


1996

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Repository Citation

Martin Alcoff, Linda (1996) "Is the Feminist Critique of Reason Rational," *Philosophic Exchange*: Vol. 26 : No. 1 , Article 1.
Available at: http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/phil_ex/vol26/iss1/1

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Is the Feminist Critique of Reason Rational?

Linda Martín Alcoff

I would wager that many women in philosophy understand intuitively that there is a natural link between feminism and philosophy.¹ Michele LeDoeuff explains this as follows. To be a feminist, she claims, is to be “a woman who does not leave others to think for her...”² This is the essential core of the feminist attitude, prior to the acceptance of any specific feminist theory or explanation of women’s subordination. But on the basis of just this minimal core, LeDoeuff conjectures we can “make a link” between feminism and philosophy, building on the more general link between “thinking philosophically and self-assertion through thought.” Given this association between the doing of philosophy and a certain kind of assertive subjectivity, or between philosophy’s being and doing, it becomes clear that “‘thinking philosophically’ and ‘being a feminist’ appear as one and the same attitude: a desire to judge by and for oneself.”³

However, despite this “natural” connection, within the profession at large the attribution of an intrinsic connection between feminism and philosophy more often produces cognitive dissonance. Feminism is (considered) a substantive set of empirical claims and political commitments. Philosophy is (considered) a discipline of thought organized by the pursuit of truth but uncommitted to any particular truth. To forego this separation by committing *philosophy itself* to some particular truth before it even begins its work is to risk inviting dogmatism. Therefore, philosophical reason must be kept prior to and primary over feminism, else feminism itself will be doomed to irrationality.

Or so Martha Nussbaum has argued in a recent critique of feminist philosophy which appeared in *The New York Review of Books*. The flavor of this article is anticipated in her opening epigram from Plato which states that there must “be a type of woman that loves philosophy, and another type that hates it.”⁴ For Nussbaum, as well as for Plato, the deciding issue demarcating these “types of women” is their respect for and loyalty to reason. This is the main problem she has with much feminist philosophy: that it courts irrationalism by unreasonably associating patriarchy with philosophical reason and thus undermining what should be its own best ally in the effort to critique and counteract irrational sexist beliefs. In this paper I will try to allay these concerns, some of which arise from an equivocation over the word “reason,” or a disagreement about its scope, a topic I will discuss in a moment. But I also want to place Nussbaum’s specific (and legitimate) questions within a larger context involving philosophy’s own legitimation narratives and its resistance to feminism, especially to feminist philosophy.

This resistance has reached a discernible new stage in the level of attentive interrogation the mainstream is directing toward our work. We have been interrogated before, but mostly we have been ignored, puzzled over, chided, and sometimes ridiculed. The major research departments have by and large not included feminist philosophy in their course lists, much less their required courses or comprehensive exam areas. We are by and large not cited or quoted by the leading (or dominant) writers in the discipline, even when our ideas are relevant to and supportive of theirs. There are too many examples here to cite. (An especially stark example is Steve Fuller’s 1988 *Social Epistemology* which focused on central themes feminists had worked on throughout the 1980’s but neglected to cite a single feminist work.) After Annette Baier’s ground breaking presidential address to the APA a few years back, ground breaking as the first address which developed feminist themes, the (male) philosophers that surrounded me in the audience were universally cold in their assessment, one of them expressing the general reaction : “Nice paper, but

no argument.” This, as we all know, is the most devastating criticism a philosopher can make of another.

Still, Annette Baier *did* become president of the APA, and she *did* read a paper developing feminist themes. Richard Rorty, a widely read philosopher despite his iconoclasm, has recently been quoting Marilyn Frye with approval. There are regular panels on feminist philosophy at each of the APA division meetings.

Several journals have had special issues on feminism, and have reviewed feminist books.

And though we are not at the major research institutions yet, feminist philosophers are getting jobs, in some cases good ones.

These positive developments are causing anxiety in a variety of quarters. Some white male job candidates feel threatened, and surprised that they would be threatened (I think), in a discipline they think of as ruled by reason rather than “political correctness.” Even established philosophers may feel some anxiety about what our agenda is in the profession, and to what extent it is directed at them. And the anxiety is not restricted to men: perhaps feminism poses a greater immediate risk to women in the field. Senior women who work in fairly traditional areas may feel as if they are being implicitly criticized by this new area of work, e.g., that their work is not feminist enough or is the product of internalized oppression. In a context where few if any women in our profession feel completely accepted by the discipline, a feminist presence can create cause for alarm: alarm about the projected guilt by association, or irritation at claims made about one that one has no sympathy for, or fear that the derision of feminist work will cast a general doubt about women’s ability to philosophize. I have experienced this myself. I was recently at a conference where another woman and I made a minority of two on a panel which included ten male speakers. After several hours of presentations and discussion, a woman from the audience spoke up, rather heatedly, to chastise the men for not listening to me and the other woman, for not even “looking at us as we spoke.” I felt paternalized by this intervention, annoyed by what I believed was an overhasty judgment-call and the fact that she hadn’t approached us directly before speaking on our behalf in public.

At the same time as I would critique some of the particular features of this small example of “feminist intervention,” I also know that my miffed reaction was partly due to my own embarrassment: I wanted to pretend that everything at the conference was fine, that my work was being given equal and fair consideration, and that the male colleagues with whom I was working were trustworthy and impartial. It would be personally painful to think otherwise, and awkward and difficult to raise such criticisms publicly. So part of my reaction to this speaker from the audience was also based on a resistance against the possibility that she was right.

Reactions to feminism often harbor both these sorts of elements—legitimate criticism alongside anxiety-driven resistance—without their being distinguished. We need to initiate some collective processes of group self-reflection in order to better identify which reaction is which. And we must realize that it would be foolish to aim toward the elimination of all anxious resistance against the immense (yet also very personal) social changes and disciplinary evolutions that feminism has initiated. On the other hand, clearly it would be wrong to demand that feminist philosophers must somehow take responsibility for these anxieties, that we must reassure the boys that we are not anti-male, that we aren’t out to destroy the canon, or that we must stop analyzing gender so as not to make it look like women are only interested in the particular and never the universal, or even that we should stop calling ourselves feminists so that people won’t confuse the whole of feminism with what we write. There are things that we should take

responsibility for, of course, and uppermost among these I would put the quality of our work, our intellectual integrity and political accountability, and our responsibility to use any power we have to help other women in the profession overcome sexist obstacles to their development as philosophers (a motivation that, no doubt, inspired the woman I mentioned above). How we interpret these responsibilities—how, e.g., we define “quality,” and how we identify where responsibility devolves into paternalism—is of course subject to a debate which will never achieve final resolution.

Feminist philosophy provokes particularly anxious responses because its subject matter is not the ontological status of numbers or of mereological sums but the status of women, with necessarily implicit if not explicit judgments concerning how we have lived and how we should live in our private as well as public lives. It thus exposes nerves and challenges our constructions of self. And for women who are philosophers, that construction of self has no doubt incorporated to a significant degree some notions about our individual and perhaps collective capacity to reason, to wield that most important human capacity and to participate in the ongoing conversation guided by reason which we call philosophical thought. It is thus in the midst of these complicated and treacherous waters that we must consider the debate over the feminist critique of reason.

