performance—or simply puzzling. Was there a deeper import to Edwards and McKie's apparently public policy approach to women's public toilets that I missed?

Two essays, by Rachel Bloul and Dubravka Zarkov respectively, which tackle the way in which women's bodies ground competing discourses around ethnicity and sexuality, work on

fairly familiar aspects of embodiment, while Gon Buurman bases her photo essay on erotic bodies on images of disability. Perhaps the most disturbing body is that of Orlan, whom Davis intriguingly notes may be less the deconstructor of identity, than a distinctly modernist subject exercising agency in the search for a self.

Where *Embodied Practices* left me feeling somewhat flat, *The Spivak Reader* was a real treat. I cannot claim to understand in detail everything that Spivak writes—and yet again I failed with ‘Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value’—but I find that her insights reward continual revisiting.

Given that Spivak's published books have been entirely devoted to collections of essays and interviews, the task for the editors here is to offer a coherent selection that makes sense of her intellectual project and offers something new. Landry and MacLean have succeeded by bringing together some very familiar pieces which develop core ideas, with previously uncollected journal articles, and a new interview in which Spivak rearticulates the question of the subaltern, and floats, but does not develop, the idea of ‘responsibility to Nature as alterity’ (p. 299). This final piece ‘Subaltern Talk’ is Spivak at her relaxed best—making unexpected connections, opening up new pathways as well as rereading old ones, engaging accessibly with her interviewers' questions, even offering a brief bibliography for students of subalternity. That aside, Spivak is often difficult, which makes the editorial interventions all the more welcome.

The strategy adopted by Landry and MacLean is to offer a good, clear introduction to the broad concerns that motivate Spivak's work, and then a short but well-focused explanatory note to each of the essays. The simple expedient of providing a handle allows the reader in each case to approach Spivak's material with some confidence, but without closing down on the deliberately unsettling possibilities of her text.

Spivak is well known for her engagement with pedagogical issues, for her desire to change how we read and ‘know’ the world, and how, specifically as teachers and students, we enter into the critique of liberal humanist discourses. Essays such as ‘How to Teach a “Culturally Different” Book’ engage directly with such concerns, while her extended and complex riff on

Derrida's *Limited Inc.*, 'Revolutions That as Yet Have No Model', offers at the end a specific challenge to those in the academy to rethink the ethico-political implications of reading.

What struck me with some force about this selection is the extent to which Spivak is always, and always has been, concerned with the ethical. Her early commitment to deconstruction—traced in the first five essays as they apply that critique to feminism, Marxism and cultural theory—perhaps masked that concern insofar as deconstruction itself was seen (wrongly) as hostile to ethical considerations. In retrospect, that criticism seems wildly adrift, and it should be no surprise that the ethico-political project of Spivak's later turn towards postcoloniality, multiculturalism and identity politics—taken up in the remaining essays—should be prefigured from the start.

If, as the editors suggest, Spivak's recent interest—theoretical and practical—in non-elite insurgency has lost her ground with the deconstructive philosophical establishment, then we can only suppose that that select club is losing touch with what Derrida calls the 'necessary possibility' of its own critique. As the *Reader* makes clear, Spivak—despite her own sometime reputation as a very high theorist indeed—will have none of it.

Margrit Shildrick
Staffordshire University

The Racial Contract

Charles W. Mills, Cornell University Press 1997

h/b £15.50 0 8014 3454 8

The Racial Contract is a short and accessible book that demonstrates how race becomes elided in Western moral and political philosophy. Indeed, as Mills rightly argues, the elision of race as a category is not incidental but structural to philosophical thinking. (p. 1) Such an elision is a reflection of who is doing philosophy—in the sense of who are the 'owners' and 'subjects' of philosophical knowledge:

standard textbooks and courses have for the most part been written and designed by whites, who take their racial privilege so much for granted that they do not see it as political, as a form of domination (p. 1).

The dominance of white European subjects in philosophy (white supremacy) is reproduced conceptually through the normalisation of white as both originary and human. Mills analyses how social contract theory is implicated in such a process of racialisation, whereby it is taken for granted that the persons who enter into the contract are white. The theory of the racial contract argues that the social contract is a historical reality which secures the white polity. At a more sophisticated level, Mills argues that it is through the racial contract that race becomes *constructed* as a category of differentiation (so 'white' becomes an epistemic position that is assumed throughout, rather than an epistemic way of being).

As such, the racial contract normalises and racialises space through demarcating civil and 'wild' spaces. It also establishes the category of the 'person', by taking a white male somatic body as the norm for the body politic, and by defining personhood, and the entry into civic society as the overcoming of the savage or native. Mills' argument examines how the 'othering' of the native is structural rather than incidental to the work of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Kant, as well as addressing the ways in which the contemporary moral and political philosophy of John Rawls and Robert Nozick 'rescripts' the racial contract by refusing to acknowledge the structuration of the social contract by race (p. 77).

However, despite this emphasis on the structuring role of racism in contractarian philosophies, Mills does suggest that contract theory can be corrected to become more racially inclusive. He 'criticises the social contract from a normative base', but does not see the 'ideals of contractarianism themselves as necessarily problematic'. Contract theory has 'been betrayed by white contractarians' (p. 129). I think Mills' argument is at its weakest here, since most of the book suggests how the 'ideals' themselves are already bound up with forms of social exclusion and othering. Relevant here is the material used in the book to demonstrate that the 'person' is defined against the 'subperson'—through a form of negation, a definition of 'who' or 'what' is *not* a person. In this sense, the ideal of personhood already defines its own betrayal. (This is another way of talking about the intimate relationship between humanism and violence.)

Most of my difficulties with the book and its theory of the 'racial contract' relate to the kind of approach it takes to the histories of colonialism and racism. While Mills does suggest that the 'racial contract' is always being re-written, and is dependent on histories of force and occupation, he also presents a rather reductive approach to those re-writings. Thus, he lists different atrocities—including violent practices against the bodies of Native Americans, Tasmanians, Jews, Japanese, Indians and Vietnamese—in support of his claim that the racial contract 'explains the actual astonishing historical record of European atrocity against nonwhites' (p. 98). Such an approach cannot do justice to the complex, contradictory and manifold nature of the histories involved.

This account is problematic, not simply because it involves a meta-narrative, but also because it implies that racism and colonialism have a single explanation—and, in that limited sense, cause. In some sense, Mill's work refers all forms of racism and colonialism back to a singular origin, that of the racial contract itself. By explaining such power relations simply through reference to the 'racial contract', Mill implies that racism and colonialism could be challenged simply through challenging the terms of the contract itself. Hence his argument leads to an extremely inadequate theorisation of resistance.

My other main anxiety about the book was that it positioned itself alongside Carole Pateman's *The Sexual Contract* (pp. 6–7). This suggests that the originary contract that provides the basis for civil society is a racial one, in much the same way that Pateman describes this contract as a sexual one. The reason I think this is problematic is precisely that it implies that race and gender are homologous forms of oppression. However, much recent Black feminist theory has argued that race and gender are mutually constitutive or simultaneous forms of oppression. Indeed, to position race and gender as homologous is also to make the position of Black women invisible.

Mills reflects on the influence of feminist philosophy (read 'white feminist philosophy') on his work, and engages with Black and post-colonial thinkers (read 'male Black and post-colonial thinkers'). His technique reminds me of the title of the well-known 1982 Black feminist anthology, *All the Women are White*,

All the Blacks are Men (ed. Gloria T. Hull et al.). Black feminists have already made strong critiques of such procedures. They have argued that white feminist philosophy erases the question of racial difference and that Black masculinist philosophy erases the question of sexual difference. As such, an engagement with black feminism would have hence strengthened Mills' book and complicated his terms of reference.

Despite these criticisms, I recommend this book as an important and timely reminder of the ways in which a philosophy which ignores race is bound up with the privileging of whiteness. This is a lesson that is still to be learnt, even within the context of feminist philosophy.

Sara Ahmed
University of Lancaster

Towards Justice and Virtue: A Constructive Account of Practical Reasoning

Onora O'Neill, Cambridge University Press 1996

h/b \$59.95 0 521 48095 7, p/b £12.95 0 521 48559 2

Towards Justice and Virtue challenges the rivalry between those who advocate only abstract, universal principles of justice and those who commend only the particularities of virtuous lives. Onora O'Neill traces this impasse to defects in underlying conceptions of reasoning about action. She takes politics and ethics as domains of activity which are guided by practical reasoning and successfully offers an account of what this means.

The argument begins by demonstrating why justice and virtue have been depicted as antagonists. O'Neill then goes on to demonstrate their compatibility. In an echo of ancient thinking, virtue and justice are discussed in parallel terms. This contrasts with universalist and particularist approaches to ethics that force a choice of commitment between justice and virtue. Her explanation for the divergence here is that these two approaches are influenced by the shared crisis of moral foundations exhibited by a suspicion of religion and metaphysical certainties. They are responses to social questions of monarchy, toleration, greed, dissent, and national loyalty, and are best seen as reactions to intellectual crises of modernity.

Defending justice, universalists orient ethical reasoning to universal principles that hold for all. Particularists—or 'friends of the virtues', as O'Neill calls them—anchor ethical claims by appeals to practices or traditions of particular communities. Rawls and Dworkin are given as examples of universalists. Particularists are more various, including new Aristotelian, Wittgensteinian, communitarian and feminist philosophers, among whom O'Neill names Benhabib, Cornell, Gilligan, Kittay, McMillan and Meyers.

What approach to ethical reasoning will overcome such a divergence between justice and virtue? O'Neill contrasts conceptions of practical reasoning geared toward Platonist objective ends, instrumental subjective ends, Kantian principles and particularist norms, and all are found wanting. Idealised premises of abstraction fail to capture agency in its fullness. For example, liberal theory often covertly assumes gendered 'male' ideals while claiming abstract gender-neutral concepts of the human agent. Abstraction is not necessarily a problem, unvindicated idealisation is.

How then 'are action-guiding conclusions to be constructed' (p. 44)? According to O'Neill, practical reasoning must be 'followable by others for whom it is to count as reasoning'. O'Neill's notion of practical reasoning 'identifies it with reliance on principles which can be principles for all, where the scope of "all" is taken to vary with context' (pp. 51–2). This is plausible: it accepts the need for universal principles and simultaneously incorporates the need for these principles to be situated and followable to make sense to specific others. Hence intelligibility is another criterion, especially since multiple, differing and dispersed audiences must be included in order for practical reasoning to be followable. To be capable of prescribing differentiated action, practical reason must also be prescriptive and able to warn against action.

O'Neill tries to defuse anxieties about universal principles by developing a constructivist ethics. Reasoning 'from *available* beginnings, using *available* and *followable* methods to reach *attainable* and *sustainable* conclusions for relevant audiences' (p. 63), she moves on to give an account of the scope, structure and context of ethical principles.

Her chapter exploring the scope of ethical consideration offers many insights. Three assumptions structure all activity and are relevant for fixing the scope of ethical consideration: there are others; these others are connected to the agent; and these others have limited powers. Where these three assumptions of plurality, connection and finitude exist there is a basis for determining which other agents we are committed to according ethical consideration.

