

Cambridge University Press

052162469X - The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy

Edited by Miranda Fricker and Jennifer Hornsby

Excerpt

[More information](#)

MIRANDA FRICKER AND JENNIFER HORNSBY

Introduction

This *Companion* represents a departure from the previously published volumes in its series. Each of those dealt with a single philosopher and with a male one in every case, whereas this one brings women in and treats a theme rather than an authority. So far as the departure allows, this book's principal aim is in line with that of other *Companions*: it consists of new papers by an international team of philosophers at the forefront of feminist scholarship; and these have been written with non-specialists in mind, so that the collection can serve as an introduction to the area. We have tried to design it to be helpful to any student or teacher of philosophy who is curious about feminism's place in their subject.

The present *Companion* has a further aim. It is intended to foster appreciation of the potentially far-reaching impact of feminist thinking in philosophy. As departments of women's studies and gender studies have grown up in the last twenty years, there has come to be more and more published work falling under the head of feminist philosophy. In our experience as members of philosophy departments, students and teachers of philosophy find it difficult to relate much of this work to their own projects. It needs to be made clearer that – and how – feminist concerns can be brought to bear on philosophy. Then 'pure' philosophers may feel less disconnected from work that they are now perhaps inclined to ignore, and genuine interdisciplinary links may be made between philosophy and other subjects on which feminism has had an impact.

In this Introduction, we address at a general level the question of how feminism can impinge upon philosophy, and we say some more about the book's organization and rationale. We hope to illuminate our view of the role of feminism *in* philosophy, by explaining why we wish neither to advocate an understanding of feminist philosophy as a separate and distinctive branch of philosophy, nor to argue for the ability of feminist philosophy to replace philosophy. We also attempt to situate the work it

Cambridge University Press

052162469X - The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy

Edited by Miranda Fricker and Jennifer Hornsby

Excerpt

[More information](#)

MIRANDA FRICKER AND JENNIFER HORNSBY

presents in the context both of the political movement that has inspired it and of the discourse of philosophy that it seeks to engender.

One might ask whether it has made a difference to philosophy that it should have been the creation largely of men and not women. Feminists are bound to ask this question. So long as philosophy is an object of their critical reflection, they will insist on viewing its authors as socially situated beings with a specific location in history. But the question makes perfectly good sense even for someone who usually abstains from the historicizing perspective of a feminist.

The publication twenty years ago of Genevieve Lloyd's *The Man of Reason*¹ incubated an influential line of argument. Lloyd's central claim was that philosophers' conceptions of reason have tended to be aligned with cultural conceptions of masculinity, reason being conceived as contrasted with and superior to intuition and emotion which the cultural imagination has associated with femininity. When one sees the bearing of gender on the understanding of such faculties as reason – which is taken often enough to be the faculty distinctive of human kind – one comes to be concerned also with gender's bearing on the philosophical conception of individual human subjects, whether in the role of thinker, of agent, of speaker, or of inquirer. It may be agreed that the great subjects of philosophy ought to be concerned with us in the sense of 'us' in which we are all human. But when the association of 'man' and 'reason' is acknowledged, it is possible to think that the male philosophers who have addressed these questions have actually not always subsumed everyone with their 'we's and their 'our's. Although philosophers' accounts of what 'we' know, or of how 'we' relate to 'our' bodies, purport to have universal application, one can question whether their authors' generic conception really is the socially and historically neutral one that their universal claims would require. In doing so, one takes issue with traditional philosophy on its own, 'neutralist' terms. One arrives, from a starting point within philosophy, at a place at which questions about male bias arise.

Feminism's own starting point tends not to be this neutralist one. By starting from the idea that human subjects are socially concrete and socially diverse beings, feminists encourage suspicion of any given universal claim. Of course feminists are not alone in their commitment to the social specificity of the subject. Other politicizing theoretical perspectives can equally place emphasis on the socially concrete character of any human being. If a feminist perspective is unique, then it is probably unique only in its insistence on the importance of gender. But we can see how a feminist perspective tends to take one more quickly to a point at which philosophy

Cambridge University Press

052162469X - The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy

Edited by Miranda Fricker and Jennifer Hornsby

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Introduction

itself may arrive unaided so long as it allows that its texts are written by real people. Given philosophy's reflexive character – given that philosophy is concerned with 'ourselves and our place in the world', so that its authors belong among its objects of study – a questioning of philosophers' self-image cannot be simply external to philosophy.