Sabina Lovibond has written another, perhaps more judicious essay on feminism and reason but which articulates some of the same concerns as Martha Nussbaum's essay.⁶ Both Nussbaum and Lovibond are concerned with feminist philosophy's relationship to philosophy, to the canon, and to the standard understandings of reason, argument, or what might be thought of as epistemic legitimation within the field. Both question whether feminism rightly criticizes the canon as fundamentally patriarchal, and they wonder if feminism can coherently critique philosophical methodology given that it must use that same methodology in its critique. And both are concerned that a feminist critique of philosophy and of reason may well undercut one of the primary strategies women have at our disposal to invalidate sexist beliefs.

These are important and legitimate concerns, since they raise the key metaphilosophical challenges that feminist philosophy has put forward to the discipline. In particular, the feminist critique of reason challenges philosophy's self-understanding as a discipline of discourse primarily organized by the pursuit of truth (unlike, for example, literature, theology, rhetoric, or art). And key to this self-image is Plato's distinction between philosophy and sophistry, between philosophical argument governed by the pursuit of truth and rhetorical argument governed by the pursuit of persuasion or practical aims. Given this map, the demise of philosophical reason would seem to consign us to accepting that all discourses are reducible to strategies of power or manifestations of a desire ungoverned by rational standards.

But if philosophy is truly truth-seeking, then how can we account for the exclusion, denigration, and repudiation of all things female throughout the history of our esteemed vocation? When Aristotle explains that women are deformed males, when Rousseau advises to consult women's opinions only in bodily matters and never in matters of morality or understanding, when Kant jokes that a woman who reasons might as well have a beard, and when Hegel likens the differences between males and females to those between animals and plants, where is the overriding concern with truth?⁷ Can the pattern discernible in these errors be explained as the result of an ignorance of some empirical fact? If the problem is a moral one, isn't it likely that the tradition of moral theory produced by these thinkers would show some trace of their ability to hold these attitudes towards their closest companions? And to the extent that the moral disposition

depended on some element of cognition, is it plausible to maintain that the theories of justification and of truth produced in this tradition were also immune from an entanglement with the need to justify these vitally important beliefs?

The traditional account of sexism within philosophy has been that it manifests only temporary lapses of reasoning ability, based on what Nussbaum calls "blind spots, the ignorance of fact, and the moral obtuseness" of a male-dominated academy.⁸ On her view, we can rectify these errors by getting on "with the tough work of theorizing in a rigorous and thoroughgoing way" on philosophical issues concerning women, sex, and the family. "It is in this way and no other," Nussbaum claims, "that women in philosophy can go beyond the past achievements of males."⁹ Reason will reveal the truth, if it is wielded consistently and rigorously.

But as I have suggested, many feminist philosophers have argued that this move is premature. The first response to a survey of the "blind spots" on women in the canon should not be simply new work on women using previous methods but must be a self-reflective, self-critical one, on the part of philosophy itself, in order to answer *how* it could be the case that, as LeDoeuff puts it, "where women are concerned the learned utter, and institutions let them utter, words which fall clearly below their own usual standards of validation."¹⁰ How does this *licensing* of misogyny operate within canonical texts? What standards of validation permit the opportunist devolution of the usual standards when the subject is women?

Nussbaum has two worries about this move toward critiquing reason: (a) she worries that critiquing reason leads feminists to dispense with reason and thus toward an irrationalism that would relinquish the possibility of truth (a philosophical concern); (b) she also worries that without reason feminism will not be able to justify the feminist conclusions that she herself would support, and thus that feminism's political aims will be disabled (a political concern). My argument will be that these are legitimate but groundless concerns.

Clearly one difficulty here concerns just exactly what is being talked about when we talk about reason. Nussbaum generally uses a very limited and narrow account of reason, involving no more than giving arguments and subjecting these to tests of logical validity. I could say here, correctly, that no feminist philosopher would dispute the need for reason in this minimal version, but there is more to the story. Feminists who are engaged in the critique of reason generally understand reason as involving more than logical validity to include conceptions of intellectual virtue, certain kinds of mental dispositions, and a variety of semi-conscious assumptions that work to identify what can count as an argument as well as what can count as relevant reasons toward its conclusion. For some contemporary philosophers, this larger notion of reason brings to mind tired Modernist debates over the quest for a faculty of reason which are today considered thankfully closed. On this view, the feminist critique would be essentially targeting a straw figure, or returning us to an outmoded project few continue to be interested in pursuing.

However, the feminist critique of reason is not obsessing over an outdated conception of reason but revealing the implicit assumptions still operative in even the minimal conception of reason endorsed today. In other words, the idea of a radical break (or incommensurable paradigm shift) between Modernist concepts of Reason and modern accounts of reason is both implausible and in fact mistaken. The very endorsement of minimalism, which has been a vogue in both epistemology and metaphysics at least since Quine, bespeaks a host of philosophical assumptions and a specific metaphilosophical orientation. For one thing, minimalism allows philosophers to believe they can transcend the quagmires of the Modernist debates with a simple change in definition, and avoid self-

reflection over how those earlier assumptions were implicated in sexism and how they still inform current thinking. It is this very refusal to engage in self-reflection over the political problems in those earlier accounts that will doom us to be repeatedly susceptible to the same sort of errors.

In order to adequately assess the feminist critique, then, a stubborn insistence that all there is to reason is given in the minimal account will just get in the way. For the moment, let us define reason more broadly, and also more generally, as the conception of how we achieve sound judgments. This broad definition can then provide a bridge between the different discussions relevant to this debate.

The first task toward understanding the feminist critique of reason is to historically situate it within the rather long tradition of critiquing reason that has existed within the mainstream of philosophy itself. Serious and sustained philosophical discussion concerning the scope and limits of reason is usually dated from the 18th century. Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, after all, developed the view that reason, knowledge, and in fact philosophy itself was limited by the intellectual and perceptual attributes of man, that our reasoning capacity provides as much a reflection on us as a window onto the world. The epistemological problems this acknowledgment raises were solved by Kant by claiming that the world we know is not a world in itself, or a world completely indifferent to human projects and concerns, but a world constituted in part by those concerns (thus Hilary Putnam takes Kant to be the original founder of his internal realism).

In the nineteenth century, Hegel pushed this critique further to argue that knowledge and reason are also embedded within and marked by history, on the grounds that the constitutive categories identified by Kant are temporally located or indexed, and thus human knowledge is unable ever to totally surpass the horizon of its historical era. Neither philosophical puzzles nor their solutions have a timeless reach, and in fact many resolutions develop only through the historical evolution of social change. I read Marx as identifying a further fundamental qualifying condition for philosophy in material power, which he defined as forms of laboring practices, and relations of production. What this idea provided beyond Kant and Hegel was the truly revolutionary notion that philosophy could no longer be entrusted to discern and correct all of its own errors; it required external critique from other disciplines in order to reveal its ideological content.

Nietzsche and Freud of course also contributed to the undermining of the rigid demarcation between abstract reason and the desiring body, with Nietzsche arguing that the body is the fundamental source of all human thought and argument and Freud arguing that the rational ego maintains its autonomy over an arational desire only temporarily. The Frankfurt School made another important critique of the way in which reason's reflective and critical aspects were being dismantled under the conditions of a commodity culture that performs only instrumental, or means-end, calculations. This critique might also target the minimalist account of reason, if the latter works to preclude a critical reflection on philosophy's social effects.

