

1-1-1991

Desiring reason : reason as an unavoidable discourse of desire.

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DESIRING REASON:
REASON AS AN UNAVOIDABLE DISCOURSE OF DESIRE

A Dissertation Presented

by

CYNTHIA C. KAUFMAN

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

February, 1991

Philosophy

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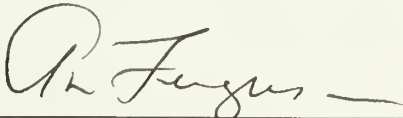
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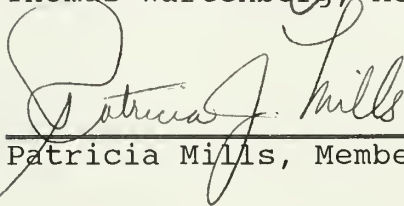
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Ann Ferguson for her insightful critical comments, her positive attitude and for her patience in helping me to figure out what it was I had to say. The ideas expressed in this thesis get to the heart of the intuition that motivated me to write a dissertation, even though the content of that intuition was less than clear to me when I started this project.

I would also like to thank Thomas Wartenberg, Patricia Mills and Robert Ackermann for their helpful comments all along the way.

For keeping me sane and believing that I would be able to finish this project I would like to thank all of the members of my dissertation support group. Alison Brown, Pat Scarbrough, Tamsin Lorraine, Maryanne Sushinsky, Cheryl Hughes and Mary Schultz all helped me to clarify my ideas by giving me the opportunity to talk them through and by reading and commenting on my work. Even more than this, they provided me with a sense that my work mattered.

I would also like to thank some other friends who helped by reading and commenting on my work and by their encouragement: Joanne Martin, Janel Holland, Barbara Helm and Nora St. John.

ABSTRACT

DESIRING REASON:

REASON AS AN UNAVOIDABLE DISCOURSE OF DESIRE

FEBRUARY 1991

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In this dissertation I argue that reason is nothing more than the term we give to thinking taken to be legitimate. It has no a priori content. Because of this, there is no objective thing called reason which could be accepted or rejected. I argue that Nietzsche's most important contribution to the critique of the Enlightenment is his exposing of reason as a socially constructed discourse of desire. This puts him above the fray of the debates over the acceptance or rejection of reason, and onto what I claim is the more productive terrain of looking at reason as problematic but unavoidable. Irigaray develops this Nietzschean approach to reason in a way that exposes the tendencies of philosophical notions of reason to prevent women from

being able to articulate their interests in discourses taken to be legitimate. Through this example of the marginalization of the interests of women, she is also able to help us see just how it is that reason can operate hegemonically. This epistemological perspective lends a certain plausability to Habermas' claim that in the absence of a transcendental ground for a notion of rationality, what we should call rational is a judgment that all participants in a discussion agree is correct. Where Habermas' position becomes problematic is in his insistence that a rational consensus can be distinguished philosophically from a non rational one. It is here that Habermas' position operates to reinforce dominant exclusionary mechanisms. I draw out the implicatons of this position for looking at feminist in an international context, and argue that we do not need universal notions of what counts as women's liberation to be able to make cross-cultural critical judgments. Rather, what we need to be able to do this is an open ear to the self articulation of the concerns of real women. I argue that critique can be rational if we do not suppose that we can ever have a fixed notion of what counts as rational, but rather if we accept that rationality is a place holder concept for the discourses which we take to be legitimate. From this it follows that the rational is the site of inevitable struggles over legitimation.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Reason, Irrationality and Legitimation

And how are you going to search for this, Socrates, when you don't have the faintest idea what it is? Which of the things that you don't know will you suppose that it is, when you are searching for it? And even if you do come across it, how are you going to know that this is the thing you didn't know?¹

When we say that a person should do their best to solve a problem we tell them to use their reason to come up with a solution. When we are having an argument and we feel that the other person is being difficult, we ask them to be reasonable. When someone holds a view that we find incomprehensible, we think of them as irrational. But what is this thing reason that we take to be the arbiter of differences and disagreements? Throughout the history of philosophy, reason has been appealed to as the faculty for properly solving disputes, regulating the will and mediating the impulses. And, though this history is full of discussions of the nature and content of this court of

¹ Plato, Meno, trans. R.W. Sharples (Chicago: Bolchazy-Carducci, 1985) p. 63, 81d5.

appeals, its existence is more often assumed than argued for.