O'Neill's principles of justice are cosmopolitan in scope, and geared toward inclusive considerations. All activity is structured by plurality, connection and vulnerable finitude. In reaching judgments about what to do in particular situations, agents have to elaborate abstract principles with the specifics articulated by law, economy, family and professional codes. The ethical weight of these specific requirements, rights, obligations and relationships rely on inclusive principles. The main obligation of justice is to reject direct injury to others in order to confirm plurality, connection and vulnerability at personal, institutional and ecological levels.

Moral status is crucial in bioethics, abortion debates and medical ethics. Thus, in cases dealing with foetuses, brain-dead, senile or demented patients there is a need to determine who is an agent and entitled to autonomous self-determination, and who is a subject and entitled to moral consideration. Given that women, along with children, dependents, immigrants, slaves, and culturally different individuals, are often denied full personhood, this chapter is also particularly relevant to feminist philosophy.

O'Neill's principles of virtue include: virtues of justice, toleration, respect, truthfulness, honesty; executive virtues of self-respect, self-control, decisiveness, courage, endurance; and social virtues of altruism, sympathy, beneficence. The main obligation of virtue is to reject indifference and neglect. The central constellations of virtue include: giving and showing concern and care directly to others; supporting trust and connection to sustain capabilities for action, communication and interaction; and preservative care for the material environment.

From a feminist philosopher's viewpoint, there are major negative and positive ramifications of this book. In a negative sense, O'Neill's references to feminists and to 'friends of the

virtues' are unsympathetic and overly simplistic. Few contemporary feminists advocate the dichotomous understanding of the 'male ethics of universal justice' and the 'female ethics of care' that O'Neill imputes to Gilligan. O'Neill bypasses completely the rich complexity of ongoing debate amongst feminist philosophers and others on the tensions, interrelationships and possible synthesis between justice and care, universality and particularity, and commonality and diversity.

In a positive sense, readers approaching the book from an explicitly feminist perspective can draw on themes in this book. *Towards Justice and Virtue* creates space for feminist theorists to articulate more explicitly what it might mean to talk of embodied action, distinctive agency, multiple capabilities, a justice that takes into account connectedness, and a care that is truly just. Plausible visions of life, action and politics require thinking about justice and virtue in tandem. As such, O'Neill offers substantive accounts of how to move toward just institutions and virtuous lives.

This is a tightly structured, carefully argued book. It is not a book to be perused casually; rather it invites sustained reflection. *Towards Justice and Virtue* is the culmination of years of pondering and writing on practical reasoning and is certainly worthy of serious consideration.

Elisabeth Porter
University of Ulster, Coleraine

Feminism and Ecological Communities: An Ethic of Flourishing

Chris J. Cuomo, Routledge 1998

h/b £40 0 415 15802 2, p/b £12.99 0 415 15806 0

This is more a book for the specialist than for the student. The committed environmentalist will value the intricacies of the discussion of a move beyond ecofeminism. The tone of concern for the oppressed is a welcome addition to concern for nature. Cuomo's ideas require a large canvas.

In her first pages, Cuomo outlines her theme of 'the similarities and connections between forms and instances of human oppression, including the oppression of women, and the degradation of nature'. She notes the problems of the object-attentive

approach which details similarities among objects of oppressive thought and action. This approach does not show that each oppression is different. Cuomo prefers an 'analysis of the ways oppressions function, the links and patterns among the treatment of oppressed, exploited or undervalued beings and entities' (p. 7). Although she considers and describes ecofeminism, her main emphasis is on 'ecological feminism as it ought to be'.

Thus, Cuomo has the admirable aim of demonstrating the interconnectedness of a concern for human beings, especially the oppressed, and a concern for nature. This interconnectedness is, for the most part, assumed. Those who care for their environment care for the poor and needy. The lack of interest in environmental matters among the oppressed themselves does not unduly delay Cuomo. She writes very much as the insider among environmentalists, and much of the book is taken up with distinguishing between the ecological feminist position that she favours and ecofeminism, Deep Ecology, and so forth. Cuomo's contribution would be more interesting if the reader had prior knowledge of the programmes of these groups.

The first chapter deals with the ecofeminist project. Ecofeminists believe that both woman and nature are essentially feminine, and that both are subject to phallogocratic regimes of power and destruction. A convincing example of the connection between damage to women and damage to nature is that of the poor African-American women and children who suffer from the toxic waste of manufacturing plants situated near their living areas.

Cuomo then distinguishes her writing from ecofeminism in that she prefers an anti-essentialist position which conceives of woman and nature as socially created concepts. Although she thinks that traditional ideas of women as close to nature can be helpful, she is concerned to respond to fallacious, fixed notions of culture, nature, gender and race. She favours virtue ethics which provide a 'socially embedded notion of the good life.'

The Aristotelian slant of Cuomo's ethical thinking is developed in her enthusiasm for flourishing. 'A defining feature of ecological feminism is a commitment to flourishing or well-being of individuals, species, communities' (p. 62). She stresses that human flourishing is interconnected with the flourishing of all living beings and systems. She writes of the 'dynamic charm' of

living beings. Dynamic charm is not an immutable Aristotelian essence but a capacity to adjust to change.

Cuomo wishes to remove the teleological focus of Aristotelian thinking and yet retain the ethic of flourishing. It is difficult to follow her argument here. The acorn can only flourish, in the Aristotelian sense, towards becoming an oak tree. The good person can only flourish towards a concept of virtue. Aristotle's ethics cannot be sliced in this arbitrary way. In her attempt to be non-authoritarian, Cuomo has moved away from the ethics she is purportedly espousing.

Cuomo's objections to the animal rights ethicists Singer and Regan come from her dislike of the concept of the assumed solitary moral agent who extends his consideration to all sentient beings. She values the holism of Aldo Leopold in whose *Land Ethic* each of us is a 'plain member and citizen of the land'. However, she has reservations about the attitude to humans of the Deep Ecologists. She charges them with focusing on the biotic community rather than social justice. 'Surely self-centredness, corporate greed, ethnocentrism, militarism and rationalism result more directly in questionable environmental practices than does anthropocentrism?' (p. 107). Cuomo is not frightened here, or elsewhere in the book, of either a polemical tone or the charge of in-fighting.

The closing chapters reprise the arguments about ecofeminism and essentialism. Cuomo focuses on ecological diversity as a value in ecological feminism as contrasted with the arguments for unity of nature from the ecofeminists. She calls for an activism against oppression drawn from Dewey-inspired 'thoughtful practice' ranging from recycling and vegetarianism to work against sexual assault and against racism. She is calling for 'a multifaceted decentred loud empowering ecological feminist activist movement' (p. 148).

Cuomo does not mention the work of Monique Wittig. I would have welcomed some discussion of her ideas which oppose the notion of women as a natural group, a group perceived as natural in favour of a materialist feminism. This omission is significant. There is a deeper level of debate available to feminists interested in questions of nature/culture.

Liz Mitchell
Canterbury Christ Church University College

The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourse

Oyeronke Oyewumi, University of Minnesota Press 1997

h/b £38 0 8166 2440 2, p/b £15 0 8166 2441 0

According to Oyeronke Oyewumi, pre-colonial Yoruba society was never ranked according to anatomical difference; rather, hierarchies were determined by the relational and non-essentialised category of seniority (based on relative age). This book aims to show how and why the concept of gender was constructed in the Yoruba society of South West Nigeria. It also sets out to demonstrate the extent to which gender operates as a hegemonic category of analysis in academic studies on the Yoruba.

Gender is not, Oyewumi argues, a universal category since, before colonisation, the social categories of 'women' and 'men' did not exist in Yorubaland. Through an examination of Yoruba language, institutions and historiography, Oyewumi challenges the conclusions of Africanist and feminist scholars who fail to recognise that gender relations are social relations and therefore historically and culturally situated. According to Oyewumi, the feminist assumption that 'woman' is a universal category contradicts the feminist notion that gender is a social construct, since the social organisation of one culture (a Western one) cannot be read as a universal model. Moreover, Oyewumi rejects the feminist distinction between 'sex' and 'gender' on the basis that, in the Western world, an anatomical body is always a social one.

Central to Oyewumi's argument is the concept of 'invented tradition', a term which invokes the reinvention of the past in order to reflect the present. The history of Yorubaland, writes Oyewumi, has been created through a process of inventing gender traditions. Since Yoruba 'women' did not exist as a category before colonisation and written history, it is inaccurate to present them as subordinated by 'men'. Just as the British colonial system in Nigeria reduced females to the status of 'women', making them ineligible for leadership roles, so historians and translators have imposed the category of gender on Yoruba society and language, creating distinctions and divisions where none previously existed.

Feminism is criticised for its tendency to universalise and, in particular, for its ethnocentric application of the key terms 'patriarchy' and 'women' to non-Western societies and cultures in the

world. It is the 'Western feminist international' that is criticised in this book. Paraphrasing Denise Riley, Oyewumi states that 'the challenge of feminism is how to proceed from the gender-saturated category of "women" to the "fullness of an unsexed humanity"' (p. 156). The 'gender saturation' of the world is blamed on Western feminism, colonisation and the United Nations, all of which have 'institutionalised and systematised on a worldwide basis a particular Western way of viewing the human body' (p. 177).

The value of this book lies in the way it forces the Western feminist reader to rethink the tools with which she analyses the world. Unfortunately, it reads too much like a doctoral thesis (which it was) in that it is rather laboured and repetitive at times. Although the author is apparently aware of these problems when she writes, 'as I have demonstrated repeatedly above' (p. 77), the repetition continues. A less heavy-handed style would have been better suited to what is often a subtle and thought-provoking thesis.

Nicki Hitchcott
University of Nottingham

The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt

Seyla Benhabib, Sage 1996

h/b £31 0 8039 3816 0, p/b £15.50 0 8039 3817 9

Hannah Arendt poses a major problem for feminist readers: one of the very few women to successfully enter the political theory canon, she not only explicitly eschewed feminism, but rooted her theories in distinctions between public/private, political/social, and action/work/labour in ways which are hard to justify—and which also seem to confine most women to spheres which she considered less than fully human. At the same time she was deeply committed to the paramount importance of every person's right to be a member of a polity.

In *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, Seyla Benhabib dismisses two equally unprofitable approaches to this problem: the 'self-righteous dogmatism of latecomers', exemplified by Adrienne Rich's branding of Arendt as a male-identified female, and 'disinterested historicism', which requires that one understand a work within the context of its genesis in ways which make it irrelevant to our own times.

Instead Benhabib offers an approach which interrogates Arendt with 'the women's question' to the fore, aiming to develop Arendtian ideas in order to further our understanding of our own times and problems. Thus she offers us a conversation with Arendt, initially focussed on areas generally considered at the margins of her thought. This leads Benhabib to use Arendtian ideas contra Arendt, ultimately rethinking Arendt's political theory, so that it contributes to contemporary social and political projects. This makes it both a fascinating and demanding read, definitely not for those seeking an introductory elucidation of a difficult thinker, and perhaps offering more to feminist theory than to Arendtian scholarship.

For Benhabib, the women's question is that of how to maintain both a commitment to universal principles of justice and equality and a respect for difference, diversity and particularity. She finds the same concern in Arendt, focussed primarily on the issue of Jewishness in her earlier writings on Rahel Varnhagen and Jewish politics. She uses the ideas that she finds in these writings to illuminate and critique the (by now) notorious distinctions of Arendt's later works, finally appropriating them for the project of restructuring public and private spheres in contemporary society.