The feminist critique of reason can thus be thought of as contributing to this long tradition of philosophical autocritique but adding the original dimension of sexual difference. Feminists have argued that concepts of reason and knowledge, as well as those of man, history, and power, are reflections of gendered practices passing as universal ones. The problem is not simply that men have been biased against women's capacity to be rational, but that, at least in modernity, reason has been defined in opposition to the feminine, such that it requires the exclusion, transcendence and even the domination of the feminine, of women, and of women's traditional concerns which

have been characterized as the site of the irreducibly irrational particular and corporeal. Moreover, as Genevieve Lloyd has pointed out, "femininity itself has been partly constituted through such processes of exclusion."¹¹ This is how Kant is able to make rational his claim that the woman who reasons might as well have a beard. It is our (supposed) irrational, intuitive, and emotional characteristics that both define us as female and make us capable of affirming men's "essential" superiority. Like any other concept, rationality is defined by reference to some contrast, and the association between rationality and masculinity dictated that contrasting site as the female.

The major factor in this masculinist formulation of reason has been mind-body dualism. From the time of Plato, reason was thought to enable the soul to reach a "pure, and eternal...immortal and unchangeable" realm where truth dwells among the "divine...and the wise," as Genevieve Lloyd explains.¹² "The senses, in contrast, drag the soul back to the realm of the changeable, where it 'wanders about blindly, and becomes confused and dizzy, like a drunken man, from dealing with the things that are ever changing.'" To achieve knowledge, Plato concluded, "the god-like rational soul should rule over the slave-like mortal body." He goes so far as to claim:

We are in fact convinced that if we are ever to have pure knowledge of anything, we must get rid of the body and contemplate things by themselves with the soul by itself. It seems, to judge from the argument, that the wisdom which we desire and upon which we profess to have set our hearts will be attainable only when we are dead, and not in our lifetime.¹³

The metaphysics of this concept of reason required the control of the body, of its emotions, desires, and everyday concerns, in order to achieve the detached outlook from which the philosopher could ascend to the plane of the universal. Such a view, in various manifestations, made its way throughout the history of western philosophy, through Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Bacon, Descartes, Rousseau, Hume, and even Kant. Though reason was portrayed as universal and neutral precisely because it was bodiless, this schema worked to justify the exclusion of women from the domains of the academy, of science, and of generally being accorded epistemic authority and even credibility. Even Simone de Beauvoir, writing the inaugurating treatise of western feminist theory in this century, agreed with the claim that women were more prone to corporeal intrusions than men, and her (in)famous solution was for women to refuse marriage and motherhood.

It is precisely because of this legacy that Genevieve Lloyd argued in 1984 that a feminist project determined to gain for women the realm of the "mind" will never work to overturn male supremacy. We cannot simply remove women from the sphere of the "body" and claim for ourselves the sphere of the "mind" and "reason" when these latter concepts have been constructed on the basis of our exclusion. Such a strategy would only participate in the violent erasure of women, continuing the valorization of the masculine as the only gender that can achieve full humanity. Thus Lloyd warned that, "the confident affirmation that Reason 'knows no sex' may likewise be taking for reality something which, if valid at all, is so only as an ideal..If there is a Reason genuinely common to all, it is something to be achieved in the future, not celebrated in the present."¹⁴

This raises the constructive question of how to reconceptualize reason toward bringing about that universal ideal. If women are to have epistemic credibility and authority, we need to reconfigure the role of bodily experience in the development of knowledge, as well as the relationship between public and private discourse, and the primacy of the propositional over the inarticulate.¹⁵ On the other hand, if reason can

no longer be segregated from bodily experience, and if sexual difference mandates a significant distinction between male and female bodily experiences, must we forego the goal of a universal reason? Rosi Braidotti, one of the philosophers that Lovibond critiques, suggests that we need to “elaborate a truth which is not removed from the body, reclaiming [our] body for [ourselves]...[We need] to develop and transmit a critique which respects and bears the trace of the intensive, libidinal force that sustains it.”¹⁶ Given the irremediable material reality of sexual difference, can we universalize the body to which truth is always connected?

This is just the sort of question that makes Nussbaum think feminist philosophy is embracing the irrational. For Braidotti, the radical problems in the canon require correspondingly radical responses. But Nussbaum calls this blaming of the philosophical tradition for patriarchal ideas a french-inspired (read: implausible) reduction of reasoned discourse to “the play of social and political forces.” Nussbaum argues that feminist philosophers fallaciously conclude from the fact that “the philosophical tradition has existed *alongside* patriarchal and oppressive institutions” that philosophy is *to blame* for these “abuses.”¹⁷ Given this view, for Nussbaum the history of philosophy provides no motivation for such radical revisions as Braidotti is willing to entertain.

I will address Nussbaum’s concern about the “french-inspired” feminist reduction of philosophy to ideology in a moment, but it should be clear from the synopsis I gave above that the canon is not attributed blame by feminists simply because it existed alongside patriarchy, but because patriarchal ideas are found rife within. It is interesting to compare the canonical quotes I lifted to the ones Nussbaum uses in her essay to support her claims about the usefulness of the canon precisely for feminism: she cites Mill’s argument for women’s liberation, Plato’s against the use of convention to maintain women’s exclusion from sports, and Aristotle’s emphasis on the role of emotion in practical reasoning. These are all genuinely positive examples, while mine were all negative. Which of these sets of examples represent the canon’s fundamental essence? The unchallenged position on this when I was in school was that those embarrassing ruminations on women’s inferiority and slaves’ slavishness and so on that one would inevitably come across in philosophers’ as diverse as Augustine and Kierkegaard represented relative trivialities, asides rather than central theses, and thus were unrepresentative of the *thrust* of western philosophical thought. This explanation then justified the fact that these passages lay unattended to, passed over in class except perhaps to joke about in ways that were usually discomfiting (as if painful sexism was simply funny), but never examined for their relationship to the central ideas of the text.

What much of feminist philosophy has argued is that there is an intrinsic relationship, as Lloyd has amply demonstrated, between these sexist asides and the main account given of reason as well as the predominance of mind-body dualism and other dominant themes in the history of philosophy. To acknowledge this does not encourage a book burning party, nor does it in any way prohibit us from mining the canon for the counter themes as Nussbaum suggests. But it does justify just such a thorough and comprehensive critique of the canon as feminist philosophers have initiated. Before we blithely announce that the tradition is more often than not friendly to anti-sexist thought, we need a careful interrogation of what it contains, and this critical project is still in its initial stages.¹⁸

However, I agree with Nussbaum on a very important point, which is that feminist philosophy cannot entirely forego the recourse to reason, objectivity, and truth. A collapse of knowledge to ideology or a refusal to characterize the source of the epistemic authority and privilege of one’s own claims is only an avoidance of the implicit

epistemological assumptions in feminist and in any other anti-ideological arguments. The attempt to devise a merely strategic definition of truth will always end in incoherence given that what gives a truth claim its strategic results is precisely that it is seen as not merely a strategic claim.¹⁹ And there is no question that feminist philosophy both appeals to and uses reason and truth in the formulation and justification of its positions.