When the gender-ideological aspects of a piece of philosophical theory are unveiled, the theory is exposed as masculinist. The theory might be less sophisticated or less complete than it had purported to be, or it might simply be in error – as when an account records only male experience while putting forward claims about the whole of humanity. But an account may also be charged with masculinism in a different sense, when its generalizations are taken to exclude the *symbolically* feminine. This sort of charge might be made as a psychoanalytic claim – in which, for instance, some tendency in philosophical thought is diagnosed in terms of male philosophers' unconsciously living out an exclusively masculine psychology (see Susan James's chapter here). Or, again, such a charge might be made as a historical claim – in which a tendency is diagnosed by reference to the operation of a 'philosophical imaginary'² that arises from distinctively masculine social experience. There are feminist writers who think that all of philosophy excludes or subordinates the symbolically feminine, so that they take the whole philosophical enterprise to be irredeemably masculinist. Theirs is a radical view, in which the task of feminism is to find a surrogate for philosophy – philosophy in the feminine.³

Evidently, the radical view is not our own view. (There is no space for the project of this book on the radical view.) But we share with the radical view a belief that a feminist perspective can bring enlightenment by introducing insights gained from lived experience. Philosophical reflection has always been conditioned by background intuitions and assumptions about how people generally behave or what they would think, say, want, intend, in particular circumstances. To the extent that it may have been conditioned by a consensus among its (*de facto*) white, male, middle-class practitioners, there are likely to be new debates as other sorts of people find their way in.⁴ Feminism will impinge upon philosophy wherever feminist insights challenge prevailing intuitions and assumptions. We agree with Sabina Lovibond, in the first chapter here, that 'the relation of feminist thought to its discursive environment' can be grasped in terms of Neurath's boat, 'which cannot find a haven safe from error but has to be repaired while out at sea'. Feminism is then one among the critical impetuses for the ongoing repair work that determines philosophy's historical development and its sense of its own history.

Cambridge University Press

052162469X - The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy

Edited by Miranda Fricker and Jennifer Hornsby

Excerpt

[More information](#)

MIRANDA FRICKER AND JENNIFER HORNSBY

As our title signals, the idea of feminism *in* philosophy guided us in commissioning chapters. We think that the work presented here is testimony to the intellectual value of taking feminism to be a radicalizing energy internal to philosophical inquiry. We resisted using the more generic ‘feminist philosophy’ in the title, partly because our own enterprise is more circumscribed than that would suggest, and partly because that label can be misunderstood. People sometimes suppose that ‘feminist philosophy’ must either name a subject area – as, say, ‘political philosophy’ does – or else stand for something that is meant to supplant philosophy. But at least as we understand ‘feminist philosophy’, it stands for philosophy informed by feminism; and feminism has different sorts of relevance as it impinges on different philosophical subject areas.

Feminism *in* philosophy is the product of a single understanding of how feminism may relate to philosophy. But it is not the product of any monolithic conception of feminism. A feminist may be hostile or sympathetic to essentialist styles of thought, for instance; she may take feminist politics to have social androgyny as its goal or think that it should aim at creating cultural and intellectual spaces for sexual difference. On matters such as these, no party line is toed here. Indeed we hope this collection exhibits pluralism within feminism. What unifies the present work is our conception of philosophy and of feminism’s relationship to it.

There are other conceptions of feminism’s relationship to philosophy than our own. That ours is not the only fruitful one is evident from the enormous and disparate body of work published under the heading ‘feminist philosophy’ which is informed by different conceptions. There is, for instance, the ‘radical’ view already mentioned, which sees feminism’s philosophical task as finding a truly feminine counterpart to an irredeemably masculinist tradition. There is also the postmodernist view which sees feminism’s task as bringing philosophy *per se* to an end, so as to make way for some preferred, perhaps more literary, discourse. Although work deriving from these views is not represented here, several of the chapters are in dialogue with it. Perhaps this dialogue is possible because of a common purpose – the exploration of the philosophical implications of gender and sexual difference. But however that may be, the important thing, which we hope to have achieved, is to encourage continuing debate across different conceptions of feminism’s relation to philosophy while producing a volume whose content and organization promotes a particular one.

