Introduction
Dialogue, politics and gender

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Dialogue is an idealised and endemic feature of modern democratic politics. So often contrasted with the monological dictations of imperialism, ethnocentrism and patriarchy, dialogue, with its potential for inclusivity, representation and political transformation, has become one of the most passionately discussed topics in social and political theory. However, while dialogue is promoted by its supporters as a pluralising force capable of accommodating the moral disagreement inevitable in every sphere of human society, its promise is widely and vehemently challenged. As the authors within this book demonstrate, there are conflicting views on the role that dialogue should play in politics. How are we to determine the principles upon which the dialogical exchange should take place? How should we think of ourselves as interlocutors? Should we associate dialogue with the desire for consensus? How should we determine decision-making? What are the gender dynamics of dialogical politics and how much do they matter? The purpose of this book is to bring together leading scholars to consider these questions anew from their various areas of expertise. Some challenge and reinterpret classic debates relating to gender and dialogical politics, while others introduce new conceptualisations. And while the authors display a range of analytic devices, as the title suggests, 'gender' is the context for their enquiry and provides fertile ground for exploration. What is more, inventive interpretations of works by, for example, Jürgen Habermas, Seyla Benhabib, Judith Butler, Georg Hegel, Friedrich Nietzsche, Iris Young, Charles Taylor, Carol Gilligan, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Georgia Warnke, Charles Larmore and John Dryzek are presented throughout.

In the first chapter – Women and the Standpoint of Concrete Others: From the Criticism of Discourse Ethics to Feminist Social Criticism – James Gordon Finlayson argues that Habermas's hugely influential model for dialogical politics has been misinterpreted by a generation of feminist scholars. In doing so, he takes a different position on moral

universalism from other authors in this volume, such as Judith Squires, Barbara Fultner and Kimberly Hutchings.

Finlayson's exploration of Habermas's discourse ethics places his interpretation of the 'moral standpoint' and its attendant 'moral self' at the centre of analysis. The moral standpoint is 'the idea of a place one occupies in order to survey the moral domain and see it aright'. It is justified by the dialogical nature of discourse ethics, which requires the dialogical engagement of rational actors, leading to consensus and is captured by the single principle (U). Habermas's principle (U) refers to the definition of a moral norm which can *only* be valid if '[a]ll affected can accept the consequences and the side-effects the general observance of a controversial norm can be anticipated to have for the satisfaction of the interests of each individual'. Principle (U) is a crucial feature of Habermas's theory since, for him, *only* 'universalisable interests' identified through dialogue and consensus can be transformed into the moral norms of justice. For Habermas, then, justice is equivalent to morality and is restricted to but a few universalisable moral norms. It is this strict limitation which has attracted vehement feminist critique, including that of Benhabib.

In assessing Benhabib's renowned challenge to Habermas, Finlayson locates its roots in two highly influential works: Gilligan's critique of Lawrence Kohlberg in the field of developmental psychology, and Michael Sandel's critique of John Rawls in political philosophy. Finlayson gives a detailed assessment of both Gilligan's and Sandel's works and claims several fundamental flaws in each. These flaws, in turn, he argues, are adopted by Benhabib (and the generation of feminist scholars who were directly influenced by her) in her critique of Habermas's discourse ethics.

Through an analysis of Benhabib's critique, Finlayson rejects her claim that Habermas's discourse ethics can only cater to an idealised rational autonomous actor and argues that her concept of the 'concrete other' reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of the moral standpoint and the dialogical aspect of Habermas's discourse ethics. In the final sections of his chapter, Finlayson is more open to some of Benhabib's other challenges – in particular, her view that Habermas's conception of justice is inadequate for the purposes of a dynamic feminist politics – however, that said, it is not at all clear to Finlayson that Benhabib provides anything more elucidating.

In Chapter 2, Barbara Fultner also returns to Habermas, asserting that core elements of his discourse ethics are vital to contemporary

debate on gender and dialogical politics. However, she is persuaded by the idea that Habermas's discourse ethics cannot overcome the problem of misinterpretations between interlocutors with different identities in the dialogical context, and she sets out to develop a reconceptualisation of rational consensus and universalism by way of a response.