This is one of the central questions raised by Sabina Lovibond in her critical appraisal of Braidotti and Elizabeth Grosz. Lovibond offers a more accurate characterization of the general critique of reason as caused by the “confrontation between the thinking subject and the fact of his own maternally conditioned status.”²⁰ And she is more inclined than Nussbaum to recognize the seriousness of this confrontation and its deep philosophical implications. Nussbaum, by contrast, thinks reason is fine as it is except for the denigration of emotions, but she neglects to explore whether the denigration of emotions is connected to fundamental aspects of the standard account of rationality.

However, while Lovibond takes seriously the need for critique, she distinguishes between two ways to go about such a critique—one reformist and one radical—and argues that the latter cannot avoid self-contradiction and irrationalism. These categories, of the reformist and the radical feminist position on reason (and on philosophy) are originally developed in Braidotti's *Patterns of Dissonance* (and to some extent also correspond to the distinction Nussbaum lifts from Plato concerning women who hate philosophy and women who love it). According, then, to both Lovibond and Braidotti, the reformist position avoids “an all-out attack on ‘rationality’ and related concepts, preferring instead to engage in local, piecemeal critical enquiries into the effects of the sexual power structure on philosophy...”, and is associated with the work of Lorraine Code, Genevieve Lloyd, and Michele LeDœuff.²¹ The radical position, by contrast, has given up trying to correct or improve reason because it sees reason as fundamentally flawed by its “complicity with the sexual power structure.”²² This position argues instead for the replacement of reason by a feminine symbolic, and can be found in the work of Braidotti herself, Elizabeth Grosz (and, I would think, Luce Irigaray).

The fundamental argument for the radical over the reformist position, according to Lovibond, is that the reformist naively believes reason can be perfected, that the limits a material context and embodied subject places on reason can be overcome, as if with enough therapy we could eventually achieve complete self-knowledge and eliminate all unconscious influences. Given the futility of this goal, Lovibond reads Braidotti as holding that no progress is possible, that is, no progress in an epistemic or rational sense. The insight of psychoanalysis (which heavily informs Braidotti's approach) is that a coherent self is an impossibility, and to the extent that reason assumes that we can at least potentially know what we are doing and that we can subject both our practices and our beliefs to self-correcting reasoned critique, reason is itself based on a mistaken ontology.

Lovibond criticizes Braidotti for this view by pointing out all the places in Braidotti's text where she appeals to coherence, legitimacy, faulty reasoning, and even the recalcitrance of reality in her critique of the reformist positions. Braidotti's rejection of reformism explains why she never attempts to reconstruct notions of truth, justification, and normativity, a problem Lovibond suggests is thematic in feminist philosophy. If no progress is thought to be possible in a rational or epistemic sense, then such projects of reconstruction are a waste of time.

On this point I would agree with what I take to be Lovibond's position that feminists or anyone else are mistaken who believe that epistemic and normative reconstructions are impossible once we let go of foundationalism and essentialism and acknowledge that we will always be both “conditioned and free.”²³ And I would argue further that all

discourses involve exclusions and standards of adequacy, which should be explicitly developed and defended rather than left implicit and assumed. But I would add a note of caution here in assessing feminism's self-explications. No discourse stands in a vacuum or addresses an undifferentiated universe; each discourse, and especially discourses of legitimation, are addressing specific textual traditions concerning the possibilities of legitimation. Which is simply another way of saying that arguments, and not only subjects, are historically and socially situated. Do feminists need to address the arguments of anti-feminists in order to legitimate their position? Do we need to appeal to the standards of legitimation dominant in our universe of discourse which are those precisely used against feminism? I don't mean to imply here that I think textual traditions and standards of legitimation or discourses generally are incommensurable entities, without overlapping elements upon which to base communication. But what we have to legitimate and on what basis we might develop a legitimation argument depends on where we stand, who we choose to speak to, who we want to convince, whose judgment is important to us. I would say that, while feminist philosophy does need to address its own implicit legitimation appeals, the way in which it chooses to address these may well not be acceptable or even recognizable from the perspective of the dominant discourse. This does not entail relativism, but simply that mainstream justificatory standards are neither hegemonic nor timeless.²⁴

The main question I want to raise in regard to Lovibond's account is whether the reformist-radical distinction holds. This question was prompted by my realization that, if the distinction does hold, then some arguments I have been making and positions I thought I held are actually incoherent. For I like the so-called reformists a great deal: I am constantly quoting and teaching Genevieve Lloyd and Michele LeDœuff, and I also like Code's work and Lynn Nelson's and I have recommended Helen Longino's *Science and Social Knowledge* to every one of my colleagues. There is no question that these are methodologically conservative works, and I will even admit that that is part of their attraction for me: they are careful, detailed, not grandiose in their claims, doing their utmost to produce a productive dialogue with the traditions (in epistemology and philosophy of science). On the other hand, I also find myself delighting in and even in fundamental agreement with the most radical feminist texts: Braidotti's, Grosz's, Irigaray's. These authors are much less concerned about dialoguing with the dominant traditions in philosophy, much more likely to castigate the whole canon as inherently phallogocentric, and they justify their irreverence on the grounds that we need to develop (precisely as Lovibond quotes Braidotti) a *feminine* symbolic.

So am I incoherent? Is this perhaps explainable on the psychological level that I truly believe in reasoned argument and empirical evidence but find the irreverent attacks more therapeutic or cathartic in expressing my "unreasoned female rage"?

I shy from that conclusion (indeed, it makes me anxious). I believe that the distinction between these two groups which would imply their fundamental incompatibility, especially on the question of reason, is unfounded, and I also believe that the imputation of incompatibility is connected to the separation Plato made between philosophy and rhetoric. Before I explain this please be clear that I am not arguing a defense of all and any claims made by the feminists I have mentioned, or that all and any of their various positions can be made consistent with each other. On some points I disagree with all of them. Nor is my aim simply to smooth over internal feminist differences so that we can all be friends.²⁵ Rather, what I am arguing for is a way to understand the broad contours of a feminist critique of reason as a coherent and defensible research program, which is different than a particular theoretical commitment.

Remember, after all, the passage from Lloyd I quoted earlier:

“the confident affirmation that Reason ‘knows no sex’ may likewise be taking for reality something which, if valid at all, is so only as an ideal. If there is a Reason genuinely common to all, it is something to be achieved in the future, not celebrated in the present.”²⁶

These are not the words of someone who believes that reason is basically fine as it is currently conceived, nor of someone who holds that progress is inevitable. Rather, the passage implies the position that the dominant understanding of reason needs fundamental critique and transformation, very far from Nussbaum’s attempt to protect reason as the tool beyond which there is no appeal and without which the forces of oppression cannot be held off.

Moreover, look again at the passage I quoted from Braidotti:

How are women to elaborate a truth which is not removed from the body, reclaiming their body for themselves? How are women to develop and transmit a critique which respects and bears the trace of the intensive, libidinal force that sustains it? What must women do to keep truth not ossified but alive?²⁷

Braidotti does not shrink here from using the word truth or articulating a project that involves epistemic progress, that is, the elaboration of a “truer truth”, a more representative truth, for women. There is no question that Lloyd and Braidotti write differently, think differently, and hold significantly different positions on, for example, psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, and other significant philosophical issues. But this makes the question of how to understand their commonalities all the more intriguing to try and answer.