Benhabib develops her thesis by arguing that the *salons* discussed in *Rahel Varnhagen* suggest that humans can create public spaces where they can appear in all their social and cultural differences. A public place for pariahs. Using Habermas, she extends this idea to that of the creation of a civil society, in opposition to the state, as a public space and point of possible political regeneration. Throughout these chapters, Benhabib successfully demonstrates that Arendt had a far more complex view of the emergence of modern society and the state than is often presumed on the basis of the simplified distinctions of *The Human Condition*. Arendt did not simply hark back to a Greco-Roman past.

In the process we are given extremely useful analyses of the different things that Arendt meant by 'social'. But despite this, here as throughout the book, I felt that Benhabib had failed to grasp the full force of Arendt's critique of the way that 'society' destroys politics, by substituting (in contemporary terms) life-

style 'politics' (i.e. behaviour) for speech and action. The claustrophobia and quick collapse of the *salons* as described by Arendt illuminate the dangers behind the promise of taking society (and, possibly, movement politics) as the focus of our political attention. We are also given compelling evidence for Arendt's thesis that the critical error that the Jews made was to confuse social acceptance or alternatively artistic and intellectual pre-eminence with political inclusion. One of our questions must be: what inferences should feminists draw from that collapse?

Benhabib's concern with civil society is motivated by several considerations. Firstly, she finds a list of conflicting demands in Arendt: political universalism, egalitarian civil and political rights for all citizens, non-conformism and the expression of pariahdom in social and cultural life, and a call for a recovery of the public world which is anti-statist. Benhabib demands: where is the growth of a political sphere which will revitalize public life and not strengthen the state to take place, if not in civic and associational society?

Benhabib's approach fits with what she has learnt from Habermas about the importance of public space and the way in which modernity generated such spaces (through the press, the political clubs etc.). It also enables Benhabib to develop the public/private distinction along attitudinal lines, using Arendt's notions of judgment and enlarged mentality understood as cognitive ability to think with others and to take into account their many different perspectives on a problem. It is this attitude which transforms narrow (private) self-interest into a common interest; this which can only be achieved by speaking and listening with others; this which represents an 'authentic political attitude'. Thus Benhabib is able to argue for a revitalisation of public life through the generation of such an attitude throughout a variety of spheres: intimate, economic etc. We might thus rekindle our capacity for utopian thought.

It is difficult to do justice to the rich texture of Benhabib's argument and interpretation, which is a magisterial dialectic between modernity and existentialism, reformism and utopianism, and fundamentalism and perspectivalism. Some of the best passages in the book discuss Arendt's appropriation of Heidegger's ideas for her own project of understanding both the

rise of totalitarianism and the possibility of avoiding this fate. But Benhabib's interpretations of Arendt are often contentious, and strongly informed by her own agenda.

The more sympathetic you feel towards Benhabib's own social theory, the more justifiable this appropriation of Arendt will appear. This method of reading the classics has much to recommend it for those who want to take contemporary feminist (or social) theory forward. But the dangers are obvious. The more that we appropriate other thinkers for our own purposes, the more difficult it becomes for us to hear their otherness, and for their distinctive perspectives to inform and inspire. There is a certain irony in noting this danger in a text committed to developing theory so that difference is included.

Thus, for example, Benhabib emphasises Arendt's references to universal rights (together with the complexity of her account of the rise of modernity), in order to demonstrate that she was a modernist, albeit a reluctant one, given the generation of loneliness and worldlessness which makes totalitarianism an ever-present possibility. Benhabib then takes Arendt to task for failing to provide an adequate foundation for these rights.

But it is arguable that Arendt was an anti-foundationalist, that she saw the crucial right as that of citizenship, and, for that to be secure, the need for well-founded political *institutions*, where the attitudes Benhabib describes could be demonstrated. Arendt grounds this in her view of the human condition, a condition which could be permanently altered by the changes being wrought by modernity. Benhabib is aware of all this, indeed discusses it, with the exception of the final claim about the human condition. For the latter makes it possible to read Arendt as a tragedian of the human condition, and fits ill with the optimistic faith in progressive social change which characterises Benhabib's time and place.

Notwithstanding these criticisms, Benhabib's book remains one of the most stimulating of the recent spate of books on Arendt, whilst making a genuine contribution to the discussion of how we might begin to regenerate our political engagement.

Anne Sellar
University of Kent

The Politics of (M)Othering: Womanhood, Identity and Resistance in African Literature

Obioma Nnaemeka (ed.), Routledge 1997

h/b £40 0 415 13789 6, p/b £13.99 0 415 13790 X

There is an uneasiness which often seems to surface in relation to the 'application' of Western theory to African texts. The editor of *The Politics of (M)Othering* evokes this unease when she 'calls' to critics of African literature 'not to wander too far afield into all brands of epistemologies, theories, and methodologies that have little or no relevance to African literary texts as *cultural* productions' (p. 190, n. 21).

Despite this editorial warning, however, most of the contributors to this volume—writing about anglophone and francophone African literature—are preoccupied with recognisable epistemological issues, including the place of feminist theory in the study of African literature. In effect, many contributors are arguing against the dangers of a kind of 'orientalism' in Western feminist critique, in which the power-knowledge nexus would continue to effect its operations on Africa, but now in a feminist key. The contributors all appear to be based in North America—this helps to contextualise the 'Western feminism' they have in mind.

Among the multifarious themes and detailed analysis of texts, several interconnected issues stand out. One is the question of identity. It is claimed that 'Western progressive critical discourse ... too readily assumes a collective identity' when dealing with the non-Western Other (p. 70). The now-familiar argument concerning multiple identifications and multiple subject-positions is extended here to non-Western writers. From this it follows that neither the West nor Africa (any more than individual Europeans or individual Africans) is a self-contained, culturally hermetic entity. As a result, the tradition/modernity binary, in which the West represents modernity and Africa represents tradition, becomes unstable in turn.

Several contributors argue for the need to outgrow these binary oppositions, which are both gendered and ahistorical. However, 'the problem of how to specify cultural dissidence remains' (p. 70), since ambiguity is in the nature of the historical process. Hence the need to allow women to be part of this

process and not confined to the mythical 'nature' represented by motherhood (more on this below).

The question of identity is linked to that of authenticity, which still has a certain attraction. As Trinh Minh-ha puts it:

The search for an identity is, therefore, usually a search for that lost, pure, true, real genuine, original, authentic self, often situated within a process of elimination of all that is considered other, superfluous, fake, corrupted, or Westernized (p. 149).

Western feminists may feel that they have largely abandoned the quest for the authentic self as an intelligible goal, but the issues arise again through displacement in relation to non-Western countries.

One way of putting it would be to say that Western critics *need* authentic spokeswomen to legitimate their 'knowledge' about other cultures (p. 14), so that authenticity is still, albeit covertly, a Western problem. Yet another way of looking at it is indicated by several of the contributors who describe themselves as Third-World women living and working in the West. They describe the impossible situation in which they find themselves, expected to be 'authentic' spokeswomen for their culture and society. If they defend any of its 'traditions', they may be rejected by western feminists as being not progressive enough. If they criticise any of its traditions, they may be rejected by their compatriots as being contaminated by the West. As the editor suggests: 'The *authentic* voice is faced with the dilemma of figuring out how to produce a counterdiscourse to the discursive territorial usurpation of Eurocentric discourse without monopolising her own sisters' discursive field' (p. 164).

It's as though feminism requires a victim, and if Western feminists reject victimology for themselves, they have to find victims somewhere else. Several contributors reject passionately this hypostatisation of the victim position, arguing that it does not do justice to the complexities of resistance, subversive identities, or agency. It is another version of the failure to allow non-Westerners —whether heroines in books or real-life women—to have a multi-faceted identity. 'Agency and victimhood are not mutually exclusive' (p. 3); 'the line between resistance and accommodation is sometimes a difficult one to draw' (p. 40).

In this context, one might compare the editor's provocative comment that: 'It is unthinkable in [Western feminist] discourse that African women actually *choose* to have co-wives and some *choose* to be circumcised' (p. 167), with the Western arguments over women's choice to have cosmetic surgery, seen variously as a degraded act of false consciousness or as a liberating act of taking control. The contributors argue for the right to similar ambiguity and debate in an African context.

The linked issues of identity, authenticity and search for origins are connected with the tropes of Mother Africa/Motherland/Mother Tongue, tropes 'which pervade the literature, language question, and nationalist discourse in Africa' (p. 2), and are in turn connected with the desire for a sphere of nature outside the historical process. Women writers—who are, of course, more immediately involved in questions of real-life motherhood than the mythical variety—have a take on motherhood that is more complicated and contradictory than the mythologies, which are deeply ahistorical. Here too there is an attempt to disconnect the almost automatic equation of African 'motherhood' with 'victimhood'. The editor urges the reader 'to see knowledge, power and agency in the margins' (p. 2), by historicising African motherhood, and confronting the nostalgic appeal to 'nature' which continues to underpin nationalist rhetoric.

Above all, knowledge construction is linked to story-telling, and fiction by African women to epistemological endeavour which, it is argued, contests the mythologies and fictions created by both Western critics and African male critics. An argument is made for the epistemological value of counter-fictions in which literature constructively re-writes and re-narrates social contexts.

You do not need to be a specialist in African literature to get something out of this collection, which should persuade the reader to (re)turn to the real thing, that is, the often spiky, unexpected, and unsentimental fictional work of African women writers.

Margaret Whitford
Queen Mary and Westfield College
University of London

Philosophy and the Maternal Body

Michelle Boulous Walker, Routledge 1998

h/b £45 0 415 16857 0, p/b £13.99 0 415 16858 9

This book attempts to tackle the silence surrounding maternity in Western culture. To attempt to theorise the subjectivity and desire of the mother, who, as this book shows, has been systematically obliterated from the dominant symbolic order and reduced to silence, is—in my thinking—the most urgent task facing psychoanalytic feminism today. The claim of the book is that it is through their association with maternity that women are most effectively silenced.

In identifying the maternal body as the site of 'radical silence in texts of western philosophy, psychoanalytic theory and literature', the author places herself in close proximity to the work of Luce Irigaray. The denial or repression of the debt to the maternal body and the simultaneous appropriation of the maternal reproductive function is identified as the process through which patriarchal culture operates and sustains itself. Matricide as the pivotal crime around which masculinist rationalist discourse is constructed is the powerful insight delivered to us by Irigaray, with whom this author is intellectually aligned.

Walker adopts the diagnostic language of psychoanalysis to interpret the phantasies at work in the male imaginary which, she argues, work to silence women. She identifies the male desire to give birth alone, and argues that it provides the primary phantasy structure of the western masculine imaginary. Psychoanalysis itself is said to be the 'brain child' of Freud. Freud—who, as the author says, was self-analysed—gave birth to psychoanalysis alone, while the theory occults the position of the mother, thus manifesting the repression which lies at the root of Western culture.

While I agree that the phantasy of the male generative capacity *is* one which is strongly resonant—one thinks of the myth of Zeus giving birth to Athena through his head—the case of Freud is over-simplified here, since his early women patients were instrumental in the creation of psychoanalysis. To consider Freud as an incarnation of omnipotent Zeus giving birth through his head becomes an instance of obscuring the vital part that collaboration played in Freud's creation of psychoanalysis.