In this thesis I want to explore the dilemma of contemporary Western philosophy with respect to the grounding of critical judgments. I will focus on the notion of reason as the term of last resort used to legitimize a strategy for judgment. In contemporary Western philosophy, most approaches to the question of reason fall into two broad categories. One view is that there must be some sort of a universal standard we can use as the basis for our judgments in the world. With this approach the attempt is made to find a grounding for a particular view of reason and to overcome the failings of previous attempts. The other view is that there is no way to establish such a standard without circularity. On this view, use of any notion of reason is seen as a bad faith effort to control and manipulate others. Appeals to reason, including critiques of existing standards of reason, are always exercises of power over others and have no further foundation.

What I want to show in this thesis is that although this dilemma is not philosophically solvable, a clear understanding of its status can help us to work more productively with it. Against the first approach, I shall use the arguments of the second: any notion of rationality, and therefore any legitimation of judgments,

rests on an unavoidable circularity. Justifications for our judgments are always related to discourses of desire and interest. The second approach focuses on the necessary non-universality of discourses of reason. By showing that reason is always related to desire, thinkers in this tradition undermine the pretensions to universality of traditional discourses of legitimation.

Against the second approach, however, I shall argue that discourses of legitimation are unavoidable, and therefore so too is reason unavoidable. Where followers of the second approach get into trouble is in legitimizing their own forms of practice. While many of them do not see this as a problem because they do not see themselves as engaging in praxis, I shall argue that all being in the world involves praxis, even when what that means is going along with the status quo. What I shall conclude from this is that reason can neither be grounded without circularity nor avoided.

Where I think both schools go wrong is in assuming that reason is something stable that can be accepted or rejected. I shall argue that reason is the term we give to thinking taken to be legitimate. It has no a priori content. Because of this, there is no objective thing called reason to be accepted or rejected. Once we challenge the reification of whatever occupies the privileged position of the rational, we open up a space

for critical discussion. The two alternatives outlined above yield political strategies that I take to be problematic: dogmatism in the first case and quietism in the second. A clear understanding of the dilemma can yield an open ended politics of critique. Once we begin to look at rationality as a dynamic concept we can begin to move beyond the paralysis of universalism versus relativism.

Nietzsche occupies a very special position in this whole discussion. His work has been taken to be pivotal in many discussions of universalism versus relativism and more recently in the discussions of modernism versus post-modernism.²

In these discussions Nietzsche has been both championed and vilified as the great irrationalist. He has also been shown to be the most consistent thinker in the tradition of the Enlightenment. Thus, while Nietzsche is central to many of the discussions of modernism and post-modernism, the ways that he is read are so diverse that it would be a mistake to think that there is one Nietzschean legacy or Nietzschean tradition.

In Chapter Two, I argue that Nietzsche's most important contribution to the critique of the Enlightenment is his

² For a good discussion of the variety of readings of Nietzsche's position in these debates see: Robert Gooding-Williams "Nietzsche's Pursuit of Modernism" in New German Critique #41, Spring-Summer 1987, pp. 95-108.

analysis of reason as a socially constructed discourse of desire. This puts him above the fray of the debates over the acceptance or rejection of reason, and onto what I am claiming is the more productive terrain of looking at reason as problematic but unavoidable. Irigaray develops this Nietzschean approach to reason in a way that exposes the tendencies of philosophical notions of reason to prevent women from being able to articulate their interests in discourses taken to be legitimate. Through this example of the marginalization of the interests of women, she is also able to help us to see how reason can operate hegemonically.

The epistemological perspective which I develop in Chapters Two and Three, through readings of Nietzsche and Irigaray, leaves us in the position of acknowledging the unavoidability of discourses of legitimation, but of also acknowledging the fact that our discourses of legitimation are always limited. It challenges us to constantly look into the space of the privileged discourse of reason to find operations of hegemony.³

One of the disturbing things about this approach to reason and legitimation is that it tells us what not to do

³ Another tradition that offers the possibility of a third way between acceptance and rejection of reason is the work of Frankfurt School. It is not surprising that Nietzsche also played a pivotal role in much of their thinking.

and what to watch out for, but it does not offer a solid ground for making the judgments that I am arguing are unavoidable. The philosophically incomplete nature of this position, combined with the tendency of critics of universal approaches of reason to go along with the status quo by focusing on the impossibility of making judgments, in part accounts for the enormous popularity of the work of Habermas.