Toward answering this, first we might note that a radical approach to critique, or the determination to subject every element of reason to criticism, is not itself irrational. On the contrary, the unwillingness to engage in such a radical critique as a matter of principle is a form of dogmatism. There are, however, serious problems that such a fundamental critique must address. If reason is fundamentally and irretrievably patriarchal, what can replace it other than arationality? And what is the rational status of the critique itself: isn’t it caught within a debilitating circularity of using reason against itself? These problems are neither compelling nor unique to feminist work: they have beset every project of critique from Kant through to the Frankfurt School. It might take another paper to adequately explore them, but if we dispense with the incommensurability thesis they immediately appear much less serious. That is, no critique of reason can actually understand itself as operating from completely outside the traditions of rational discourse. To some extent, therefore, all such critiques will be immanent, which dispenses with the need to show that one is appealing to strategies of legitimation entirely outside reason unless one is championing arationality.

Alasdair MacIntyre, working very much within the Western Aristotelian traditions that both Nussbaum and Lovibond prize, has developed an account of rationality as essentially historical and socially context-bound which can make sense of the feminist critique. In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* MacIntyre endeavors to make sense of the fact that every set of cognitive standards emerge from and are a part of a particular social history, and that they inescapably gain their legitimation precisely from this context, in their ability to “transcend the limitations and provide remedies for the defects of their predecessors within the history of that same tradition.”²⁸ This sort of historicist meta-philosophy, or historicist account of legitimation, is today a position considered reasonable within philosophy of science (Lakatos) and even influential within epistemologies of the

social sciences. Absolute relativism, the collapse of truth to ideology, and the repudiation of all reasoned appeals do not follow from a historicist account, since, as I have been arguing, to locate an epistemology or a concept of reason in a social history (and thus, following MacIntyre, to understand it as a tradition) is not to say that it cannot understand or communicate with other traditions, that it shares no common ground with them upon which it can criticize their positions or learn from them how its own positions are limited. Nor does it follow that nothing we say represents the real.

What does follow is that reason is not timeless, and that we cannot dismiss out of hand an external critique which would explore the threads of connection between a social context like patriarchy and colonialism and the epistemic systems that grew out of this soil. If epistemologies are legitimated through their ability to provide remedies for currently existing problems, we need to explore what problems Enlightenment epistemologies solved, and we need to be prepared to look beyond the explicit content of the canonical debates over knowledge to see the social and political contexts in which these debates became so important and so influential.

Given this convergence between feminist critique and other critique and explorations of the limitations of reason, such as in MacIntyre's well-respected work, one begins to wonder why feminists have been singled out for their/our disloyalty to the tradition. In order to answer this we are led to a second point that would be helpful in understanding the consistency between the reformist and radical wing of the feminist critique. If we must begin to acknowledge that forms of rationality (this is the type of wording MacIntyre counsels, in order to signify the plurality and variability of reasons) are embedded within history, we must also acknowledge that reasoned argument is only a part of what is contained in ours or any other philosophical writings. What I am referring to here is the need to repair the Philosophy/Rhetoric split we all intoned in graduate school as the primary legitimation for philosophy, that is, philosophy's distinctiveness from and superiority over writing which aims primarily to persuade, which appeals to emotion, which supplants aesthetic for logical criteria, or which conceals from view its ideological content or overriding strategic aim. My suspicion is that it is *this* part of our tradition that most philosophers will have trouble critiquing, for it is just this part that Braidotti openly contests and that Lovibond believes can be relinquished only at the peril of our profession. And moreover, I would argue that it is this aspect of the feminist critique of reason which is most "gendered" in that it threatens mind-body dualism and endangers the self-understanding of philosophy as a form of manly control (with control over) the forces of emotion, desire, and power associated historically with an essentially chaotic and female nature.

The canonical demarcation between philosophy and rhetoric turned on the issue of truth. On Plato's account, rhetoric merely delivers a truth that has already been discovered; it cannot itself contribute to the discovery of truth. Thus it is style without substance, an inessential and often obfuscating dress lain over the truth substance which philosophical argument achieves. And as a form of dress, or even fashion, rhetoric comes in for all of Plato's criticisms of seductive practices aimed at deceit associated strongly although not exclusively with women. Indeed, as Susan Jarratt has shown, when men attempt to manipulate language toward the goal of persuasion—as in rhetorical oratory—they bring themselves down to the level of women who manipulate their external appearance toward the goal of seduction.²⁹ In both cases, the enchanting surface appearance conceals a process of manipulation and often further conceals the truth, i.e., the real appearance of the woman or the "real" epistemic status of the claims

being advanced. Rhetoric is thus analogous to the cosmetic arts as principally organized toward deception rather than the attainment of truth. (If you wonder why so many philosophers write badly this view certainly explains it: dull, spare writing becomes a virtue in an ascetic value system which spurns all attention to style).

This account actually presents us with two ways to understand the relationship of rhetoric to truth. To the extent that rhetoric is merely a delivery of already discovered truth, it adds nothing to the philosophical enterprise of truth seeking. To the extent that rhetoric works to persuade through deception, it is an obstacle to philosophy that must be sharply discredited and exposed. In both cases, it is entirely distinct from philosophy.

Needless to say, Plato's contemporaries who were engaged in rhetoric held a different view of the nature of their discursive practice. For the Sophists, rhetoric was not merely style without substance, but the actual means to truth, which they defined differently than Plato. Famously for Plato, truth referred to a realm entirely transcendent of the human realm, transcendent of the temporality and changeableness that material reality cannot escape. For the Sophists, on the other hand, truth is the outcome of human perception and discourse, and is established through disputation. In contrast to Plato's transcendental conception of truth, the Sophist's conception suggests an immanent, non-absolute definition of truth.³⁰

The Sophistic epistemological claims about the intrinsic relationship between discourse and truth can find resonance in contemporary consensus theories of truth (Peirce, Habermas) and philosophies of science that locate the scientific community as the final arbiter over scientific truth claims (Kuhn). The ontology of truth to which these theories are committed is not necessarily anti-realist. Understanding truth as immanent relocates the reference of truth claims to a fully contextualized material reality rather than a decontextualized transcendent realm. Putnam's internal realism may be the most fully developed account of such a view that explains (successfully, in my opinion) why it deserves the title "realist."³¹

However, my main interest in the Sophist's claims about truth for this paper does not concern these epistemological and metaphysical issues so much as the metaphilosophical issues raised by the claim that rhetoric is necessarily a part of truth-seeking discourse. I will try to flesh these issues out and then turn to see how they are developed in some works of feminist philosophy.

As Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar has explained, "the 'rhetorical turn' refers to the growing recognition of rhetoric in contemporary thought...It means that the special sciences are becoming increasingly rhetorically self-conscious. They are beginning to recognize that their discursive practices, both internal and external, contain an unavoidable rhetorical content."³² Gaonkar warns against overestimating the scope of rhetoric, or overvaluing rhetoric as the ground of discourse. But he agrees with Derrida that even if we take Plato's point that rhetoric is always only a supplement rather than the ground of discourse, the history of this supplement may be of more ultimate interest "than the history of that which is in need of a supplement."³³

What happens if philosophy were to become more rhetorically self-conscious? What would this mean for philosophy's pursuit of truth as its highest aim? Dominick LaCapra has offered a useful discussion of this related issue for history, which is also a truth-seeking discipline, showing that an incorporation of rhetorical understanding is not in necessary contradiction to history's overarching concern for truth.