Fultner begins by revisiting Young's work on 'perspective-taking' for inspiration. Young's various claims about perspective-taking are grounded in her idea of 'social groups', which should not be understood as having a 'group identity' as such but rather as a collection of individuals who have similar 'perspectives' that, to varying degrees, are influenced by their similar experiences of the 'structural organisation of power' and 'resource allocation'. Fultner, though not fully convinced by the arguments of Young, nevertheless borrows the parts that provide an alternative starting point not only to 'parochial interest-driven identity politics' but also to 'difference-blind universality-driven politics'. Next, drawing on Sara Mills' critique of 'identity linguistics' and her concept of 'discourse competence', Fultner refutes the popular view that discursive power resides with the male and opens up the dynamism of dialogical politics to all.

Fultner then considers Butler's important claim that Habermas requires the prohibitive fixity of meaning in order to justify the ideal of rational consensus. On this view, political dialogue would be confined to dominant discourses and would foreclose future understandings and interpretations of meaning. In response, Fultner introduces her interpretation of rational consensus as *defeasible* – that is to say, generally compelling but not absolute – so that discourse is able to accommodate resignifications of identity and meaning. She concedes, however, that 'signification' or 'pre-understanding' must logically precede '*re*signification', and it is these pre-understandings that are so often deeply lodged in the habitual backdrop to dialogue – what Habermas calls 'the lifeworld' – and are the most resistant to reinterpretation. To this, Fultner invokes Taylor's 'language of perspicuous contrast', which enables engagement across cultures. This approach requires that each interlocutor must understand something of the other in order to appreciate that their own pre-understandings must be open to revision. It is equally crucial that each interlocutor is open to their own identities being transformed through the dialogical encounter, in order for there to be meaningful political dialogue.

By combining these ideas, Fultner develops an innovative open-ended, 'fallibilist' conception of universalism, which, she claims, is in

fact common to *both* Butler and Habermas, despite Butlerian critique. In doing so, she defends a reconfigured consensus-oriented dialogue as an inclusive and dynamic form of transformative politics across and within gender boundaries.

The next chapter, Universalism in Feminist International Ethics: Gender and the Difficult Labour of Translation, by Kimberly Hutchings, addresses dialogical politics at the international level. Like the two previous authors, Hutchings is interested in how we should understand universalism and how moral judgement might be justified. In contrast to Finlayson and Fultner however, she turns to Hegel for inspiration.

Hutchings begins by setting out Hegel's deconstruction of the logic of moral judgement in which he examines the Kantian moral point of view based on pure practical reason and grounded in the universal and also that of the alternative Romantic (singular) beautiful soul embodying perfect moral subjectivity. On Hegel's view, both accounts fail in that neither can sustain satisfactory distinctions between the content and form of the universal, the singular and the particular.

Over the course of this chapter, Hutchings argues that Hegel's misgivings about the categories of moral judgement can be applied to the three foremost approaches to moral reasoning in international ethics: cosmopolitanism (moral universalism), communitarianism (moral particularism) and care ethics (moral singularism), the last of which is adopted by many feminists.

Whilst Hutchings is convinced by Hegel's contestation of the logic of moral judgement, she finds little in his work that provides direct guidance for international ethics (feminist or otherwise). Consequently, she invokes dialogue as a way forward and turns to the work of Benhabib and Butler. Like Finlayson, although from a very different angle, Hutchings is critical of Benhabib's position. Drawing on the works of Young, Hutchings argues that Benhabib's dialogical model relies too heavily on the idea of reversibility, and here we see similarities with Fultner's view of Habermas's discourse ethics in the previous chapter. On Hutchings' account, then, and in particular for the international context, the misconception that one can simply see things clearly from another's point of view tends to lead to the assimilation of difference to sameness. For her, Benhabib is subject to Hegel's critique of 'the moral point of view' under charges of homogenisation and a reliance on overly prescriptive underpinnings. Consequently, and in a vein complementary to Fultner's use of Taylor's 'language of perspicuous contrast',

Hutchings develops the idea of Butler's 'cultural translation' as a viable alternative. A form of discursive dialogue, cultural translation involves the 'loss of purity of meaning' for each interlocutor and 'denies the possibility of definitively settling questions on the meaning and validity of moral claims and concepts through a process of judgment'. Hutchings argues that her development of Butler's work might challenge the meaning of 'universality' in a way that avoids Hegel's critique of moral judgment and that can be used productively in the context of dialogical politics and feminist international ethics.