Our idea of feminism *in* philosophy is also born of the ambition that feminist contributions should take their place in the philosophical main-

Cambridge University Press

052162469X - The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy

Edited by Miranda Fricker and Jennifer Hornsby

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Introduction

stream. This will require feminist work to be included in philosophy courses – whether these are courses in particular branches of philosophy, or courses specifically devoted to feminist themes. The pedagogical rationale has determined this *Companion's* overall organization. The divisions between chapters correspond to divisions between traditional philosophical areas – history of philosophy, metaphysics, ethics, etc. Wanting to aid and abet the entry of feminist work into philosophy teaching, we asked each of our authors to set the stage in her area – to provide material suited to show how the claims of her chapter fit into a broader context of feminist debate. Most of the chapters have an early section or sections which play the stage-setting role. (In a few cases, where a chapter as a whole has the character of a survey, such a section would have been redundant.)

A casual run through the book will reveal a lack of uniformity between subject areas in the quantity of existing material referred to while setting the stage, and in the length of their Further Reading lists (collected at the end of the volume). This is no accident, and reflects the unevenness of the development of feminist work in the different areas. This unevenness may be thought to be explained in its turn by differences in subject matter, with some areas naturally lending themselves more readily to feminist intervention. We see no need to judge: these are still early days for feminism in philosophy. We hope that this *Companion's* existence will encourage more feminist-informed work in the areas where it is scarce, and, in the areas where it is plentiful, assist in its incorporation into the mainstream.

The goal, then, has been to produce a collection that encompasses at least all of the core subject areas commonly taught in anglophone undergraduate philosophy courses. One difficult decision that has resulted has been to omit work that is usually categorized (though this may be a misnomer) as continental philosophy – work with roots in post-structuralism, or in critical theory, for instance. To many people such philosophy has seemed more immediately hospitable to feminist perspectives than its analytic counterpart. Indeed there is now so much innovative feminist continental work, both existing and ongoing, that we have considered it part of our task to help redress the balance by providing a space for analytic work. Students specializing in feminist continental philosophy who encounter no special difficulty in obtaining guidance to the literature in their area often find that they are stuck for want of bibliographies when they set out to discover what is happening under the analytic head. The absence of an essay on feminism in continental philosophy, then, results from the nature of our editorial task, given the volume's pedagogical ambition.

The only departure from our normal principle of inclusion comes with 'Feminism and Psychoanalysis'. Despite the fact that psychoanalysis is

Cambridge University Press

052162469X - The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy

Edited by Miranda Fricker and Jennifer Hornsby

Excerpt

[More information](#)

MIRANDA FRICKER AND JENNIFER HORNSBY

seldom on the philosophy syllabus, we felt that the volume would be incomplete without an essay in this area. It belongs here because of the enormous impetus which psychoanalysis has given to feminist work, including work of the ‘feminism in philosophy’ sort. Given that psychoanalysis can be a resource for feminists and for philosophers, it becomes an important question which of the various psychoanalytic theories we make use of. Sarah Richmond’s chapter provides a corrective to the recent tendency among feminists to draw exclusively on Lacanian psychoanalytical theory. She presents the work of a female analyst, Melanie Klein, as a springboard for fresh feminist philosophical reflection.

Psychoanalysis draws our attention to sexual difference – something that is relevant to all feminist thought. But the work collected here should also be read in relation to a concern with ‘difference’ of another kind. As a watchword of feminism, ‘difference’ refers to social differences *between* women – differences of ethnicity, or of sexual orientation, or of class, for instance. In feminist theory, ‘difference’ has come to signify all of the complexities thrown up by the sociological observation that women are not possessed of a uniform social identity.

Here as elsewhere, feminist philosophical thinking reveals its roots in the women’s movement. An articulated commitment to acknowledge difference sprang from a problem that second wave feminism, which emerged as a political force in the 1960s, found itself confronting a decade or so on. Perception of an exclusionary white, middle-class bias in the movement led to a split.⁵ At the level of practice, issues of difference drew attention to the need for a feminist politics which could furnish political solidarity among women yet do full justice to the intricacies of social identity. There is a continuing need for a transformative gender-politics that is suitably sensitive to relations of oppression besides gender. Diemut Bubeck argues for the possibility of such a transformative politics in her chapter here. She develops a dialogical, as opposed to antagonistic, model of communication across difference.