Rhetoric involves a dialogical understanding of discourse and of "truth" itself in contrast to a monological idea of a unified authorial voice providing an ideally exhaustive and definitive (total) account of a fully mastered object

of knowledge....the concept of the dialogical situates that of persuasion in a larger discursive context. Within this context, a "conversation" with the past involves the historian in argument and even polemic—both with others and within the self—over approaches to understanding that are bound up with institutional and political issues.¹⁴

Within philosophy, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics offers just such a dialogical model of truth. Here, the positivist model of knowing in which an active knowing agent confronts a passive object is reconceptualized as a conversation between participants all of whom have their own horizon or interpretive perspective. Textual documents and objects of knowledge, to the extent they are delimited and identified as objects of knowledge through historical processes of inquiry, carry forth their own horizons of meaning. Knowing, then, requires not so much the discovery of a pristine fact but the fusion of horizons into a maximally comprehensive and coherent whole.

On this conversational or dialogical model (which may well involve more than two participants), a rhetorical self-consciousness leads us back to the sophistic account of truth. If truth is the contingent product (that is, within history rather than transcendent of history) of an interpretive, dialogical process, it becomes easier to see how rhetoric can contribute to the attainment of truth rather than being an inessential or obfuscating supplement. If truth is understood as the product of an argument (involving two or more participants), then all the contributing elements of that argument need to be analyzed within an epistemological characterization of its results.

The major shift involved here is a localization of truth to a specific context and away from a transcendental, ahistorical model. And this has been the stumbling block to understanding both the relationship between rhetoric and philosophy and between reason and the body. How can rhetoric, even when it is understood on the Aristotelian model as a science that is attentive to the particular, material context of debate, contribute to the attainment of a philosophical truth defined by its transcendence of that context? Jarratt suggests that the sophistic ontology of truth is based on a kind of materialist anthropology rather than a metaphysics. By this she means that truth is contingent on the relations of knowers as these are constituted within a particular, material context, not in the sense that the content of the truth claim may be about these relations, but in the sense that the truth-status of any claim cannot transcend this particular context. In rhetoric, the knower makes arguments, or moves in the language game, based on her assessment of its likely effects on her particular interlocutors or co-discussants. In philosophy, traditionally understood, we are not supposed to aim at persuasion as the highest good, but at truth. To misunderstand the distinction (a distinction which exists in principle even if not always in fact) between a persuasive argument and a valid argument is to risk distorting the truth seeking process. But if truth is not separable from the dialogical process within which it emerges, then the rules of philosophical argument and of conversational argument (or persuasion) begin to merge. For example, we might want to take into account the background of our partner in dialogue in terms of expressing meaning, knowing that the meaning s/he will hear through our words will partly be affected by her or his own horizon of interpretation. And to the extent meaning is connected to truth, this process will not be irrelevant to assessing either the justification or truth-status of our claims.

A further point of conjuncture LaCapra highlights between rhetoric and history is likewise relevant for philosophy. This involves the question of reading texts. He notes the tendency of professional historians to see texts as documents in the narrow sense of the word and, by the same token, to ignore the textual

dimensions of documents themselves, that is, the manner in which documents “process” or rework material in ways intimately bound up with larger sociocultural and political processes...Nor are we inclined to raise the more “rhetorical” question of how texts do what they do—how, for example, they may situate or frame what they “represent” or inscribe (social discourses, paradigms, generic conventions, stereotypes, and so forth). The multiple roles of tropes, irony, parody, and other “rhetorical” devices of composition and arrangement generate resistances to the construal of texts in terms of their “representational” or narrowly documentary functions, and they disclose how texts may have critical or even potentially transformative relations to phenomena “represented” in them.³⁵

The philosophical canon is disanalogous from the type of historical documents LaCapra is referring to here, documents such as census reports, legal transcripts, birth records, and so forth. And yet our canon is nonetheless rife with the rhetorical devices LaCapra lists as well as with the multiple relationships to their purported representational content. These elements will not be revealed by an exclusive attention to a text’s propositional claims, but will need an attentiveness also to its choice of metaphor, imagery, conventions, etc., all of which may suggest a subtext that may or may not conform to the explicit argument of the essay. And these are not asides to a philosophical dispensation of the text, but crucial to understanding its full meaning, its dominant interpretations and persuasive effect, even to its canonization.

In *The Philosophical Imaginary*, Michele LeDoeuff explores several canonical philosophical texts for what she calls their textual unconscious. Philosophy defines itself by a contrast precisely to the rhetorical devices LaCapra mentions as well as to images, poetry, myths, and fables. When these appear in philosophical texts, they are said to be there only for embellishment, for illustration of a claim rather than standing for a claim itself. However, LeDoeuff argues, and succeeds in showing, that philosophy cannot do without these elements: they spring up constantly as unsupported premises, and prop up other premises in the text, creating a kind of repressed and unsayable textual unconscious to which LeDoeuff means to refer by the concept of the philosophical imaginary. Thus, the philosophical imaginary is constituted by a set of images central to the functioning of philosophy that it cannot itself acknowledge. This, she suggests, is the shameful or inadequate face of philosophy: its inability to reflect on its own modes of discourse.

Philosophy projects the imaginary as either its precondition—the primitive, the child, or the infantile which exists prior to philosophical thought—or as its pedagogic device—its means to translate philosophical conclusions for an untrained audience. Thus it attempts to dominate the whole field of theory and non-theory: it recognizes the existence of non-theory but considers itself in charge of assessing non-theory as well as the master of theory. But on LeDoeuff’s account, the philosophical imaginary, which can be ascertained in any given philosophical text, represents desire and affect, over which philosophy can never gain total control. Her view is not that philosophy is reducible to desire, but that philosophy is inextricably bound up with desire.

The specific form that the philosophical imaginary will take for any given specific text arises from four elements: (1) the internal needs of the particular philosophical enterprise; (2) the psychical needs of philosophers and their readers; (3) the sociological, i.e., historical and cultural, context; and (4) the trajectory of images in a historical succession of texts, that reveal a text’s debt to other sources. Thus, the philosophical imaginary does **philosophical work**, in developing, justifying and clarifying an argument and not simply delivering it. The imagery of a text works to justify premises that the explicit philosophical

argument cannot justify.

Thus, LeDoeuff disputes the notion that these subtextual elements are simply the expression of a "primitive soul" or "pre-cultural, pre-historical desire" which commentators from Jung to Paglia have believed to be operative within philosophy. Rather, on LeDoeuff's account, the philosophical imaginary "copes with problems posed by the theoretical enterprise itself" and thus cannot be characterized as something essentially other-than-philosophy.

LeDoeuff's most compelling reading is of Thomas More's *Utopia*, which she interprets through a focus on More's choice of the island as a metaphor for a utopian society. This island imagery reveals that More's vision is not in fact a political vision: it is a vision of self-sufficiency, of independence, without external influence or engagement. It is thus an insular utopia, a solitary, non-object-related introversion, where the pleasure is a pleasure of undisturbed tranquility, what she names a primary narcissism. The island of utopia is like the mirage of individual autonomy, where the "free" individual is completely alone, with its umbilical cord (to the isthmus) cut. This is not a politics: there is no theory of external relations, nor even of friendship. The version of utopia thus produced has total closure, a closure maximized inversely to the elimination of social relations. Thus, LeDoeuff's reading produces an inversion of More's own vision from utopia to dystopia. I want to suggest that this reading is not outside the domain of reasoned analysis. Reading More's *Utopia* through a focus on its metaphors and imagery is not the only way to read the text, nor does LeDoeuff argue that hers is the privileged reading. But it is one approach to mining the content of the text that philosophy has traditionally castigated as irrelevant. And it reveals that the traditional segregation between rhetoric and philosophy is a delusion.