It is, however, when the author begins to argue that psychoanalytic theory is an 'elaborate psychotic hallucination' (because in 'foreclosing the mother, Freud gives birth to himself in the form of his own brain child'), that my own sympathies begin to wane. Diagnosing psychoanalytic theory as a 'psychotic hallucination' sounds like a travesty of the ambiguities and complexities at the heart of psychoanalysis. To fix psychoanalysis as a pure manifestation of the masculine imaginary is an absolutist move which actually misses the radical potential in psychoanalysis which *itself* subverts one-dimensional readings. It is precisely the author's employment of the diagnostic term 'psychosis' that signals the faultlines in her critique.

Walker utilises the model of psychosis as a way of 'reading silence' in texts of western philosophy, literature and psychoanalysis; rather than speaking of denial or repression in terms of what is silenced in a text, suddenly we are in the psychotic realm. Such a strategy immediately sets off a warning siren in my mind. To 'read silence through the structure of psychosis' at first seems a somewhat paradoxical undertaking, since I had assumed psychosis to be a condition which has foreclosed on the symbolic. Bringing psychosis into the picture as a way of reading is a daring and innovative move, since one is used to thinking about psychosis as precisely the failure of symbolic functioning. But the author wishes to disrupt such oppositional notions as inside and outside symbolic functioning—and does this by introducing psychosis as a 'reading strategy'.

Walker turns around the Lacanian model that posits psychosis as the refusal of the paternal metaphor and instead says that it is the foreclosing of the maternal function that characterises psychosis. Such a move immediately undoes the relationship between psychosis and symbolic foreclosure, and the reader is left wondering what she believes the category of psychosis to refer to. Walker then attempts to explain what psychosis is, and it is when one reads her definition that the warning sirens are confirmed as valid. Although the author registers that psychosis denotes 'such extreme states as schizophrenia, manic depression and paranoia, as well as a range of hypochondriacal, obsessional and narcissistic disorders', she also broadens the definition:

I shall argue that psychosis represents a much broader state; it constitutes the parameters of so-called normal masculine identity. This understanding of normal psychosis is defined by a masculine desire to be, or stand in for, the mother.

What kind of work is the author asking the category of psychosis to perform when in effect she has collapsed it into the normal? One wants to ask: why not just critique 'normal masculine identity'? Walker obliterates, in fact, any theory of psychosis by conflating it with normal masculinity. But psychosis is *always* an extreme state. Whilst the insight of psychoanalysis has shown that the absolute division between psychosis and normality cannot be sustained, it is also careful not to abolish the precarious distinction between them.

We may well ask, as Walker does, what is the difference between Schreber and Freud? In the author's terms there is no difference. But Freud is able to symbolise Schreber's phantasy; he is able to position himself in such a way as to name it, think about it, and retain a sense of its divorce from reality, whereas Schreber inhabits it, believes in it, lives it. To 'broaden out' the state of psychosis to such an extent results in abolishing all meaning from the term so that it comes to mean everything and nothing.

That Walker comes up with the term 'normal psychosis' is an indication of this confused theorising. The protest at the sequestering of the mother into the realm of psychosis—outside Lacan's paternal symbolic—is rightly felt, but what results is a simple reversal: 'It's them that are psychotic, not us.'

The central tenet of Walker's argument is that it is women who are silenced through the site of the maternal body. This argument is undoubtedly powerful, but the rewriting and use of 'psychosis' cannot be convincingly sustained. However, as an introduction to one of the central problematics facing contemporary psychoanalytic feminism, this book plunges us straight into the troubled heart of an important and unresolved debate.

Amber Jacobs
University of Sussex

Maternal Ethics and Other Slave Moralities

Cynthia Willett, Routledge 1997

h/b £42.50 0 415 91209 1, p/b £13.99 0 415 91210 5

Although the title suggests a Nietzschean disdain for maternal ethics, Cynthia Willett's book is in fact an attempt to transvalue Nietzsche's own values on this point 'by retelling the story of freedom from the point of view of those who have been systematically marginalized, i.e., the "slaves" of history' (p. 4). Willett's claim is to have found, in a reconsideration of maternity, child-rearing and child development, and in the slave narratives of Frederick Douglass (1817-95), a conception of selfhood and freedom at odds with the dominant Western philosophical accounts of these latter.

In Parts I and II, concerned with pre-natal maternity and the psycho-social development of the child in relation to its carers, Willett's main argument asserts the pre-discursive origins of sociality in order to contest the idea that the fundamental terms of social exchange lie in linguistic structures. This idea, according to Willett, assumes (mistakenly) a privileged role for a disembodied, rational consciousness; a 'fuller' conception of the origins of sociality would, on the other hand, begin in the womb, where 'the fetus participates in the rhythms and tones of subject-less sociality' (p. 18), the foetal kick and the maternal caress of the belly being read as 'step[s] in a dance between mother and child' (p. 32).

Drawing inspiration from Luce Irigaray, Willett's account emphasises the hands-on role of the parental caress in shaping the emergent subjectivity of the infant. Willett seeks to counteract what she sees as an excessively logocentric philosophical discourse of selfhood and to reassert 'the social force of the mother in the construction of the infant self' (p. 65) against, for example, the alleged reduction of the mother to the function of mirror in Lacanian psychoanalysis.

In Part III, Willett once again affirms the origins of sociality in the expressive, non-discursive 'erotics' of music and dance. Reading Frederick Douglass as both indebted to and critical of an Hegelian narrative of freedom and selfhood, Willett applauds Hegel's location of self-consciousness and freedom in the sphere of the social. At the same time, Douglass' personal account of his

struggle for freedom and a non-alienated sense of self through resistance to the slavebreaker stands as a corrective to the Hegelian sublation of the master-slave dialectic in ascetic retreat.

Citing Douglass' animal metaphors as evidence, Willett finds in Douglass' narratives a conception of self and of freedom that avoids the dichotomies (Hegelian or otherwise) that legitimise or seek to justify continued oppressions based on sex and race. What is avoided are the dichotomies—between the animal and the human, nature and spirit, and between desire and reason—that 'propel the pathologies of European and Euro-American culture' (p. 146)

The biggest problem in Willett's text is a confusion concerning the status of the discourses with which she engages and, indeed, which she produces. Willett reads Hegel, Lacan and Levinas in particular as offering descriptive, developmental accounts of the emergence of subjectivity, and takes issue with these accounts in those terms. To this end, she seems to be offering what she takes to be a more adequate descriptive psychology or phenomenology as a corrective to these biased accounts. An early comment (p. 4) suggests a commitment to something analogous to feminist standpoint theory, but her position remains untheorised and begs some very important questions.

If Willett's alternative account is claiming to describe how the self and then subjectivity *actually* develops, in opposition to false patriarchal/logocentric/Eurocentric accounts, then one might legitimately ask, where's the problem? If this is how subjectivity is, surely false philosophy may go hang itself? If, on the other hand, philosophical accounts are, to a greater or lesser degree, influential on or determining of subjectivity (and only this assumption explains why one would bother with them), then Willett is forced to postulate a true or authentic self (the one she describes) waiting to be liberated from these perverted accounts, and the perverted false or inauthentic selves to which they give rise. As it is, the question of the relation between conceptions of selfhood and lived selfhood is never explicitly addressed, and much of what Willett says appears to relate indiscriminately to either or both without adequately distinguishing between the two.

At other times, Willett characterises the better self she describes as an ideal model to be imitated; a description, then,

not of what *is*, but of what *ought to be*, which is a very different proposition. The failure to distinguish between these two registers is, then, responsible for the illusion, seemingly foundational in this text, that there is some necessary connection between descriptive phenomenology and ethics or between phenomenology and progressive politics, that phenomenology will necessarily uncover the good.

The more general uncertainty surrounding the status of Willett's discourse also means that her invocation of maternity will be extremely problematic for many readers. Despite protestations to the contrary, as a description of the mother-child relation Willett's account is idealised (no abusive or neglectful mothers here), thus suggesting it be taken, figuratively, as a model for parents and non-parents alike. Elsewhere, however, explicit claims about child development and the role of the parent indicate that this is meant to be an empirical psychology, one in which the conflation of the feminine and the maternal is irresistible, and one which tends, therefore, towards a prescriptive conservatism. One wonders, for example, how abortion is to be thought in relation to the dance of the foetal self, and whether the 'more viable conception of self ... discovered in the joys of fertility' (p. 85) is available to non-breeders too.

All in all, then, it is hard not to be sympathetic to Willett's feminist and anti-racist motivations, but this is precisely why one would want to insist on the rigorous development of these ideas in the face of hard-headed criticism. In philosophy, as elsewhere, wishing and good will alone will not make it so.

Stella Sandford

University of North London

Female Genesis: Creativity, Self and Gender

Nicole Ward Jouve, Cambridge, Polity Press; St Martin's 1998

h/b £49.50 0 7456 1681 X, p/b £13.95 0 7456 1682 8

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Can we engender ourselves, as creators, without making another human being, of a different sex or colour, subservient to us? Perhaps a utopian question ...

Yet Nicole Ward Jouve hopes to answer 'yes' to it. Her book aims to define or imagine a creative identity that includes 'a bisexual-

ity much more fundamental than the sex/gender of whom we desire', invoking to this end the images of fathers and mothers, and often drawing on psychoanalytic thought (more Jung and Winnicott than Freud or Lacan).

The introductory essay, 'Male and Female Created (S)he Them', harks back to seventies feminist questioning of male myths of creativity, disputing postmodern deconstructions of the term 'woman'. This is followed by 'In Father's Lack'—a dig at Jacques Lacan—which offers several essays. These include close readings of a Balzac novel, essays on the First World War, D. H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf—and—brilliantly—of the case of the Papin sisters, two maids who murdered their mistress and her daughter, examining how this act of female violence is (mis)read by male surrealists.

The second half of the book, 'Troublesome Mothers', deals with problematic representations of the maternal. There is a fine elegiac essay questioning (and finally forgiving) Angela Carter's repudiations of the mother. This is followed by another on 'Can the Mother Write Poetry?' and, finally, the lyrical/theoretical 'Metaphor and Narrative' which meditates on the gendering of language and the terms in which creativity can be thought. Conceding feminist and Derridean critiques of the 'white mythology' implicit in dead metaphors, Ward Jouve nevertheless envisages language as a means of access to the often-denied creative maternal principle.

Drawing on Winnicott's notion of the 'transitional object' as a psychic space which 'gives room for the process of being able to accept difference and similarity', she argues that metaphors of the maternal body (shells, oranges, tongues) constitute possibilities for creative play. Although she illustrates this part of her argument with examples from women writers, she finds that language finally 'belongs' to both sexes and neither. This point is emphasised in the conclusion to the book which reformulates 'Genesis' as 'Male and Female Created They Them'.

Female Genesis is a humane, theoretically sophisticated, elegantly written, self-aware book. Ward Jouve is a generous, patient critic, not mincing her words when discussing misogyny and violence, yet always prepared to learn from writers even when sharply disagreeing with them (as in her perceptive account of D.

H. Lawrence). And yet for all the book's intelligent perception, I felt oddly enclosed by the arguments whose self-questioning, meditative ponderings always came back to re-interpreting the feminist canon.