There is a certain intuitive plausibility to Habermas' claim that in the absence of a transcendental ground for a notion of rationality, what we should call rational is a judgment that all participants in a discussion agree is correct. And Habermas seems right to claim that this consensus should always be judged with an eye to the power relations of participants of the discussion. Habermas claims to hold these views while still positing a universal source of legitimation. He seduces with the promise of universal legitimation in the ideal speech situation. Because I believe that universalism is as politically dangerous as it is appealing, I devote Chapter Four to a critique of Habermas' slippery position on the status of universalism in reason and legitimation. The hope is that this will not just serve as a critique of one regressive Enlightenment thinker but rather, will sensitize us to some of the ways that universalism has of insidiously reasserting itself.

In this thesis I want to argue that reason is a place holder term for discourses of legitimation and that this place is always occupied by some content, but that this content is never wholly justifiable. Because of this the best we can do in critical discussions is to be self conscious about the positions that we hold, and to not let charges of irrationality stop us from moving our investigations into areas where we are interested in going. Because of the enormous weight that commonly accepted beliefs have in prejudicing notions of rationality, we need to be continually aware of the hegemonic operation of all discourses of legitimation.

Section 1:

One of the most peculiar things about reason is that though many philosophers have spoken of it as if it were a thing, found in the world, every aspect of the nature of this thing has been the subject of dispute in the Western philosophical tradition.⁴ Why then do we persist in

⁴ Kant argues that reason is the faculty through which we control our appetites. Hobbes argues that reason is "nothing but Reckoning (that is, Adding and Subtracting) of the consequences of general names agreed upon, for the marking and signifying of our thoughts..." For Locke, if we use our reason, we will know the laws of nature and live according to them. God has given us reason in order for us to be able to know the good and act according to its dictates. For contemporary rational choice theorists, such as Rawls, reason is the capacity to act to satisfy more rather than less of our desires. [See: Immanuel Kant, Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals, trans. H.J. Patton (New York: Harper, 1964) pp. 64-65, par

talking about reason as if it had some sort of metaphysical existence?

One thing that the various philosophical approaches to reason seem to have in common is that when they call something rational they mean that it is in some sense correct, right or good. But if reason is the faculty through which we judge the validity of a proposition, then how do we know when we are using the correct faculty, or using it correctly? There is an infinite regress of standards of legitimation that no theory of reason, truth or justice can escape. Because of this regress, I will argue that reason can only be used as a ground which is temporary and open to further challenge. That is, if what we mean by reason is thinking taken to be legitimate, and we admit that no discourse of legitimation can find absolutely stable ground, then the best we can do with a concept of reason is to use it as a place holder for thinking taken to be legitimate at the moment.

This does not leave us with no concept of rationality nor does it leave us with a valorization of irrationality. The reason it does not leave us with no concept of rationality, is that whenever we are engaged in linguistic practices, we unavoidably raise legitimation

#397-8; Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan (Middlesex: Penguin, 1968) p. 111; John Locke, Two Treatises of Government (New York: New American Library, 1963) p. 311; John Rawls, A Theory of Justice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971) p. 143.]

claims. In speaking we act to organize the world according to the categories we adopt. Even if we do not want to attribute to these organizational schemes any metaphysical validity, our use of them constitutes a certain intervention in the world. It is impossible to jump out of the language game of legitimation. Even if we accept the Derridean deconstruction of the distinction between serious and playful uses of language, or Sara Kofman's deconstruction of the distinction between metaphoric and literal uses of language, language still implies legitimating practices.⁵

In, On Deconstruction, Jonathan Culler has argued against the reading of Derrida that takes his undermining of the distinction between serious and playful uses of language to mean that he has found a way to use language such that determinations are avoided. Culler argues that the notion that all meaning is derivative does not get us out of the view that language creates meaning.⁶

With Derrida we give up on the notion of absolute meaning, but not of meaning altogether. And as meaning creating practice, language, even 'deconstructive'

⁵ See: Jacques Derrida Margins of Philosophy trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Sara Kofman Nietzsche et la Metaphore (Paris: Payot, 1972).

⁶ Jonathan Culler On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Deconstruction (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 132.

language, works as an intervention in the world. As a meaning creating practice, language is only not a legitimating practice if we refuse to accept responsibility for our actions.⁷

Since our linguistic interventions in the world always throw up legitimation claims, we are always caught in the game of rationality. This is not to say that we always need to use the term rationality to name the discourse of legitimation. But if rationality has no a priori content, and is seen as nothing but a place holder for a discourse of legitimation, then there is no a priori reason not to call any discourse of legitimation that we accept 'rational.' Of course the discourse of rationality is strongly historically bound to admit some contents and not others. In currently accepted discourses of reason, thoughts associated with desire or any notion of interest other than 'rational self-interest' are taken to be antithetical to reason. These exclusions are part of the strength reason has as an operative force. Reason acts to mark its other, and the weight of the accepted exclusions sets up a powerful political force.