Neither science nor philosophy works entirely through logical entailments between factually based claims. Part of the way in which models and hypotheses are judged as worthy of experimental pursuit or philosophical plausibility involves coherence, analogy, and metaphor. And surely the most ubiquitous metaphor of all involves gender. Even in English, which does not gender its nouns in the way that French and Spanish do, there are many gendered associations: mother earth, boats, ships and hurricanes are female, as is the sea, justice, and so on. And there are dozens of cliché phrases in the academy such as "the penetrating argument," "the thrust of an argument," a "rigorous critique," "erect a defense," a "seminal work." These phrases work precisely in the way LeDoeuff suggests in so far as they invoke unsupported premises that work to offer support for other premises in the text. If one is in doubt that phallogentrism exists, one need only read Saul Kripke, for whom the ultimate, fixed, and essential meanings of words are always determined by what he calls "rigid designators."

As Eva Feder Kittay explains, metaphors help to elucidate meaning through making an association between two different things; they thus perform an act of mediation, which changes the term thus mediated.³⁶ Hegel argued that, in the master slave dialectic, the slave's subjectivity is mediated through labor, that in creating a new object a new sense of self is produced in the slave. Moreover, the slave's recognition of the master's status as master mediates the master's own sense of self, and thus the master's relation to himself. De Beauvoir carried this idea forward to male/female relations: a man is made to feel stronger, larger, more intelligent, when paired with a relatively smaller, weaker, dependent woman. In this way mediation transforms the self, and gender dimorphism is selected for in the species.

Metaphors in language can also perform such an act of mediation, by structuring an unstructured conceptual domain. When we say of a fashion "it's hot" we transfer the

semantic relations between hot and cold to those between clothing styles. When we say of an argument that it is seminal, penetrating or rigorous we transfer the semantic relations between masculine potency and impotence or between having an erection and being flaccid.

The concept of woman mediates the relations between man and his others—other men, nature, his own self. This is not a reciprocal relation: women are defined in reference to men, as helpmeets, wives, mothers, caregivers of men. Men are not defined to the same extent by their relations to women. Thus men do not figure as metaphors so often. Kittay has developed a typology of such gendered metaphors: (1) First, man locates himself in his domain in relationship to woman in her domain, but always according a greater value to the male activity. Thus Socrates the philosopher portrays himself as a midwife, but bringing forth universal truths rather than particular babies. (2) Second, man locates himself in his object world through a relation to women. Thus the city of Babylon is said to be the great whore, there for man's delight and temptation, and nature is, of course, a woman, trying to hide her secrets under her skirts. (3) And third, and most obvious, woman mediates the relationships between men, establishing their status vis-a-vis other men; the beautiful model on the arm of a high powered man is there for other men to see. Gang rape establishes bonds between men via the domination and subjugation of a woman.

Kittay concludes from this that woman's usefulness as metaphor depends on the difference and lesser status of our activities. Our empowerment and our equal participation in male domains will make us less useful for the mediating function. In part I bring this up to flesh out some of the ways in which models and metaphors which carry political implications work within inquiry to make arguments persuasive, hypotheses plausible, and to provide a coded discourse which can make us comfortable (or not) with other inquirers. Kittay's analysis also can help us understand why what might appear as trivial linguistic conventions (the subject of what today is called the pc wars) can have significant political meaning and effects.³⁷ Coherentist procedures of inquiry are neither arational nor unsusceptible to ideologically informed analogical arguments, such as those that link beliefs about efficient methods of managing workers and master molecule theories, or between the patriarchal belief that there must be one ultimate head of a household and mono-causal genetic explanations of behavior. To make such connections is not to imply that reason is useless, but that we need much more complex accounts of how reason works. We need to learn to read on more than one level, to pay attention to language, imagery, metaphor, to do the kind of readings that both LeDoeuff and Irigaray (presumably on opposite sides of the reformist-conservative split) excel at, and that Andrea Nye provides in her history of logic.³⁸ As Nye says, such readings are not the whole story, and a reductionism to the "play of social and political forces" is not the conclusion. But these readings are a part of the story about reason and truth which we have left aside in our manly refusal to acknowledge the significance of a texts' inevitable emotional and aesthetic elements.

Braidotti reaches this conclusion through a psychoanalysis of philosophy itself. The argument is basically this: Traditional rationalism's declared supremacy over emotion and desire parallels the ego's attempt to wrest control over the unconscious. The illusion of the coherent, ego-dominant, rational subject depends on its ability to segregate and gain control over its irrational internal sibling; the ego must reign over the unconscious, the rational must reign over emotion and desire, and the mind must reign over the body. In the west at least, these associations became gendered, so that rationality required male dominance over women. Permeable borders between the rational and irrational

components of a subject, or a text, threaten the very possibility of rational control.

Nussbaum, on my symptomatic reading, would have us reincorporate emotion within our understanding of rationality, but after having done this her basic strategy would be to pronounce reason sufficiently degendered and universal, and once again in control. Why isn't this acceptable? For one thing, the narrative of opposition with the dark forces of corporeality is likely to be reinscribed through another identity marker so that reason can retain its supremacist self-image; e.g., through whiteness, such that irrational, superstitious, "traditional" cultures are portrayed as the central site of a discourse controlled by desire and myth against logic and truth. This scenario is of course already in place, but the suggestion is that gender can be disentangled from modernist narratives about reason with the result of exempting white Anglo women only from the realm of the irrational abject. We need a larger analysis.

Braidotti understands the modernist narrative associating reason and philosophy as ultimately founded on power.³⁹ Thus, her critique of reason is that it mistakenly represents itself as undetermined by power when in actuality the entire discourse is the linguistic enactment of an exclusionary hegemony enabled through violent agonistics structured and concealed under the guise of reason and logic. In this, Lovibond is right to point out that Braidotti is appealing even to representational truth in her claim to know better than traditional philosophy what its discourse is actually about.

But if Lovibond is right that Braidotti is still appealing to reason, this fact does not disprove Braidotti's claim that it is not possible to seek a theoretical discourse that will stand completely outside of power, that will enforce no exclusions and contain no elements having to do with desire and the will to maximize one's own sphere of effectiveness. To seek such a theory outside of power is a metaphysical mistake as well as the wrong political and epistemic aim: any discourse needs a true/false distinction.

Given this, the better alternative is to reconfigure the relationship between power and theory, between the ego and the unconscious, between reason and its others, to acknowledge the instability of these categories and the permeability of their borders, and to develop a reconstructed notion of reason not as a mastery of an ego over the whole, but as including multiple forms and operating on many levels. This project is incorrectly interpreted as a reductionism of reason to unreason: it does not give unreason the total mastery. But it also rejects the zero-sum game of the law of non-contradiction or the mutual exclusiveness between corporeal power and desire and incorporeal rationality. Rationality does not need the manichaeic epistemic ontology of an absolute truth-mastery over an abject unreason. It needs distinctions, between true and false, more and less rational, but these can be formulated differently through developing an account of the situatedness of truth and reason.