It has come to be a central feminist philosophical project to respect difference by treating the subject (or self) so that she is represented as socially situated in many dimensions of power and identity besides gender. Some work in mainstream philosophy has also come to make room for social differences between human beings. Sally Haslanger refers to such work under the heading ‘natural and social kinds’, in the course of discussing how feminism might contribute to the more abstract issues in metaphysics. In some quarters, at least, mainstream philosophy has arrived at accounts that can acknowledge the fully social character of any human

Cambridge University Press

052162469X - The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy

Edited by Miranda Fricker and Jennifer Hornsby

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Introduction

subject. Such accounts resist individualism of a sort which assumes that people must be conceived atomistically in the first instance, so that social relations between them are conceived as secondary. Not that it has been the aim of any mainstream account to accommodate social difference as such: the aim may be simply to ensure that the space of reasons is a socially articulated space,⁶ so that all conceptual activity is understood as activity within a setting in which people adopt attitudes towards one another.

Although the ‘socialized’ conception of the human subject that results is itself too abstract to include ideas about any socially specific subject, it is a merit of this conception (in our view) that when the accounts which embody it purport to record *a priori* truths about any ‘knower’ or ‘agent’, they speak of something ineluctably related to other such subjects. It is then a question for philosophers whether the pluralism that results from taking account of the socially specific characters of *diverse* human subjects leads inevitably to the kind of relativism that postmodernists endorse. This question is answered negatively in Miranda Fricker’s chapter on epistemology.

Epistemology provides a good example of an area reshaped by the socialized conception of people. When the knowing subject is treated as a social being, testimony assumes its place as a fundamental mode of knowledge acquisition, attention is given to epistemic practices, and relations between knowers are brought to the fore. Epistemology then contains resources for exposing the political aspects of quotidian epistemic practices. Such practices are now seen as instantiations of what the epistemologist theorizes about; and we know that equality between the people who are parties to these practices, in respect, for instance, of whether one takes another as reasonable, or as trustworthy, cannot be assumed. Social difference then makes for epistemic difference. In the chapter by Rae Langton, the question of epistemic difference is discussed in relation to how women may be excluded and even harmed by certain conceptions of knowledge.

The socialized conception of the subject contrasts with the individualistic conception which has thrown up so much of modern philosophy’s distinctive problematic. The individualistically conceived subject is the self-sufficient individual, represented in the figure of the philosopher when he finds himself on one side of a gulf – whether a gulf between himself and his body, himself and others, or himself and the world outside him. (Thus we encounter the ‘mind–body’ problem, the problem of ‘other minds’, and the problem of the ‘external world’.) In one way or another, many of the chapters here inveigh against this picture of the subject: most directly, perhaps, Susan James’s, Naomi Scheman’s and Jennifer Hornsby’s, in

Cambridge University Press

052162469X - The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy

Edited by Miranda Fricker and Jennifer Hornsby

Excerpt

[More information](#)

MIRANDA FRICKER AND JENNIFER HORNSBY

connection with personal identity, mentality and language use respectively. Alison Wylie's chapter addresses the socialization of the subject in the context of feminist philosophy of science which adopts a sceptical attitude towards the traditional ideal of value-neutrality in scientific enquiry. Marilyn Friedman's and Alison Jaggar's chapters reveal how feminist thinking, whether about autonomy or about moral justification, aims to reconcile the social interconnectedness of individual moral subjects with the differences in their social experience. And in the concluding essay, Genevieve Lloyd advances a conception of feminist history of philosophy as focused on the interface between philosophical texts and the cultural context of the present. Here, as in the collection generally, that cultural context is to be understood not in terms of gender relations alone, but in terms of the myriad categories of social identity.

Feminists are not alone in wanting to get past the compulsory 'neutrality' of traditional philosophy. And they are not isolated in their manner of intervention. Most notably, perhaps, an historicizing perspective entered philosophy of science with the work of Thomas Kuhn, who treated science as an institution, under historical pressures, rather than as, at any particular time, a body of theory simply.⁷ But the importance as it seems to us of the idea that humans' mode of being is being alive in some social setting appears to be dawning in analytic philosophy more generally.⁸ Insofar as feminist work cannot be viewed as continuous with the mainstream, we take this to be explained by the fact (as we put it above) of feminists' having a different starting point from the philosopher who has to be brought to acknowledge the historical and cultural locatedness of the subject.