Once we have accepted the view that reason opens up onto an abyss of legitimation, however, the a priori exclusion of desire or interest cannot be held up on philosophical grounds. This does not mean that it is not

⁷ Admittedly a philosophical possibility.

held up in reality. Reason is accepted as having a certain content by most people and because the space occupied by discourses of rationality is an almost sacred one, it is very difficult to challenge what ever it is that occupies this space. Thus not everything can be called rational by a given group at a given time, but the reasons for what is accepted and what is not grow out of political struggles over legitimation rather than from any disinterested set of a priori laws.

Habermas argues from the position that all language involves discourses of legitimation to the view that in all speaking we raise universal validity claims. As I shall argue in Chapter 4, Habermas' reasons for claiming this universality are highly problematic. We can reject this universalism and still claim that some form of legitimating practice is always involved in the use of language.⁸ If what we mean by rationality is something taken to be legitimate, then we cannot avoid making claims to rationality, as long as we use language.

⁸ See: Jurgen Habermas, Communication and the Evolution of Society trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979. Habermas bases this claim in the speech act theories of Searle and Austin. See: John Searle, Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); J.L. Austin, How To Do Things With Words (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962). For an interesting reading of Austin as himself undermining the distinction between playful and serious uses of language see Shoshona Felman The Literary Speech act: Don Juan with J.L. Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages trans. Catherine Porter (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1983).

Since discourses of legitimation are unavoidable, our defetishization of the concept of rationality need not lead to a rejection of rationality. Neither must it lead to a valorization of the irrational. Irrationality is the other of what is taken at any one moment to be rational. If we understand the extent to which the rational is unstable, then nothing can be given stability as reason's other. The content of the irrational, like the content of the rational is open to dispute.

The problem with taking rationality to be a metaphysical given is not just a philosophical one. Since the designation 'rational' gives a particular content the mark of legitimacy, the assumption that we can divide up the contents of discursive space into the rational and the irrational allows for the political operation of inclusion and marginalization. Throughout its long and varied history, the concept rationality has worked to mark a barrier between the dominant and the dominated. This occurs in the relations between the sexes and in the designation of colonized others.

One implication of the position that we cannot avoid discourses of legitimation is that we are always unavoidably involved in discourses of inclusion and marginalization. Speaking always involves discourses of legitimation, and discourses of legitimation always imply the evaluative marking of positions. What happens when

rationality is fetishized and taken to be an invariable given, however, is that the political process of marginalization becomes unaccountable. The commonly accepted structures of what counts as correct reinforce structures of marginalization, and the designation rational puts them above the field of discursive struggle.

If being dispassionate is the mark of a rational person, then it is difficult for the person who advocates a position because of a passionate interest in the subject to get a fair hearing. In advocating for her position, the passionate person could adopt a dispassionate demeanor and use some argumentative strategies accepted as rational, she could reject the discourse of rationality as oppressive and stick to an emotional appeal, or she could challenge the notion that what it means to be rational is to be dispassionate. While use of all three strategies can be effective, the third strategy is one that is often overlooked. This is the case because the concept rationality has achieved such a high level of fetishization that we often forget that its content is a matter of social determination. When the content of the concept rationality is allowed to remain above the fray of ideological struggles, a key form of hegemony is allowed to remain unchallenged.

This is not to say that the content of the concept rationality has remained stable over time. In fact there

have been enormous changes in it over the course of the Western philosophical tradition. What has remained stable is the way that reason has been able to designate its other without having its own constitution openly challenged. The discursive space occupied by rationality embodies an enormous amount of power. What counts at a particular moment as rational is what is unquestionably taken to be correct, what has achieved the highest level of legitimation possible. But the way that this concept receives its content is from the power of commonly accepted beliefs.