Reading *Female Genesis* is not unlike listening to a series of very good, sophisticated, introductory lectures on feminist literary criticism; the exposition is a pleasure to follow, the literary illustrations aptly chosen, and the interpretations subtle and instructively many-layered, drawing intelligently on the writings of Kristeva, Ricoeur, Cixous and Winnicott. If the student audience ever questioned or disagreed, their queries have been recuperated seamlessly into the lecturer's discourse—just as she has appropriated 'French theory' into the English liberal humanist tradition of close reading of canonical texts.

And this perhaps explains my unease, for I think these intellectual traditions are more contradictory than Ward Jouve, with her love of balance and reconciliation, wants to know. Her method of examining, for instance, the question 'Can the mother write poetry?' through particular examples of women's texts, suggests that we can have our psychoanalytic/feminist cake and eat it in ways. But her explanation leaves me feeling doubtful. Ward Jouve surveys the textual notion of the mother's body, the invocation of the mother in multiple, contradictory ways by poetic sons and daughters, examining a fine collection of particular examples—which lead her to conclude that the general question was invalid. Once you start looking closely, you find the 'Mother' dissolving into mothers writing poems.

Yes, but if the question itself was wrong (and I agree it was), then what was the point of asking it, other than taking the audience round the arguments and examples? Similarly, the question about the ethics of creativity quoted at the start of this review is problematically 'utopian' in the sense that, speaking from no (defined) place, it presupposes agreement by speaking for 'us', but doesn't say who 'we' are supposed to be.

Janet Montefiore
University of Kent

Self-Generation: Biology, Philosophy and Literature Around 1800

Helmut Müller-Sievers, Stanford University Press 1997

h/b £30 0 8047 2779 1

The themes of gender and sexual reproduction run throughout this book. Helmut Müller-Sievers tells us, for example, that 'Preformationism is the proper scientific theory behind the practice of arranged marriages in the eighteenth century' (p. 30). By contrast, the author positions epigenesis as 'inseparably linked to what some have called the "classical" philosophy of gender' (p. 29) and as intimately linked to the 'ideology of love-based marriages' (p. 15).

The book starts with the claim that there were two theories of biological growth in competition around 1800. The 'preformationists' asserted that the germs of all living beings were preformed and had been since the Creation. Some preformationists claimed these germs were scattered through nature. More standardly, preformationists claimed that 'germs were encapsulated in one another like Russian dolls' (p. 27). Either the first male (Adam) carried the seed for all subsequent generations within his semen (this was 'animalculism'), or the first woman (Eve) carried all the embryos of all future human beings in her ovaries (this was 'ovism'). For animalculists and ovists, a person would have the same offspring whoever she or he mated with. This is the grounds for Müller-Sievert's link between arranged marriages and preformationism: both involve a separation of 'generation' and 'choice', and 'sexuality' and 'love'.

By contrast, epigenesis is the theory that organisms 'generate themselves successively under the guidance of a formative drive' (p. 3). Aristotle is presented as the progenitor of epigenesis, with his account of the male 'formal cause' (conveyed by the male semen) being impressed on the material cause (the menstrual blood) provided by the female. Müller-Sievers' book opens by charting the changes in the biological theories of the eighteenth century that allowed epigenesis to regain predominance, having 'been widely accepted until the beginning of the seventeenth century' and having subsequently fallen into disrepute (p. 26). The link which Müller-Sievers seeks to establish between epigenesis and love-based marriages fails because there is nowhere an ade-

quate analysis of the apparently misogynist aspects of Aristotelian and epigenetic theory.

In chapter 1 Müller-Sievers analyses the passage in the second edition of *The Critique of Pure Reason* (B167–8) in which Kant contrasts 'the *epigenesis* of pure reason' with a 'kind of *preformation system* of pure reason' (p. 46). This argument is pursued in chapter 2 which offers fascinating detail on Kant's 'transcendental deduction' of the categories, but surprisingly little that could relate to the controversial claims about the ideological dimensions of the competing biological theories.

Chapter 3 explores the way that epigenesis operates in Fichte's philosophy. Müller-Sievers seeks to establish a 'tight connection between postcritical epigenetic approaches and misogyny' (p. 82). He seeks to link Fichte's claim that women could not in general wish to exercise their human and civic rights with the drive towards passivity that is decreed by her role in sexual reproduction (pp. 86–7). Here there is lots of intriguing detail, but the argument moves too quickly for the reader to properly follow the logic of the steps.

In Chapter 4 Müller-Sievers indicates that he fears that the sceptical reader might regard him as offering a 'paranoid narrative' of the links between 'epigenetic natural philosophy, Fichtean idealism, philosophy, the politics of gender, Humboldt's philosophy of language, violence, and silence' (p. 120). However, this chapter does not so much offer a paranoid narrative, as a narrative that fails through omission of grounding evidence. Thus, there is a strong use of labels ('phonocentrism', 'logocentrism') and emotive descriptions, but these often serve to mask lack of detail in the argument. Fichte is criticised for being 'xenophobic' and 'provincial' (p. 103), whereas Herder fares even worse and is accused of 'suffocating rhetorical bombast' and 'deliberate' confusions in his 'abominable', 'reprehensible' and 'irritating' critique of Kant (pp. 97, 100).

The final chapter (ch. 5) explores the treatment of marriage and love in Beaumarchais's *Mariage de Figaro* and Goethe's *Wahlverwandschaften* (*Elective Affinities*). But the links that Müller-Sievers finds between arranged marriages and preformationism, on the one hand, and epigenesis and romantic love, on the other hand, become no clearer. If 'ovism' was the dominant variety of

preformationsim by mid-eighteenth century (as is claimed), how does this fit with the concern that in arranged marriages the family inheritance should be secured through male lineages? Furthermore, if epigenesis was the dominant view during the medieval and Renaissance periods (as is also claimed), how does this square with the dominance of arranged marriages (at least for the aristocracy) during this period?

Müller-Sievers addresses an interesting topic in this book and there are many interesting 'germs' of ideas. However, Müller-Sievers fails to provide a suitable environment for these germs to develop into plausible philosophical or historical hypotheses. As such, the author accurately describes his work when he remarks that his 'crossbreeding of literature and science ... may well have produced a monster rather than a successful hybrid' (p. 10).

Christine Battersby
University of Warwick

Finding a New Feminism: Rethinking the Woman Question for Liberal Democracy

Pamela Grande Jensen (ed.), Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 1997

h/b £42 0 8476 8188 2, p/b £18.50 0 8476 8189 0

This book examines liberalism's treatment of gender and suggests that there is no necessary antagonism between feminism and liberalism. Jensen's Introduction strongly defends the essays' overlapping themes of difference and equality. Her 'new feminism' aspires toward community and individual rights tied with equality, attachments and freedom. This 'new feminism' appreciates erotic desire, education and civic responsibility. However, many of the essays are highly specialised. I would have appreciated more application to contemporary life and literature, as offered in the essays by Elshtain and Nichols.

Mary Nichols' essay draws parallels between an Aristotelian coexistence of equality and difference and the themes of freedom and community presented in the movie *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe*. Aristotle defines political rule 'as a sharing in ruling and being ruled' (p. 177), implying the justice of equal sharing as well as the differences. Nichols shows the movie's particular embodiment of liberty and equality, difference and sameness, individuality and humanity.

Jean Bethke Elshtain's essay is a sensitive interpretation of the 'Mothers of the Disappeared' in Argentina. Elshtain's account is written after sharing the pain and developing friendships with the Mothers. She compares Latin American machismo with the veneration of the Madonna and these public Mothers. Herein lie new ways to rethink the woman question. Initially these women expressed atomised grief. Silenced, they found strength and political identity by deprivatising their mourning. Human rights became constituent of their political identity, not as a vehicle for entitlement, but to express a shared desire for anti-repressive politics. Interpreted like this, women's social guardianship alters 'iconography of motherhood: from weeping woman to defiant witness' (p. 145).

Jensen suggests that this expresses difference (as mothers) while striving for equal common humanity (as citizens). However, Jensen draws on the significance of self-sacrifice in order to contribute politically in a way I find troubling. Certainly there are costs to social obligations, but to repeatedly emphasise women's self-sacrifice in the domestic realm renders equality difficult.

Assuming women are the protectors of the personal, Jensen thinks that a combination of self-assertion and self-sacrifice as a model of feminine excellence bolsters women's self-identity enabling political connections. This concerns me. While self-sacrifice remains central to feminine moral goodness, women's conflict between self and others ensures that autonomy is suppressed. The other essays are competent in-depth analyses of male theorist's works, yet confirm traditional domesticity, presenting little of the promised new feminism.

These essays include Catherine Zucker's examination of Machiavelli's comedy *Clizia*; Diana Schaub's exploration of Montesquieu's novel *Persian Letters*, a harem drama about sexual violence and jealousy; Ann Charney Colmo's account of difference in Rousseau's *Emile*; Luran Weiner's testing of democracy through the 'self-made girl' presented in Henry James' novel, *Portrait of a Lady*; and Arlene Saxonhouse's examination of Aristophanes' comedies *Lysistrata* and *Ecclesiazusae*.

Is this new feminism? I am not suggesting there is no place for systematic commentary on texts. However, the title misleads.

The essays did not indicate a new feminism, but frequently restate the importance of domesticity, sensuality and the private, as depicted by male authors. Furthermore, the book did not provoke much 'rethinking'. The authors include none of the wealth of feminist scholarship on liberal-communitarian debates that would have increased the book's accessibility. However, political theorists will welcome the close feminist readings of texts.

*Elisabeth Porter,
University of Ulster, Coleraine*

Feminist Interpretations of Søren Kierkegaard

Céline Léon and Sylvia Walsh (eds), Penn State University Press
1997

h/b £29.50 0 271 01698 1, p/b £16.50 0 271 01699 X

Too often, *Feminist Interpretations of Søren Kierkegaard* proceeds as though we know in advance what *feminist* interpretation is and what *feminist interpretation* is. The volume is characterised by what Toril Moi has described as 'Images of Women' criticism: assessing a work according to the way in which women are represented. And this process tends to assume that there would be something like a fair and accurate representation (one that depicted women as autonomous, self-determining agents) *and* that there is a clear boundary between a patriarchy that misrepresents women through stereotypes, clichés and cultural constructions and the other voice of the interpreting and equal-minded feminist critic.

Most of the essays chart Kierkegaard's (or Kierkegaard's pseudonyms') representations of women—assessing whether such representations are misogynist, descriptive of misogyny or implicitly critical of a culture of misogyny. There is little attention paid to how the use of voice or pseudonym, the very form of Kierkegaard's writing, might problematise issues of adequate representation, identity or interpretation. It is as though we all know what women are or should be—beings who ought to be granted the same rights to existence, self-determination and autonomy as men. And it is also as though reading a text as a feminist is simply a task of assessing whether the text does or does not grant its female characters these unquestioned human attributes.

In this volume, feminist interpretation seems to be nothing more than the provision of an inventory of female characters' and male characters' attitudes to women in order to assess whether this depiction is stereotypical, patriarchal or misogynist. Not only does the volume's unremitting and unreflective rhetoric of stereotypes, misogyny, sexism and patriarchy suggest some pre-representational femininity to which Kierkegaard's pernicious representation of women might be compared, it also suggests a clear locus of power—male patriarchy—that is misrepresenting its simple, passive, female other. As a result, there is a tiresome 'sameness' about the essays in this volume, most of which chart different characters in Kierkegaard's different works according to an unthematized dichotomy between sexist and non-sexist forms of representation.