In the chapter entitled Language, Gender, Dialogue, Ethics: Universalism and Consensus after Gender Trouble, Terrell Carver, like Fultner and Hutchings, is particularly interested in the fusion of language and power in the dialogical context. Carver begins by casting the conventional understanding of ethics as a 'vocabulary' through which individuals can express their particular perspectives on 'things', such as the morally good life. Implicit to this understanding is the notion that individuals who employ such a vocabulary are in possession of different traits or properties, which inform or determine their various viewpoints. Gender identity would be one such property. It follows from this conventional perspective 'that dialogue and consensus across the gender binary will be ... difficult, or on some radical feminist views, impossible'. However, Carver takes a step back from this position and asks: '[b]ut what if language is not about "things", individuals do not have properties, and gender is not in the body and the mind? What then happens to ... the conjunction of ethics with dialogue [and] consensus with universalism?'

In order to answer these questions, Carver turns to Butler's famous work on gender and power: '[g]ender is [in fact] a property of language, not a property of individuals, and indeed "things" therefore do not have properties at all, language does, and the ascription of properties to "things" is a locution, not a reflection'. If gender difference is merely a locution rather than an actual set of characteristics, then all suppositions based upon it are unfounded. The liberatory nature of Butler's argument is apparent. However, if we are to accept the view that 'all stabilities are denounced', what hope is there for any form of agreement in dialogical politics?

To understand gender differences and power as properties of language is not to negate their importance but rather to re-identify them. Carver explains how our language as a dialogical or 'intersubjective' phenomenon

is not only temporal but also widely transmittable and therefore how we can easily come to think of terms in language as referential (a reflection of a perceived given) rather than what they really are – mere 'tropes of generalisation, universalisation and ultimately, inscription'. Butler's claim is that such 'tropes of referentiality', which have been seemingly naturalised, are at the core of power relations in which human individuals are mistaken in thinking that forms of oppression are insurmountable and consequently remain subordinate. Carver explains that on this view, language could be thought of as a means to '[record] for a time where human individuals intersubjectively determine for each other through power relations what differences there are, and how much they matter'. We should, Carver concludes, develop an introspective type of dialogue that would enable us to express desires that we understand to be 'in process' rather than naturalised, as well as being aware that language itself is invariably constitutive of power relations.

In the next chapter, Between Consensus and Deconstruction, Martin Leet and Roland Bleiker confirm the merits of dialogue as a transformative means to political progress, not least in terms of a feminist agenda. Yet, they vehemently oppose political dialogue focused on consensus – what they refer to as 'the modernist longing for certainty'.

Leet and Bleiker begin with the linguistic turn in philosophy and highlight the feminist critique that political dialogue is all too often 'cast in masculine terms'. They, like several authors in the book, are persuaded by Butlerian critiques of Habermas's discourse ethics insofar as they problematise subjectivity as a basis for a 'naive politics of liberation and emancipation'. Indeed they agree with Butler that identities should instead be constructed and disregarded in line with contingent political practices and that dialogue should be decoupled from the desire for mutual understanding altogether. However, unlike Hutchings and Carver, for example, Leet and Bleiker are not convinced that such an approach provides any inspiration on how to move forward and so suggest an alternative route – the aesthetic approach. Drawing on the works of writers such as Georgia Warnke and Jane Bennett, Leet and Bleiker illustrate how an aesthetic approach emphasises the non-consensual potential of dialogue as a means of communication not only with others (here they invoke the expectation of differing interpretations of art and literature by way of example) but also within oneself through 'practices of self-cultivation' (an argument in line with that of Carver and

Smith and Strong). Asserting the self as multiple, such self-cultivation practices, they argue, are a vital precondition of productive dialogue with others: 'Opening up a constructive dialogue among these internal identities is a way of cultivating the self towards external forms of dialogue.' Conceived as such, Leet and Bleiker argue that an aesthetic approach to dialogical politics is able to cater to the complex self and serve as the basis for new theoretical exploration which neither liberal nor post-structuralist approaches can.