This operation has been especially clear in the discursive construction of woman as the other of reason. While the nature of the relationship between reason and its other has changed dramatically over time, the fact that reason constructs its other has not. For Aristotle, the fundamental distinction between reason and its other was the distinction between form and matter. Each thing has a formal principle or essence, and its reason consists in fulfilling the function dictated by its essence. For Aristotle, form is a fundamentally male principle, matter is associated with the female. Men exercise reason in thinking and deliberating. Women are the material substrate from which life grows, they do not add a formal element, in reproduction or in social life. Reason's other

is unthinking matter, and women's essence is to be matter.⁹

The notion that reason is opposed to passion is a fairly modern innovation. While Aristotle's reason could include passionate convictions, the desires of the body and moral principles, concepts of reason growing out of the Enlightenment excluded these elements. For Kant reason elevates us above bodily desires and interests. Reason's other becomes the emotional desiring body. Whereas for Aristotle women were not rational because they were material giving and not form giving beings, for Kant their lack of rationality lay in the over dominance of their emotions.

Since the Enlightenment, the notion of a strict mind/body dualism has been one of the more stable and politically powerful elements of the concept of reason. On this view, reason is seen as deriving from the mind as opposed to the body. As reason and the mind are elevated so are the body and its brute desires denigrated. The assumption of mind/body dualism has worked to mask the source of reason. If the mind were based on a fundamentally different principle from the body, it would not be absurd to suppose that this principle had a law to govern it. Once we reject the ontological assumption of

⁹ Ann Ferguson "Does Reason have a Gender?" unpublished manuscript.

mind/body dualism, we bring up for question the status of the source of reason.

While Descartes built his whole system around the notion of mind/body dualism, he was never able to clearly articulate the relationship between these two elements. If mind and body are truly distinct, how can they effect one another? Of course Descartes had an answer to this question, but his theory of the pituitary gland as working like a lever to operate the machine of the body begs the question. The point of contact in a dualistic ontology always invites an infinite regress. Once we reject a dualistic ontology, we are forced to rethink the relationship between reason and desire. If reason is not a faculty found somewhere in our heads, as distinct from our bodies, where does it come from?

As reason changes, so the nature of its other changes, and along with it, nature of woman. Woman's status as the other of reason has remained stable as the character of this otherness has changed dramatically.¹⁰ While the history of Western philosophy contains a variety of notions of rationality, each with its own way of construing its other, what these notions have in common is

¹⁰ A similar operation takes place in the construction of the racialized other of colonialist ideology. See: Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967); Edward W. Said, Orientalism (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

the ability to designate a boundary of acceptability. Only when the construction of this boundary is thematized and included in discussions of legitimation, rather than accepted as a given, will it be possible to break the hegemonic function of operations of reason.

In this thesis I want to make a specific point about the hegemonic function of the way that the relation between reason and passion is traditionally construed and a more general point about the need for a continual questioning of any views which get elevated to the status of the rational. This is meant in part as a caution against using notions of reason to limit the kinds of critical issues that can be raised and to encourage the taking seriously of the specific critical claims that people raise, even if on first sight they do not appear rational.

Section 2:

If we take seriously the notion that rationality is a place holder term for discourses of legitimation then it no longer makes sense to carry on a debate over the virtues or disadvantages of its acceptance. While we may not necessarily continue to use the word 'rationality' to connote legitimate discourse, the very instability of the term prohibits its simple rejection. If what we mean by the rationality we reject is a certain content it is taken

at present to contain, its rejection always falls onto the terrain of the rational, since the rejection itself must appeal to what it takes to be a more legitimate position than the one rejected as 'rational.' If we accept this view, then it does not make sense in discussions of the critique of rationality to argue for and against, as if the object under discussion were a metaphysical given. A more fruitful discussion would center around the constitution of the discourse of legitimation, whether pro or anti 'rational.'

If we begin to investigate the constitution of the concept rationality, we can begin to move beyond what has become a standoff in recent literature in social theory between adherents of rationality and its opponents. The potential fruitfulness of a discussion over what can be used to ground political judgments in the contemporary world has been all but thwarted by a sniping back and forth around positive and negative evaluations of rationality. This uncritical acceptance of the givenness of rationality is nowhere more extreme than in discussions about Jurgen Habermas and Jean-Francois Lyotard.