Analytic philosophy creates an intellectual climate in which it is especially problematic to acknowledge locatedness. This is surely an important part of the explanation why continental philosophy can seem more hospitable to feminist projects. Feminists, who believe that the personal is political (to use the terms of a familiar slogan), are bound to be concerned not only with macro structures of power but also with human relations' permeation by power at the micro level. So the imperative of social criticism will ensure that feminist philosophy of any kind is likely to share an affinity with work in the continental tradition (most obviously, perhaps, with the work of Foucault and of Habermas). We believe it is philosophically valuable that work written in the anglo-american paradigm can produce a genuine engagement with questions typically raised in the continental tradition. What we put on display, in assembling this volume, is the possibility of an intellectual breadth in philosophy that is, as yet, largely foreign to the mainstream.

Cambridge University Press

052162469X - The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy

Edited by Miranda Fricker and Jennifer Hornsby

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Introduction

NOTES

- 1 *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy* (London: Methuen, 1984).
- 2 For a germinal account, see Michèle Le Dœuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary*, trans. Colin Gordon (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).
- 3 We borrow this concept from Margaret Whitford's *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (London: Routledge, 1991).
- 4 Several special issues (or issues containing special clusters) of *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* are devoted to new critical thinking of this kind. See vol. 7, no. 4 (Fall 1992), vol. 9, no. 1 (Winter 1994), vol. 12, no. 4 (Fall 1997) and vol. 13, nos. 2 and 3 (Spring and Summer 1998), on, respectively, lesbian philosophy, Spanish and Latin-American feminist philosophy, citizenship in feminism and multicultural and postcolonial feminist challenges to philosophy. See also relevant sections in *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy*, ed. Alison Jaggar and Iris Marion Young (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).
- 5 No doubt there were other factors contributing to the split. In Britain, at least, a political climate of virulent conservatism was in place by the early 1980s, discouraging and demoralizing radical movements for social change. See Lynne Segal, 'Generations of Feminism', *Radical Philosophy* 83 (1997), which we heard as a talk at 'Torn Halves', Radical Philosophy Conference, London, 9 Nov., 1996.
- 6 As Robert Brandom puts it in 'Knowledge and the Social Articulation of the Space of Reasons', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 65 (1995), 895–908. See also his *Making it Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).
- 7 *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1962).
- 8 Such an idea is at work, for instance, in Bernard Williams when he stresses the importance for ethics of the cultural and historical embeddedness that shapes a human life (*Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana/Collins Press, 1985)), and in John McDowell when he introduces the Aristotelian concept of 'second nature' into his account of thought's bearing on the world (*Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1994)).

Cambridge University Press

052162469X - The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy

Edited by Miranda Fricker and Jennifer Hornsby

Excerpt

[More information](#)

I

SABINA LOVIBOND

Feminism in ancient philosophy

The feminist stake in Greek rationalism

Introduction

Despite the internal diversity of extant ‘ancient philosophy’, it has generally been agreed that the main intellectual legacy of classical Greece and Rome to the modern world is the idea of the value of truth and the capacity of human reason to discover it. This idea, powerfully expressed in the dialogues of Plato and in the more systematic teaching of Aristotle, has provided an implicit point of reference – usually, though not invariably, positive – for all subsequent ‘philosophy’ in the western world, and feminist thought has been no exception to the rule. What remains unresolved, however, is the proper ratio of positive to negative in the attitude of feminism to ‘reason’. Since the eighteenth century at least, there has been an effort to rethink the rationalist ethical and political tradition for the benefit of women, and to detach its characteristic themes (legitimate social order; mutual recognition among citizens; co-operative pursuit of a common good) from the ideology of male supremacy. But the sexual egalitarianism which we inherit from the age of Enlightenment is complicated, today, by a rival impulse of *solidarity* with what the rationalist tradition symbolically excludes – that is, with reason’s supposedly feminine ‘other’ or complement. It is this tension that sets the scene for our discussion.

Probably the burden of argument can be said to rest at present on those who still wish to speak of continuity, rather than of discontinuity or rupture, between feminism and its philosophical past. There is at any rate no doubt that the overall effect of feminist scholarship since the 1970s has been to jolt the traditionally educated classical student into a less respectful attitude. Although it has been cheering to learn of a number of individual women who practised philosophy in the Greek world (even if their access to this activity may have been principally through their male kin or sexual protectors),¹ the most influential theme during this period has been that of