From a perspective shared with Leet and Bleiker, Verity Smith and Tracy Strong argue that it is insufficient to consider the dialogical process as simply one between interlocutors with multiple views. They, too, argue that the self is multiple. However, as they set out in Chapter 6, Trapped in a Family Portrait? Gender and Family in Nietzsche's Refiguring of Authority, Smith and Strong are concerned that the concept of the multiple self is too often adopted merely as a response to the seemingly impoverished singular and fixed identity of the self inherent in liberal models of democratic politics. Their claim is that there is insufficient theorising as to what it might actually mean for the self to be multiple and how to conceive of it in this way might further the democratic project. Through a detailed reading of Nietzsche, Smith and Strong consider these questions and provide a provocative analysis of Nietzschean genealogy, which they place at the heart of scholarship on the multiple self and dialogical politics.

According to Nietzsche '[a] self ... cannot be single: he/she/it must contain all that engendered it (parents) and all that it can engender (child)'; nor can it be restricted to one gender identity, '[as] both his mother and father he is thus of two genders, both male and female ... bi-gendered'. Indeed, in identifying the 'double sexuality of one's selves', Smith and Strong claim that 'Nietzsche's rethinking of the relationship of present to past is inextricably bound up with a contestation of conventional gender roles'.

Nietzsche's position is that we are able to alter our current identity by confronting and transforming our past. Smith and Strong assert that by virtue of this return to the past, the concept of self is no longer anchored temporally. Similarly, they challenge the idea that the self is constricted spatially (in this context, 'spatiality' is understood as the boundaries of one's identity). It is not enough to conceive of the self as multiple but also 'motile' or fluid in that the boundaries of 'the many selves' are porous to each other, thereby enabling continuous change. Smith and

Strong argue that the other in dialogue must also be multiple and motile. Consequently, we should be wary of the political temptation to 'fix the voice of *the* other . . . sex' or to claim moral superiority. Instead, and in contrast to authors such as Finlayson and Fultner, Smith and Strong argue we should foster an 'agonistic respect' for our interlocutors or opponents in order to protect against a 'monopoly of predominance'. Akin to Leet and Bleiker and Carver, Smith and Strong suggest that we should abandon traditional understandings of universalism as the frame of transformative dialogical politics, and also understandings of consensus-oriented procedures as its objective. However, they argue that Nietzsche offers a more complex understanding of the self as temporally free, mobile and motile, and in doing so, offer foundations for a dynamic dialogical politics aimed at the accommodation of difference and plurality through the privileging of 'individuality' rather than the predominant focus on 'individualism' in current liberal democratic models.

The chapter entitled Gender, Gesture and Garments: Encountering Embodied Interlocutors, by Diana Coole, introduces a 'corporeal–hermeneutical' approach to discourse ethics that examines the various ways in which bodies, particularly gendered bodies, generate power dynamics in the act of dialogue.

Coole's approach is particularly relevant for Habermas's discourse ethics, which prescribes that 'diverse constituencies actually meet to negotiate fair procedures and to participate in reasoned discussion under conditions of free and equal access'. But what are the implications of this type of encounter in terms of gender identity? Rather than focusing on women's exclusion from and subordination in political deliberations, as many feminists do, Coole investigates the situation of women who actively take part in dialogical politics as potentially 'equal players' and asks: 'How significant is it that they are embodied? Do their gendered bodies still disadvantage (or, perhaps, empower) them within discursive situations?'