The position that Lyotard takes up in The Postmodern Condition: a Report on Knowledge is that the rationalism of Western modernism is an unnecessary attempt at legitimation which limits our freedom. In his analysis, he distinguishes between metanarratives, through which we

establish discourses of legitimation, and narratives through which legitimation is established "by the simple fact that they do what they do."¹¹ He argues that society is made up of a plurality of language games and that each language game grounds itself in rules and practices immanent to its own functioning. The problem with meta-narratives- such as Marxist discourses of liberation, philosophical discourses around truth or the Hegelian doctrine of Absolute Spirit ¹²- is that they attempt to establish a narrative frame to hold all narratives. Whereas narrative knowledge "does not give priority to its own legitimation and... certifies itself in the pragmatics of its own transmission without having recourse to argumentation and proof"¹³, metanarratives such as the Western discourse of truth establish a form of cultural imperialism through the demand for legitimation.¹⁴ Lyotard then calls for an abandonment of all metanarratives. We should allow the narratives that we have to hold our

¹¹ Jean-Francois Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) p. 23.

¹² Curiously excepted from this is the Western ideology of science which Lyotard takes to be a open and experimental practice, free from metanarrative constraints. See The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, p. 64.

¹³ Ibid. p. 27.

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 27.

societies together without recourse to discourses of legitimation.

One of Lyotard's targets in this discussion is Habermas. Habermas' project of grounding critical judgments in the 'uncoerced coercion' of the ideal speech situation strikes Lyotard as an imperialistic attempt at a meta-narrative. He argues that Habermas makes two faulty assumptions: that all speakers could come to some agreement as to what rules to accept as legitimate for all arguments and that the goal of a dialogue should be agreement. Lyotard claims that different language games should have different rules, and that dissensus- or a space for disagreement- should be the goal of discourse.¹⁵

In The Philosophical Discourse of the Modern Habermas makes a counter attack on the French postmodernists who he characterizes as neoconservatives (this is because their refusal to get behind any emancipatory program leaves them valorizing the given). While not addressing Lyotard directly in this book, Habermas takes up the problematic dealt with by Lyotard. The problem with the postmodernists, for Habermas, is that by denying the universality of knowledge they undermine any position from which they could make judgments. This leaves them either contradicting themselves when they make judgments or not making judgments at all. To combat this relativism, what

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 65.

is needed is a universal form of reason, which Habermas argues can be found in the notion of the force of the better argument as the foundation for settling disputes in a counter-factual ideal speech situation.

Habermas takes the position that a universal form of reason is required for critical judgment. He takes up the banner of reason- albeit reason in a non-instrumental, non-transcendental form- and shows the postmodernists to be irrationalists. Lyotard replies with the charge that Habermas engages in a repressive practice by using rationality to enforce conformity and discipline. Missing from the debate is the issue, that both Habermas and Lyotard implicitly raise, as to what counts as rationality and why.

For all of his talk of wanting to escape from discourses of legitimation, Lyotard himself is engaged in one in his argument with Habermas. His claim- that paralogy gives a better measure of justice than consensus- is nothing but a metanarrative of legitimation. Even the notion that narratives ground themselves in the pragmatics of their functioning implies a pragmatist meta-narrative. For all of his posturing as someone willing to take the leap into the undefined world beyond discourses of legitimation, Lyotard's insistence that we must go there necessarily implies such a discourse.

If we see the ways in which Lyotard himself is engaged in discourses of legitimation it becomes clear that the ground for a debate between Habermas and Lyotard is not over the desirability of engaging in discourses of legitimation- and therefore of reason- but rather how these discourses should function. All of the charges of rationalism and irrationalism keep us from getting to this point.

If we accept the notion that reason is what we call a discourse when we find it to be legitimate, then the difference between the positions of Habermas and Lyotard is not one of reason versus unreason, which given the fluidity of these terms is impossible. But rather the contest is between different strategies for legitimation. While Habermas argues that there are universal and necessary requirements for any legitimate discourse, Lyotard argues that different discourses carry with them different rules. For Lyotard, the questions as to what legitimizes these rules or even why plurality is better than universality are never adequately dealt with. This is because Lyotard's refusal to engage in anything that looks like a discourse of legitimation makes him back off and avoid discussions when these sorts of questions are raised.

One of Habermas' objections to the postmodernists is that by denying the universality of reason they undermine

any position from which they could make critical judgments. If I am right in arguing here that thinkers such as Lyotard and Foucault are always engaged in discourses of legitimation even if they themselves deny this, then how could it be possible for them to ground their legitimating practices, given their denial of the universal validity of any discourse of truth?

Foucault's work has been especially interesting in showing domination implications of discourses of reason.¹⁶ Habermas would argue that interesting as these views might be, the moment they reject universal discourses of reason, they undermine the ground from which their position gains its force or purchase on reality. But does the view that we are always speaking from a standpoint necessarily imply the position that we must take our own standpoint as universally valid? Habermas argues yes. For him, thinkers who reject all universal approaches to rationality involve themselves in a pragmatic self-contradiction. Their practice of making critical judgments is contradicted by their position that these judgments can never achieve universal validity.