All this is disappointing since, more than a decade ago, in *Sexual/Textual Politics*, Toril Moi looked back to Elaine Showalter's distinction between 'feminist critique' and 'gynocritics' in order to assess the state of play in feminist literary criticism. Showalter had already described the shift from a criticism that identified the sexist bias, stereotypes and prejudice of a male canon to the productive task of women's writing. Moi's own work then deployed the now familiar three-stages-of-feminism schema to present feminist criticism with a further challenge: from the first stage of eliminating prejudice, to the second task of establishing women's own terrain, it might now be possible to 'deconstruct' sexual difference.

This third challenge would entail looking at sexual difference neither as the construction of gender upon some neutral nature, nor as some pre-given biological essence. Rather, sexual difference is *at once* a figuration and production (through texts, conventions and embodiment) and an expression (of bodies and desires). Indeed, as the debates surrounding sexual difference have proceeded, it is no longer a question of either essence or construction so much as how the issue of sexual difference *produces* the possibility of thinking this opposition between nature and nurture.

One thinks of the work of Luce Irigaray, for example, as having problematized the nature/representation dichotomy. This dichotomy cannot *explain* sexual difference precisely because it is

figured through sexual difference. (Nature is that material, feminine passivity that comes to be formed by an ideal masculine representation.) And one can also call to mind the work of Judith Butler and her deconstruction of the sex/gender opposition, for any such opposition is the effect of a process of differentiation, a process that has to be tirelessly performed through texts, bodies and practices. Butler and Irigaray are only two instances of a wide range of work on sexual difference and embodiment that has done much to question just what it is to do philosophy and how sex and identity are imbricated in the philosophical project (rather than being self-evident terms available for philosophical inquiry or interpretation).

In contrast with such approaches, the first essay in *Feminist Interpretations of Søren Kierkegaard*, by Wanda Warren Barry, looks at the way a 'stereotypical heterosexuality' (p. 35) enables a series of theoretical dichotomies. The second contribution, by Birgit Bertung, looks at the different forms of synthesis effected by Kierkegaard's male and female characters and concludes that Kierkegaard's seemingly sexist dichotomy is descriptive, rather than discriminatory or prescriptive.

The third chapter, by Julia Watkin, describes the logic of Kierkegaard's misogyny and explains why Kierkegaard's metaphysics and his emphasis on realising universals led him to condemn marriage—thus rendering him guilty of misogamy rather than misogyny (p. 78). This is because, she argues, Kierkegaard writes in a culture that over-emphasises marriage (pp. 78–9). The fourth contribution, by Robert L. Perkins, looks at Kierkegaard's re-figuring of a dialogue on Eros through the relation between Plato's *Symposium* and Kierkegaard's 'In Vino Veritas'. For the most part, he argues, Kierkegaard's characters are guilty of 'women bashing', but the final scene of the dialogue shows a happy marriage—and this demonstrates Kierkegaard's advance over Plato's celebration of homosexual Eros. For Kierkegaard, love needs to be lived and not idealised, and thus there is more of a space for women in his philosophy.

The fifth essay, by Céline Léon, charts a now familiar path. Léon describes how Kierkegaard's three spheres of the aesthetic, ethical and religious are also internally divided by the lesser abilities of women in relation to men. This, she judges, reinforces

Western patriarchy (p. 162) which (as in most of the other essays) is simply defined as the malicious representation of women by the interested and repressing masculine philosophical canon. The sixth essay is by far the most promising in the collection. Sylviane Agacinski looks at *Repetition* and does make extensive reference to the textual production of Kierkegaard's work and the ways in which the motifs of the feminine organise the text and Kierkegaard's use of dialectic.

The seventh essay is yet another contribution by one of the editors, Céline Léon, and undertakes a description of the relation between Kierkegaard's own anxieties about marriage and the views of his characters. Mark Lloyd Taylor re-reads Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* in order to argue for the centrality of gender as an issue in all Kierkegaard's writings. Like many of the other authors, he points out that Kierkegaard describes the woman negatively in so far as she is essentially relational, but concludes by saying that what looks like a critique of bourgeois woman is actually a critique of bourgeois culture in general (p. 194).

Sylvia Walsh's paper then looks at how Anti-Climacus's position in *The Sickness Unto Death* 'perpetuates stereotyped views of women and men' (p. 212), and does this by describing two forms of despair. Leslie Howe's paper assumes, rather than argues for, an ideal of equality and androgyny, and then assesses how Kierkegaard fits women into this ideal. Jane Duran's essay has the virtue of questioning what feminism is, what Kierkegaard might offer feminism and how questions of identity and ethics might be altered by reading Kierkegaard.

Both editors have contributed two essays to the volume, and Sylvia Walsh's second piece is far more worthy than her first. Here she assesses Kierkegaard in relation to feminist epistemology. For the most part, this volume as a whole proceeds as though feminist philosophy has not taken place, as though feminism is nothing more than a critique of masculinism; at least this essay by Walsh takes some of the issues and questions of feminism into account. Wanda Warren Berry contributes a second essay on images of women in Kierkegaard's religious writings. The volume concludes on a strong note, with Tamsin Lorraine exploring Kierkegaard through Kristeva.

Overall, there isn't a great deal to recommend this volume. There is certainly much in Kierkegaard that warrants feminist attention. This has been evidenced most recently in Christine Battersby's book *The Phenomenal Woman* (reviewed elsewhere in *WPR* 21 [ed.]), a work that offers Kierkegaard as a way of thinking an identity that does not depend on presence or autonomy. Kierkegaard's use of personae, his use of irony, the ficto-theoretical nature of his corpus and the manifest difficulty of determining just who is speaking in his work demand serious reflection and criticism.

After reading Kierkegaard we are no longer sure of our definitions of identity, ethics and philosophy. And this is why Battersby insists on the value of Kierkegaard for thinking what a feminist metaphysics might be. *Feminist Interpretations of Søren Kierkegaard* fails to meet this challenge in Kierkegaard's work.

Claire Colebrook
Monash University

Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman

Stanley Cavell, University of Chicago Press 1996

h/b £31.95 0 226 09814 1, p/b £11.95 0 226 09816 8

Stanley Cavell begins *Contesting Tears* by arguing that the four films that he addresses—*Gaslight*, *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, *Now Voyager* and *Stella Dallas*—can be seen to constitute a new genre which he entitles 'the melodrama of the unknown woman'. The book picks up themes in his previous work *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (1981) which he summarises in the introduction. The comedies of remarriage considered in the earlier book present an egalitarian relation between human beings which is understood to be 'a relation of rightful attraction, of expressiveness, and of joy' (p. 9).

This definition of the ideal relation borrows from Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–82) and is said to be fully represented by the central couple of the remarriage comedies. Cavell argues that the presentation of the couple in these films shows woman's demand for intelligibility meeting with a sympathetic response from her male partner. In sharp contrast, the melodrama of the unknown woman considered in the new book shows an inimical

relationship in which the woman is unable to articulate her own perspective. This heroine chooses solitude because the terms of her intelligibility are seen to be unwelcome.

Cavell argues that the heroines of the remarriage comedies and the melodramas are both descendants of Nora in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. The first set of heroines find a mutually educative marriage, the second set leave an unsatisfactory one. However, Cavell argues that the decision to leave their partners still upholds the ideal of marriage as a form of educative communication. The heroine of the melodrama of the unknown woman attests to the possibility of intelligibility even when she is isolated to the point of madness. Cavell's latest book can therefore be read as a prequel to *Pursuits of Happiness*, because the isolation of the unknown woman is positioned as a precursor to the demand for intelligibility made by the heroines of the remarriage comedies.

This ordering is crucial because it clearly demonstrates Cavell's agenda. Ultimately he prizes communication between the sexes and therefore refuses to analyse the predicament of the unknown woman in gender specific terms. Cavell reads her choice of isolation as a form of solipsism and compares her questioning of marriage with Descartes' questioning of the everyday world. The interesting aspect of Cavell's reading is his insistence that Descartes' *Meditations* also take the form of melodrama. The difficulty is that Cavell does not distinguish between the self-imposed nature of Cartesian questioning and the social exile that is inflicted upon the woman who is constructed as unknown.

The fundamental problem is that Cavell does not apply the concept of gender to the philosophical structures that he uses, despite the fact that he aims to provide an analysis of a genre that he recognises to be feminine. Thus, 'woman's search for a story, or of the right to tell her story' (p. 3) is explicated with reference to Emerson, Wittgenstein, Freud, Lacan and others without really addressing the gender specific nature of their work. This is clearly illustrated when Cavell dismisses feminist readings of the Dora case as 'angry' and reads Freud's treatment of Dora in terms of the analyst's cross-gendered identification with his own sister.

In conclusion, *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman* is of limited usefulness to philosophers who

are interested in feminism! I would suggest that Cavell's presentation of philosophical and literary theory would be accessible to third year undergraduates in related subjects. He does not address the work of many film theorists and the textual analysis is intermittent, which indicates that undergraduates in film studies might not find this book readily accessible.

Catherine Constable
Sheffield Hallam University

Feminist Dilemmas in Qualitative Research: Public Knowledge and Private Lives

Jane Ribbens & Rosalind Edwards (eds), Sage 1997

h/b £40 0 7619 5664 6, p/b £14.99 0 7619 5665 4

The interests of the feminist philosopher and of the feminist social or psychological researcher intersect in the debates about epistemology and ethics. Both groups commonly share emphases on the context of knowledge, on the value of marginalized voices, on the problem of representation, and an aversion to academic/non-academic power structures. Therefore the concerns of the feminist researcher engaged in empirical work raise important issues.

In *Feminist Dilemmas in Qualitative Research*, twelve women who have conducted empirical research involving women reflect, with sensitivity and clear-sightedness, on their methodological policies, procedures and qualms. For the contributors, the question of the context of knowledge raises difficult questions about crossing the public/private divide. The welcome aim is to make more public aspects of women's lives, such as tensions in feelings of motherhood, or problems of managing young people working for and with their families. Yet the cost of raising the profile of these tense situations for women is that the researcher is obliged to take the protection of privacy from her research subject.

The very act of eliciting this knowledge, whether by interview, diary or autobiographical account, implies a power relation between the academic and the subject. This power relation is emphasised in the writing-up stage of the research when the process of emendation and selection lies with the author. Pam Alldred, taking account of post-structuralist approaches to language, writes from within discourse analysis of her work on rep-

resenting children. She asks how 'we can try to recognise the ways in which our researcher status may confound and exploit our adult status' and ends by questioning 'not just how, but whether, each representational act should be made' (p. 167).

The work of all the researchers reflects a concern to listen to those seldom heard. They are conscious of the tact and flexibility that this requires. In writing on sister relationships, Melanie Mauthner backs off when her respondent parries her question with 'oh just personal things' (p. 53), while Janet Parr altered her whole research framework in response to her discoveries about the approach of the mature women students she was interviewing.

This flexibility is more than a technique. It demonstrates an ethical awareness of the potential intrusiveness of research, and a desire for an egalitarian relationship with the subject of research. These concerns are linked to the policy of self-reflexivity adopted by many of the researchers who express their dislike of the anonymous scientific model of the researcher. As such, the researchers are prepared to disclose aspects of their own life history before and during the research process. The contributors like the concept of the narrative; Tina Miller entitles her piece 'Shifting Layers of Professional, Lay and Personal Narratives: Longitudinal Childbirth Research'. The narrative is more ethically acceptable than a pitiless drive for the truth.