In examining these questions, Coole analyses three different approaches to understanding the body: instrumental, genealogical and phenomenological. The first of these, the instrumental approach, in effect identifies the body as a 'material tool of the will'. On this view, individuals purposefully use their bodies to boost their influence in dialogical forms of deliberation. In contrast, the genealogical approach (essentially a Butlerian perspective here) identifies the body as a 'medium' or 'site' of power, thereby implying

passivity despite its participation in dialogical proceedings. Whilst Coole acknowledges the usefulness of both the instrumental and genealogical approaches, neither is fully convincing to her: 'what they both fail to recognise is the way bodies actively exhibit capacities for communication and expression, and hence agency, in a corporeal way that renders the body an important player in any face-to-face conversation'. Consequently, she introduces a third perspective to supplement the other two approaches. The phenomenological approach, drawn from the work of Merleau-Ponty, describes the body itself as having agential and improvisatory capacities; 'a corporeal process whereby the perceiving body responds to and engenders, stylizes and patterns its milieu, thereby endowing its world with meaning before it reflects or speaks'.

Coole applies her combined approach not only to the body but also to clothing, which she describes as 'rich in symbolic and communicative significance, which melds with the meanings emitted by bodies and therefore enters deliberative situations along with, or as part of, them'. In the final section of the chapter, she examines body language and religious dress through a detailed discussion of the veil worn by some Muslim women in Britain. In combining the various themes in her chapter, Coole argues that corporeality is an inherent feature of any dialogue and that it must be incorporated into any model of dialogical politics, not least those influenced by Habermas.

In their chapter, What Kind of Dialogue do we Need? Gender, Deliberation and Comprehensive Values, Clare Chambers and Philip Parvin are unconvinced by the central place dialogue inhabits as a tool for establishing ethical principles in popular models of deliberative democracy and political liberalism. Like several other authors in this book, Chambers and Parvin begin by tracking the recent turn in contemporary political theory towards dialogical politics in response to criticisms that conventional forms of liberalism and democratic practice cannot accommodate the scale of cultural diversity that characterises modern society. Through an assessment of Charles Larmore's dialogical approach to liberal justice, they argue that despite many attractive features of deliberative democracy and dialogical models of liberalism, the preconditions necessary for them to function (such as compliance with principles of equality and autonomy) are no less problematic than the comprehensive values underpinning more traditional forms of contractualist liberalism. On the view that both deliberative and contractualist liberal traditions rely upon similar norms of reasonableness,

equal respect and the desire to share some form of common life, Chambers and Parvin challenge the added benefits of dialogue, questioning 'its ability to resolve political conflicts arising from social and moral diversity by standing apart from controversial or comprehensive liberal values'.

The particular problems that Chambers and Parvin identify in establishing foundational principles through dialogue are highlighted by the specific context of gender. Focusing on Benhabib's account of discourse ethics, they argue (in a similar vein to Hutchings) that so stringent are the preconditions of Benhabib's dialogical process that there is very little, if any, work left for dialogue to do. In other words, if the dialogical process requires, as Benhabib claims, a series of predetermined foundational principles including 'acceptance of egalitarian reciprocity' and 'individual autonomy', then many of the major controversies pertinent to gender ethics may be resolved directly from these principles and do not need the superfluous dimension of dialogue. Nevertheless, appreciative of the informative and transformative potential of dialogue, Chambers and Parvin turn to Dryzek's work and consider the merits of his discursive model of democracy, which they compare to 'consciousness-raising' such as that emblematic of second-wave feminism. In conclusion, whilst Chambers and Parvin reject dialogue as a means of devising ethical or political 'rules', they argue that it should be promoted as a powerful tool for facilitating individuals, through their exchanges with others, to investigate their understandings of and assumptions about gender and social norms and for developing their own views on how best to effect positive change.

In the last chapter of this volume, Deliberation, Domination and Decision-Making, Judith Squires argues that those who are concerned with a legitimate and inclusive model of deliberative democracy have no choice but to accept the inclusion of some form of 'dialogical impartiality' despite various feminist claims to the contrary. This view notwithstanding, Squires is sceptical that dialogue can elevate democracy above anything more than the mere aggregation of preferences.

Like Finlayson, Squires begins by revisiting the influences of Carol Gilligan's work on the 'ethic of care'. As highlighted by several authors in this collection, feminist advocates of such an approach (which Squires calls the 'expressive approach') argue that abstract procedural models of deliberative democracy exclude the feminine, the particular and the bodily. Squires recounts how such an approach has been