What is unclear in Habermas' position is why making judgments implies our taking them to be universally valid.

¹⁶ See for example: Michel Foucault The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972 and The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980.

If we accept the position that we are always speaking from a standpoint we do not thereby completely invalidate our ability to make claims from where we are standing. We can accept the view that our positions are our own and use them to engage in discursive interactions. The important implication of realizing that our position is perspectival is not that our view is wrong, but rather, that it is open to challenge. Although there is always an infinite regress in any discourse of legitimation, we are constantly engaged in these discourses, and the regress often stops where participants in a discussion find themselves to be in agreement.¹⁷

Section 3:

In holding the view that there is an infinite regress in grounding any notion of reason, we find ourselves on the terrain of Habermas' charge of self-refutation. If I have rejected all grounding as unstable, then where can I

¹⁷ An interesting example of this fallacy is contained in the argument that once we have accepted a pluralistic epistemology we are committed to the view that modern Western epistemologists are epistemologically superior to members of traditional cultures who take their worldviews to be 'true.' A truly pluralist epistemology does not have to accept this implication. Theories of truth grow out of the answering of questions that arise in real lived experience. One of the experiences of those of us who have grown up in the Western ideological tradition has been the imperialistic implications of notions of truth as a universal. Thus I can reject the universalism of my own tradition without having to say that this pluralism is the new universal truth about epistemology.

stand as I make this claim? In his essay, "Die Krise des Wahrheitsbegriffs als Krise der Metaphysik", Josef Simon argues that the concept of truth is necessarily paradoxical. It is paradoxical in that any concept of truth requires a grounding, but any grounding must make reference back to some already legitimized principles of truth if it is to count as grounding. According to the charge that this view is self-undermining, the rejection of the validity of truth claims must itself raise truth claims. Thus, on this view, the skeptic necessarily falls into a pragmatic self-contradiction in which the claims of the skeptic are undermined by her practice of making assertions which necessarily raise validity claims. Simon claims, however, that the paradox of grounding a concept of reason is unavoidable: for either the metaphysician or his critic.

Nothing seems to irritate metaphysical thought as much as this sort of utterance [that discourses of truth are inherently circular], which immediately, when one takes it seriously, provokes the objection that it itself wants to raise claims to truth. Certainly it does do this. The problem however remains that it is difficult not just to redeem truth claims from this sort of paradoxical utterance, but to redeem them from any sort of utterance.¹⁸

¹⁸ Josef Simon, Nietzsche Studien #18, 1989 p. 242. Here redeem is a translation of *einlösen*. This word, which shows up often in Habermas, means something like cash in or make good on. We should think of redeeming in the sense of green stamp redemption rather than the redemption of our souls. There are no theological implications in the

Any speaking implies the validity of the terms used, hence any speaking raises truth claims. But no speaking can thoroughly ground the claims it raises.

Simon wants to limit discussions of truth to the clarification of names. A name clarification is sufficient when it distinguishes the things we need to distinguish for a specific goal. This means that discourses of truth take place within a horizon of commonly accepted beliefs. Simon sees questions of knowledge as fundamentally pragmatic. That is, we are justified in holding something as true when our understanding is clear enough for action.¹⁹ Rejecting the claim that this lands one in a pragmatic self-contradiction, Simon argues,

Those who make the objection of the pragmatic contradiction do not realize that no concepts can have the validity of a definitive interpretation, including the concept truth, and that one can only speak of a contradiction under the presupposition of definite interpretations of concepts, for example, that in making a claim to 'truth' one would be making a claim about the 'correspondence between concept and object.' This can only be done under the presupposition that the concepts 'correspondence', 'concept' and 'object' are not at the same time in need of interpretation, that means, that it depends inseparably upon the situation of which the meeting of the different horizons of the speaker and the hearer is a part.²⁰

German.

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 247.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 255.

And this, he claims, means that discourses of truth are necessarily provisional and related to the horizon of inquiry of the participants of a discourse of knowledge.