The book is also inherently encouraging. Most of the contributors completed their research as part of their doctorates. *Feminist Dilemmas* illustrates the value of a support group; the contributors met monthly to discuss their work. The struggles and setbacks overcome in the research process are everywhere between the lines, if not on them. There is a tone of empowerment as the contributors look back on energy well spent. Despite the justified ethical reservations of the contributors about disclosure of private information, this discussion of what for many women are lonely experiences—childcare problems, sibling rivalry—is helpful. It brings a previously hidden experience into the light of female solidarity.

This is an excellent book for both undergraduate and graduate students. It contains some useful tips on technique and some striking quotations. There is also a comprehensive bibliography of feminist writing on a wide range of theoretical and practical

topics. The care and thoughtfulness of this collection bring together in a stimulating way the philosopher's questions about representation and the empirical researcher's questions about evidence. *Feminist Dilemmas in Qualitative Research* is a useful and timely book.

Liz Mitchell

Canterbury Christ Church University College

Adrienne Rich: Passion, Politics and the Body

Liz Yorke, Sage 1997

h/b £49.50 0 8039 7726 3, 0 p/b £15.99 8039 7727 1

Adrienne Rich is a major poet whose work has finally achieved widespread recognition (accepted by her with considerable ambivalence) by the literary establishment, after many years during which it was viewed with reluctance or hostility. Her prose writings, and the themes which are central to them, have been a major influence on feminist theory and activism, and she was one of the first second-wave feminist writers to mount a serious and sustained challenge to the male domination of the academy and the obliteration or marginalisation of women in academia. In her book, Liz Yorke aims primarily to provide an overview of these central themes in Rich's prose writings, but the discussion of the prose writings is illustrated and illuminated usefully by frequent references to the poetry.

Although Rich has been influential, much of her work has been almost equally controversial; it has appeared at times to be at odds with a number of contemporary currents of feminist theory. Yorke's book also aims to identify and discuss these points of tension, and sometimes to defend Rich against some of the more common criticisms of her work.

Rich has, for instance, constantly maintained that feminist theory and activism should be grounded in women's experience; those who have become critical of appeals to experience have seen a kind of naivety in what they have read as her belief that experience can be some kind of final court of appeal. Her writings on language and subjectivity can appear to be at odds with poststructuralist views of the subject as created in language, and with the poststructuralist denial of the view that language can in any way reflect 'the real'. Rich seems at times to want to represent

women's lives and the history of their oppression in a way that calls upon notions of 'representation' that have become suspect.

Rich has three sons from her early marriage. One of her most moving and influential books was *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976). This was one of the first second-wave feminist books to take the experience of motherhood seriously, and the distinction Rich made in the subtitle between experience and institution allowed her to write not merely about the burdens created by the patriarchal organisation of motherhood, but about its tensions and its joys, its bodily meanings and its potential for providing a source for re-evaluating women's lives, priorities and sense of self. Yet the book was not well received by many feminists when it came out, and has been taken to task many times since then; Rich has been accused of an almost mystical biological essentialism which tended to recapitulate the patriarchal norms of which she herself was critical.

Rich came out as a lesbian in the 1970s; her writing on lesbianism has, however, been just as controversial. Her concept of the 'lesbian continuum' in her famous article 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', with its apparent downplaying of lesbian sexuality, has been accused of shortchanging lesbians who have the courage to embark on stigmatised social relationships with other women, and of presenting a 'soft-focus' view of lesbianism and relationships between women in ways which marginalise the power of sexuality and the erotic in women's lives.

Those unfamiliar with Rich's work have probably encountered these kinds of criticism of her views of motherhood and lesbianism. But Yorke notes that since the 1970s, an increasing amount of Rich's writing has explored issues concerning race and identity: her own Jewishness, her relation to her upbringing as a privileged white southerner, the tensions between 'margins' and 'centre', 'inside' and 'outside', and the necessity of remaining constantly self-critical and aware of one's own location, while never seeing that as a prison which prevents the possibility of allegiances and common struggles with others who are very differently located.

Yorke notes the ways in which Rich has always been self-critical and prepared to rethink, revision and re-evaluate. At times,

perhaps, she over-stresses the 'inspirational' quality of Rich's work: an element of idealisation tends to creep in at the expense of more systematic exploration of the doubts and difficulties that Rich's work has raised. The latter should not be underestimated; nevertheless, whatever view one may take of the particular (and complex and changing) views Rich expresses in her work, it is hard to find a major theme or issue in contemporary feminist thinking which her work does not in some way address, and hard also to think of many other feminist writers whose work has a similar range. If Yorke's book provokes those who have not read Adrienne Rich to do so for themselves, then it will have served a very useful purpose.

Jean Grimshaw
Bristol

DISCUSSION POINT

A Feminist Philosophy of Religion

Pamela Sue Anderson, Basil Blackwell 1998

h/b £45.00 0 631 19382 0, p/b £13.99 0 631 19383 9

Anderson addresses herself to the Anglo-American analytical philosophy of religion represented by Richard Swinburne and Alvin Plantinga, and proposes a paradigmatic shift in its premises through an appeal to feminist psycholinguistics, feminist standpoint epistemology and to Michèle Le Dœuff's idea of the philosophical imaginary. Anderson identifies one of her central aims as being 'to study both feminist objectivity and female desire as essential concepts for achieving less partial and less biased beliefs than presently found in dominant forms of theism' (p. 19).

Anderson describes herself as a reformist, and she is committed to a modified Kantianism which seeks to uphold a rational model of enquiry into religious epistemology, while also questioning the boundaries which define rationality. She sets out to challenge the 'God's-eye view' which is implicit in the 'supposed objectivity of the rational, individual, male-neutral subject of western philosophy and theology' (p. 36). She is critical of the 'weak objectivity' of philosophers of religion whose core ideas about God (their 'unramified beliefs') are implicitly premised on the partial and limited perspectives of a privileged minority, and in ways that entail the 'ramified beliefs'—and the dualistic and oppressive consequences—of Christianity.

In appealing to feminist standpoint epistemology, Anderson argues that philosophers of religion might develop a 'strong objectivity' by reinventing themselves as 'other' in order to form a more inclusive and representative understanding of what constitutes rational belief. In addition, psycholinguistics and analysis of the philosophical imaginary allow for the scrutiny of what the validation of rationality has excluded. The framework is thereby widened in ways that take account of the role of female desire and yearning in the 'rational passion' of religious belief and in the formation of concepts of justice.

I was particularly interested in Anderson's creative synthesis of Ricoeur's narrative theory of the figuration, configuration and refiguration of belief, and Irigaray's strategies of mimesis. By

combining the two, Anderson suggests ways in which feminist reinterpretations of religious myths might be introduced into the philosophical framework. This would allow for the mimetic refiguration of religious beliefs in such a way as to expose patriarchal misreadings through accommodating the subversive insights and experiences of the marginalised. Anderson demonstrates how this might be applied in practice, by examining Irigaray's re-readings of the story of Antigone, and Parita Mukta's feminist reinterpretation of the Hindu legend of Mirabai.

Anderson breaks new ground in this book, which is an important contribution to the philosophy of religion. However, as a Catholic woman theologian with an intellectual commitment to the kind of contextuality which Anderson advocates, I have a number of reservations. I realise that in offering these comments from a theological perspective I am adopting an approach which is somewhat oblique in terms of a philosophical critique, so I have decided to write this as part review, part dialogue with Anderson. I believe that her book opens up important issues for feminists in the areas of both philosophy of religion and theology, particularly with regard to defining the boundary between the two.

Despite Anderson's appeal to feminist standpoint epistemology as the basis for a 'strong objectivity' capable of representing a plurality of perspectives, I remain unconvinced that an epistemology which is premised on an appeal to rationalism and objectivity is capable of representing the embodied female believer as a subject of religious yearning and desire. The kind of philosophical theism with which Anderson engages is a post-Kantian academic construct. As such, it is committed to the rational investigation of questions about God and ultimate meaning. These questions are addressed from a position of objectivity which is independent of theology, religious belief or an embodied life of faith. As such, I do not see how such a philosophical theism could survive the kinds of changes which Anderson proposes.

Yearning implies a focus and a context for belief, and it is grounded in expressive practices of faith, as well as in intellectual theories about God. It requires a language of devotion and longing, but as soon as the philosopher introduces such language

into her work, has she not crossed over either into theology or into literature and poetry?

Anderson writes about desire and yearning, but her own voice remains decontextualised in a way that threatens to undermine her commitment to the embodied particularity of women's religious experiences. By adopting a position of objective neutrality (at least with regard to her religious self-positioning), I do not think she is sufficiently appreciative of the nuanced complexity of the kind of embodied belief she advocates. Despite the fact that she is critical of the philosophical tendency to over-simplify religious belief, she is herself guilty of such over-simplification.

To illustrate what I mean, I would compare Anderson's uncritical perpetuation of androcentric configurations of the Christian figures of Eve and the Virgin Mary, with her willingness to take seriously feminist refigurings of the Hindu legend of Mirabai. Anderson states that she is deliberately not engaging with themes which are particular to Christian theology, but her reinterpretations of Greek and Hindu myths are consistently offset against a highly over-simplified and one-sided reading of the Christian tradition. The philosophy of religion represented by the Anglo-American analytic tradition is an offshoot of Protestant Christianity, and it is therefore predicated on a form of Christian belief which rejected all the feminine symbolism of the medieval church. Such considerations seem relevant to Anderson's commitment to take account of the historical and cultural contexts in which beliefs are located. In choosing to sidestep the complex task of refiguring Christian myths and narratives in favour of more exotic discourses, Anderson avoids having to address the inconsistencies and contradictions which arise when one considers beliefs in the embodied contexts of the faith communities which practise them.

This brings me to the question of feminist standpoint epistemology as a way of gaining access to the perspectives of the other. Central to Anderson's book is the argument that 'To be objective is to be able to think one's claim from the perspective of another and to reinvent oneself as other' (p. 78). But is this really possible without dissolving difference and colonising the other? As long as one holds to a position of objectivity and rationalism from which to judge and discern the legitimacy of the

other's position, I think there is always the risk that the philosophical subject will make excursions into the margins from a position of power and privilege, in order to change the view from the centre. Anderson acknowledges such risks and the ambivalences which they imply, but I think she fails to take seriously enough the challenge they pose to her argument. I am left wondering if it is possible for a philosophical enterprise such as that proposed by Anderson to preserve both its claims to objectivity, and its claims to respect the religious other (and/or the otherness of religion perhaps).

Anderson has written a provocative and challenging book which has implications for both feminist theologians and feminist philosophers of religion. If at times she seems to address herself to a somewhat small and self-referential philosophical elite, the questions she asks extend beyond philosophical boundaries to issues which affect feminist scholarship in many different disciplines.

Tina Beattie
University of Bristol

Pamela Anderson responds

As a feminist Catholic theologian with specific doubts about my feminist appropriation of post-Kantian philosophy, Tina Beattie obviously found aspects of *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion* not just thought-provoking, but perplexing and problematic. I had intended that philosophers should take seriously my proposal for a feminist philosophy of religion. Yet since other feminist theologians might have some similar reactions to my overall argument, I am grateful for the opportunity to respond to this review.