I conclude therefore that the work of the radical feminists contributes to this project of reformulating reason by teaching us to read differently, to analyze logical relations between propositions alongside the silent invocations of word choice and the implicit arguments advanced by metaphor. They help us to develop a simultaneous attentiveness to the emotional content of a text alongside its surface pronouncements, without eliminating either from efficacy over meaning.

This is how I would understand the coherence between the approaches that both Braidotti and Lovibond want to separate as reformist and radical: I see both as contributing to a reconstructed reason, internally heterogeneous in form and organizing principle, free from the defensive need to purify itself from corporeal intrusions heretofore known as sophistry, rhetoric, and emotion. Both of the so-called reformists and radicals are teaching us to read differently, as Annette Baier suggested we read Locke differently

in that presidential address, and as we learn to read differently, we learn to understand the development of meaning and the process of justification in more complex ways. In reconfiguring if not repairing the philosophy/rhetoric division, we can learn to read our own anxieties in the very midst of our best arguments, and to make distinctions between anxieties and arguments that also recognizes their interdependence. Even Martha Nussbaum's work would be included here, in her readings of literature as philosophy and of philosophy as literature, as a contribution toward breaking down these distinctions and redrawing the map of rational thought.

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Notes

¹I am very grateful to Sally Haslanger, Maureen Linker, and Marianne Janack for their helpful comments on this paper.

²Michele Le Doeuff, *Hepparchia's Choice: An Essay Concerning Women, Philosophy, Etc.*, trans. Trista Selous (Oxford: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 29.

³Ibid., p. 29.

⁴Martha Nussbaum, "Feminists and Philosophy," *New York Review of Books*, October 20, 1994, p. 59.

⁵(Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1988).

⁶Sabina Lovibond, "Feminism and the 'Crisis of Rationality'", *New Left Review* 207 (Sept/Oct 1994): 72-86.

⁷For these passages as well as many others, see Linda Bell's excellent anthology, *Visions of Women* (Clifton, N.J.: Humana Press, 1983).

⁸Nussbaum, p. 63.

⁹Nussbaum, p. 63. The gendered connotations of words such as "tough" and "rigor" create an interesting paradox here, such that women are being called upon to out-masculine the men.

¹⁰Le Doeuff, p. 37.

¹¹Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. x.

¹²Lloyd, p. 6. See also Michelle Le Doeuff *The Philosophical Imaginary* (London: Athlone, 1989), esp. "Long hair, short on ideas."

¹³Plato, *Collected Dialogues* eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 49.

¹⁴Lloyd, p. 107.

¹⁵On my own work I have explored this in relation to the epistemic devaluation of midwives' knowledge, which was characterized as improperly personal and

non-propositional, and I have also looked at the epistemic discrediting of survivors of sexual violence, as incapable of achieving the detached objectivity current norms of reason demand. In both cases, those with the best claims to know, based on even traditional empiricist accounts, have been systematically excluded from the right to claim knowledge via gendered concepts of cognition. It is the very bodily experience of rape survivors that is thought to render us incapable of reasoned judgment. See "Survivor Discourse: Transgression or Recuperation?" co-authored with Laura Gray, *SIGNS* 18:2 (Winter 93): 260-290; and "Are 'Old Wives' Tales' Justified?" co-authored with Vrinda Dalmiya in *Feminist Epistemologies* eds. L. Alcoff and E. Potter (New York: Routledge, 1993), 217-244.

¹⁶Rosi Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 8. See also Elizabeth Grosz, "Bodies and Knowledges: Feminism and the Crisis of Reason," in *Feminist Epistemologies* eds. L. Alcoff and E. Potter (New York: Routledge, 1993), 187-216.

¹⁷Nussbaum, p. 60.

¹⁸Which raises an interesting issue. Many feminists have used the trope of dutiful versus rebellious daughters to characterize various attitudes toward the canon. Braidotti herself uses this, so that she can position herself in the vanguard rebellious camp. And Nussbaum's defensiveness in her essay similarly spells out where she stands. But I wonder if this trope of the dutiful versus the rebellious progeny, representing as it does what is really a male oedipal scenario, can be correctly applied to any woman. In her recent book entitled *Philosophia*, which is an analysis of the thought of three women philosophers—Rosa Luxemburg, Simone Weil, and Hannah Arendt—Andrea Nye suggests that their relationship both to the canon and to each other was not characterized by the need to supplant the fathers or compete for the patrimony since the patrimony was not even a possibility. Perhaps our female status as the disinherited may free us from the dialectic of the sons oscillating between loyalty and rebellion, and will make it possible to create a new relationship to the fathers, less caught in binaries, more capable of independence. See Nye, *Philosophia* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

¹⁹We could perhaps maintain a strategic effect by attempting to obscure the real epistemic status of the claim, but as Nietzsche knew, such an enterprise will always be unstable and unreliable.

²⁰Lovibond, p. 75.

²¹Lovibond, p. 77.

²²Lovibond, p. 76.

²³Lovibond, p. 81.

²⁴The true contrary to epistemic absolutism, or the belief that there is one set of epistemic standards to which all claims must answer, is not relativism. As many have pointed out, relativism and this sort of absolutism are correlates, not true contraries. It is the (hopeless) quest for absolutism that leads to a defeated relativism, and relativism itself (in its absolute or radical form) actually presupposes an absolute and neutral frame of reference from which

all positions may appear equal. In reality, no position is absolute or disengaged, and thus there is no position from which everything appears equal. So the Foucauldian take on discursive standards of legitimation that I am alluding to here is simply a way of saying that we can argue over standards themselves and reject the necessity of following the dominant ones without implying a commitment to relativism. See my *Real Knowing: New Versions of the Coherence Theory* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996).

²⁵And in fact, I have been criticized by Ann Snitow and Teresa de Lauretis for setting up feminist theory as an agonistics with adversarial sides. See their contributions to *Conflicts in Feminism* eds. Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller (New York: Routledge, 1990).

²⁶Lloyd, p. 107.

²⁷Braidotti, p. 8.

²⁸MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), p. 7.

²⁹See her *Rereading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Refigured* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991). Much of the following account is based on her analysis.

³⁰My claim here is not that a transcendental conception of truth or a correspondence theory of truth cannot be paired with an account of justification that would incorporate rhetoric, but that there was an epistemic delegitimation of the sphere of immanence in Platonic accounts of both justification and truth.

³¹For an extended argument on this, see my *Real Knowing*, op. cit.

³²Gaonkar, "Rhetoric and Its Double," in *The Rhetorical Turn: Invention and Persuasion in the Conduct of Inquiry* ed. H.W. Simons (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 352.

³³Gaonkar, p. 352.

³⁴LaCapra, *History and Criticism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 36.

³⁵LaCapra, p. 38.

³⁶Kittay, "Woman as Metaphor" *Hypatia* 3(2), 1988: 63-86. See also her *Metaphor: Its Cognitive Force and Linguistic Structure* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

³⁷This analysis of metaphor should also reveal that depictions of women, of our nature, our role, and our feminine essence, has the power of holding in place an entire social system of relations and practices: hierarchical relations between men, practices involving our environment, and the very concept of man itself. Here perhaps, is the key to understanding the resistance feminism has encountered.

*Andrea Nye. *Words of Power: A Feminist Reading of the History of Logic* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

†Braidotti, p. 217.