To begin with, I would like to take issue with certain terms that Beattie uses to describe my position, especially 'rationalism', 'objectivity', 'embodied female believer' and 'exotic'. The vague use of 'rationalism' is worrying because I endeavour to articulate a quite precise concern with rethinking both the limits and the images used when defining rationality in traditional philosophical texts—for example, the image of the sea in Kant, as well as the mariner's ship on the open sea in Neurath and Quine. I would reject the suggestion that philosophy has nothing to do with literary or poetic images. Not only does my reliance upon Michèle Le Dœuff's argument concerning the philosophical

imaginary mean that I do not separate thinking-in-images from philosophy, I would even argue that a language of yearning can be found in the texts of Kant's philosophy.

As for Beattie's use of 'objectivity' to describe my position as 'neutral' and 'independent of theology, religious belief or an embodied life of faith', this is not how I conceive objectivity. I take care to present my specific epistemological interest in revising the conception of a 'view from nowhere'—and here I employ Sandra Harding's notion of 'strong objectivity'. I also spend a considerable amount of time arguing that any naive notion of neutrality should be given up to achieve more justice for women. At the same time, I contend that less partial knowledge (not neutrality) can be the goal of strong objectivity. Hence, for me, objectivity is a possibility, even if never actually achieved by embodied beings. I do not treat one's situation as something obvious; rather I take situatedness to be necessarily mediated by a complex of social and material relations, as well as theoretical principles. A feminist philosopher, in particular, needs special tools to recognise the unjust social and material relations that constitute the reality of women's situation as oppressed or dominated.

'Embodied female believer' is not a phrase I would use lightly (in fact I do not use it): I consider embodiment as a necessary but not a sufficient condition for knowledge; nor is embodiment sufficient for the production of non-oppressive beliefs. Certain mediating principles and mimetic thinking necessarily come into play in the process of knowing (or believing), whether acknowledged or not. I try to take into account such principles by demonstrating that the application of feminist epistemology to configurations of religious belief is usefully enhanced by post-Kantian hermeneutics, i.e. by using certain principles of interpretation to mediate our differences.

I argue against taking unmediated experience as the ground for justifying men's or women's beliefs. I find the use of one's own experience (especially the idealisation of experience) in the justification of theistic belief, neither adequate nor fair for those who do not share the beliefs of the privileged or status quo of patriarchy. Instead I argue for a feminist standpoint. For me, a feminist standpoint is an achievement. It results from struggle by or

on behalf of women who have been exploited, oppressed or dominated (e.g. women who have been exploited or even oppressed by certain, pernicious monotheistic beliefs). Embodiment is not a sufficient condition for the production of a feminist standpoint; formal and substantive principles—concepts of reason—necessarily mediate women's embodiment. Since I am not privileging a female perspective, I am also not prioritising the experience of 'an embodied female believer'.

I argue that the crucial principle for achieving a feminist standpoint is the recently revised, rational principle of 'strong objectivity'. This is a feminist objectivity insofar as it seeks *to think from the lives of* marginalised women; hence not an unmediated account of women's experience. Instead strong objectivity is a socially produced and mediated value. And this means that I'm concerned with the production of knowledge, while insisting that our social and material positionings cannot be ignored. In other words, values do come into the process of knowing; so neither the production of knowledge nor the construction of belief can be neutral. And this can be seen in the configuration and refiguration (e.g. of Antigone) that philosophers do, in fact, use to represent the reality of our ethical and religious lives.

My concern with objectivity does not mean I am unconcerned with social situatedness. I illustrate how the production of less biased knowledge might be achieved with religious belief by turning to configurations of the Hindu poetess—Saint Mirabai. In particular Parita Mukta challenges the principles that inhibit 'what I know' by forcing us to think through differences of culture, class, caste, gender and sex in our representations of the religious practices of belief. In considering the various configurations of *bhakti* we are forced to struggle with the appearances of Western patriarchy and privilege as they have infiltrated into (re)configurations of Eastern religious beliefs.

And this brings me to what I regard as Beattie's most serious charge against my position: that I choose to remain 'neutral' in studying the 'exotic discourse' of a legendary Hindu devotional practice. Far from choosing something exotic that has no critical relevance to my philosophical thinking, Mukta's socialist and humanist concern with the people who sing or have sung the song of Mirabai (and so, in a mimetic sense, 'become Mira')

forces me to become aware of my lack of awareness of otherness. Such a lack results—at least in part—from the exclusion or repression of aspects of our otherness in the practices of philosophy of religion. One could say here that I propose an alternative strategy for what Maria Lugones has called 'world-travelling'.

A Feminist Philosophy of Religion urges an engagement in the struggle to transform philosophy of religion on behalf of those women's lives that have been excluded from theistic accounts of religious belief. The book also urges an engagement in imaginative thinking by and with those who have risked forming relationships on the margins, in order to be transformed. bell hooks writes persuasively about this sort of two-way transformation, concluding that 'there are many individuals with race, gender, and class privilege who are longing to see the kind of revolutionary change that will end domination and oppression even though their lives would be completely and utterly transformed'. In this spirit, my struggle to transform philosophy of religion is not 'neutral' as Beattie suggests. Instead, I am claiming that those who engage in this struggle over the rationality and myths of religious belief are made vulnerable to having their thinking and living utterly transformed.

Perhaps I could have endeavoured to refigure Catholic and Protestant configurations of the myths of the incarnation in the way that Tina Beattie would wish. But in seeking a feminist standpoint from which to transform philosophy of religion I found the disruptive mimings of the ancient myth of Antigone and the medieval legend(s) of Mirabai more globally significant for challenging the narrow parameters of empirical realist forms of theism, i.e. for redefining the parameters that confine contemporary debates in philosophy of religion.

Any reference I do make to the Virgin Mary in *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion* is in the context of demonstrating the contradictions of an empirical realist's form of theism—that is, the position of a contemporary philosopher of religion who, nevertheless, claims to follow a rigorously coherent logic and seeks the truth of a so-called disembodied thinking. If this use of the Virgin Mary seems an oversimplification, it is not *my* simplification. In any case, simplification—or at least one version of the principle of simplicity—is not compatible with my overall com-

mitment to a less exclusive thinking bent on reforming our theories of knowledge, concepts and images of reason.

*Pamela Sue Anderson
University of Sunderland*

Tina Beattie comments

Like Pamela Anderson, I am critical of the appeal to experience which is a feature of much feminist theology, but a person's religious framework, however ambivalent or unresolved, is a factor which influences that person's standpoint as observer. Insofar as Anderson accords significance to her own positioning with regard to gender and philosophy, but not with regard to religion, in a work which situates itself at the intersection of the three, her approach implies that one's religious standpoint is not one of the complex 'social and material relations' which mediates one's position.

This means that religious claims are judged from the position of a neutral observer who seems to offer a 'view from nowhere'. And this is done in a way which seems to violate the principles of 'strong objectivity' that are offered in the book. Insofar as religious belief systems have a powerful influence on 'the production of knowledge', I am wary when any philosopher of religion fails to acknowledge the religious system which has produced his or her particular brand of knowledge. And this is for all the reasons which Anderson cites in her criticism of the 'view from nowhere'.

Anderson's response offers a helpful clarification of the terms which are at the source of my critical questions. But this seems to me the beginning, rather than the end, of a process of potentially fruitful debate triggered by the rich insights and provocations of this book ...

*Tina Beattie
University of Bristol*

CALLS FOR PAPERS

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WPR no 29, 2001

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For preliminary discussion and to request stylesheet, please contact either
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j.hodge@mmu.ac.uk

or

Alessandra Tanesini,
Philosophy, Cardiff University,
PO Box 94, Cardiff CF1 9NT
Tanesini@cardiff.ac.uk

**Feminist Interpretations
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Papers should address a wide range of issues for feminist theory that emerge from critical and constructive engagement with Gadamer's writings. The overarching question is 'What does Gadamer have to offer to feminist thought?'. Completed ms by 30/6/99.

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Send papers & preliminary inquiries or proposals to
Lorraine Code, Philosophy
Dept, York University
Toronto, Ontario, M3J 1P3,
Canada
lcode@nexus.yorku.ca

Philosophy Now

WPR has been contacted by the editor of this magazine which is aimed at the general educated public & claims to be the UK's biggest-selling philosophy periodical.

On the basis of reader feedback and subscription surveys, the editor feels that the magazine has become very male-orientated. Articles by and feedback from women philosophers are invited to redress the balance.

Potential contributors should consult the Guide for Authors published each issue. Issue 21 (Summer/Autumn 1998) actively solicits articles on feminist philosophy and continental philosophy & other subjects that rarely appear within the pages of *Philosophy Now*.

Contact

Rick Lewis, Editor, *Philosophy Now*, 25 Blandfield Road,
London SW12 8BQ
rick.lewis@philosophynow.demon.co.uk

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or info from

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8-14 August 1999

Society for Philosophy in the
Contemporary World
The Rockies, Estes Park,
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For more information about
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[//www.phil.stmarytx.edu/spcw](http://www.phil.stmarytx.edu/spcw)
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noise@let.uu.nl
further details

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1-3 October 1999

The Dept of Philosophy &
The Ethics Center,
University of South Florida
Feminist Ethics Revisited
at the Sheraton Sand Key
Resort, Clearwater Beach,
Florida.

Keynote speakers: Margaret
Urban Walker, Claudia Card,
and Uma Narayan.

Contact Peggy DesAutels, The
Ethics Center, University of
South Florida, 100 Fifth
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FL 33701, USA

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8-10 October 2000

Zürich

IAPH Symposium
**International Association for
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info:
pellikaanengel@hetnet.nl

NEWS

There is a new (biannual) international Newsletter for Women Philosophers published by Joke Hersen (Tilburg) and Eva van der Plas (Amsterdam). The Dutch Network for Women Philosophers (founded twelve years ago) has produced forty-five newsletters and organised twelve conferences on Feminist Philosophy. It has now established contacts with the Vienna Women Philosophers Group, women from Germany, Finland, Belgium and France.

The new newsletter is in a variety of languages, including English. The first 36 page issue included

Book Reviews

Jessica Benjamin's *Shadow of the Other* (Routledge, 1998) (Review in English)

Annemarie Pieper's *Gibt es eine feministische Ethik?* (Munich, Fink 1998) (Review in German)

Judith Butler *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford University Press, 1997) (Review in English)

Julia Kristeva's *Arbeit an den Grenzen der Sprache* (Ulrike Helmer Verlag, 1998) (Review in English)

Judith Vega's PhD dissertation 'Inventing Enlightenment's Gender' (Groningen, 1998) (Review in English)

There were also three conference reports, a calendar of forthcoming events, a short list of New Books and several short 'Varia' in Dutch, German and English

Further information about prices and joining: sofenet@mail.com

More information on conferences etc via the virtual network at the same email address.

The Dutch group would like a regular contact & collaboration with the UK group. Since the General Editor is too busy to take this on, this will be discussed at the next SWIP/WPR meeting. Volunteers for taking on the role of liaison welcome.

The newsletter of the US SWIP group has been put on-line on an experimental basis. It can be accessed through the US SWIP website: <http://www.uh.edu/~cfreelan/SWIP>