In all speaking there takes place, in a way which can never come to a conclusion, not only a discussion about objects but at the same time over concepts to clarify their respective uses. Since this process of self-clarification can never come to a conclusion, there is no basis for the charge of self-contradiction. There is a basis for this charge when used against the person who speaks out of an uncritical consciousness, which sees its concepts as final and by that token as referring to ultimate being. The charge of self-contradiction is a typical metaphysical charge in a high sounding tone which refuses to perceive the bodily origin of its own voice.²¹

In other words, there is no pragmatic self-contradiction for the critical thinker who knows that her concepts are temporary, and related to specific contexts. Only when one attempts to claim a wider scope of validity for one's truths do the problems of the paradoxes inherent in a theory of truth come to bear. The self-critical critical thinker is prepared to enter into a discussion of the validity of concepts being used when a participant in the discussion finds something being assumed to be problematic. The discussion can proceed until the conflict or misunderstanding is resolved or at least clarified.

²¹ Ibid. p. 255.

After this point there can be a moment of acceptance of a truth, until the next problem arrives on the scene.

Section 4:

Simon shows the impossibility of self grounding for any notion of truth, or Reason. In The Dialectic of Enlightenment, Horkheimer and Adorno show the implications this circularity has for relations of domination. Underlying their critique of Enlightenment notions of rationality is an acceptance of the positive challenge the Enlightenment raised to traditional forms of authority in medieval Europe.

The aporia that faced us in our work proved to be the first phenomenon for investigation: the self-destruction of the Enlightenment. We are wholly convinced—and therein lies our petitio principii—that social freedom is inseparable from enlightened thought.²²

As sons of the Enlightenment, embittered by German fascism, Horkheimer and Adorno found themselves in the position of asking how things could have gone so wrong in Europe and pointed the finger at the inherent contradictoriness of Enlightenment rationality.

Works such as Kant's "What is Enlightenment" offer the promise of human liberation by positing a faculty of

²² Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, Dialectic of Enlightenment trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1972) p. xiii, translation modified. Dialektik der Aufklärung (Frankfurt: S. Fischer Verlag, 1969) p. 3.

reason that can be used to undermine illegitimate structures of authority and to prepare the way for a society in which all people are treated with the dignity they deserve as human beings,

This free thought gradually acts upon the mind of the people and they gradually become more capable of acting in freedom. Eventually the government is also influenced by this free thought and thereby treats man, who is now more than a machine, according to his dignity.²³

But while undermining traditional forms of authority, the principle of autonomous reason sets up a new form of legitimation,

For enlightenment is as totalitarian as any system. Its untruth does not consist in what its romantic enemies have always reproached it for: analytic method, return to elements, dissolution through reflective thought; but instead in the fact that for enlightenment the process is always decided from the start.... Nature, before and after quantum theory, is that which is to be comprehended mathematically; even what cannot be made to agree, indissolubility and irrationality, is converted by means of mathematical theorems.²⁴

Although we are told that we each have faculty of judgment within ourselves and that we can use this faculty as the ultimate court of appeals for any judgment, only certain

²³ Immanuel Kant, "What is Enlightenment" in The Philosophy of Kant trans. Carl J. Friedrich (New York: The Modern Library, 1949) p. 138.

²⁴ Horkheimer and Adorno p. 24.

kinds of judgments are recognized as having been made by this faculty.

As the transcendental, supraindividual self, reason comprises the idea of a free, human social life in which men organize themselves as the universal subject and overcome the conflict between pure and empirical reason in the conscious solidarity of the whole. This represents the idea of true universality: utopia. At the same time, however, reason constitutes the court of judgment of calculation, which adjusts the world for the ends of self-preservation and recognized no function other than the preparation of the object from mere sensory material in order to make it the material of subjugation.²⁵

Adorno and Horkheimer criticize Enlightenment rationality for its prescriptive aspect according to which only systematizable knowledge counts as knowledge. Reason posits man as an autonomous agent who relates to nature as a passive other. This way of positing nature sets up a relation of domination within man over what he conceptualizes as his natural side, and a relation of domination of women and colonized others on the basis of their being associated with nature.

Woman as an alleged natural being is a product of history, which denaturalized her. But the desperate will to exterminate everything that embodies the allurements of nature- the physiological, biological, national and social inferiors- shows the extent to which the experiment of Christianity has failed....Women and Jews can be seen not to have ruled for thousands of years. They live, although they could be brushed aside; and their

²⁵ Ibid. pp. 83-4.

fear and weakness, the greater affinity to nature which perennial oppression produces in them, is the very element which gives them life. This enrages the strong, who must pay for their strength with intense alienation from nature, and must always suppress their fear.²⁶

For Adorno and Horkheimer, discourses of rationality can function critically to unmask operations of power while functioning to hide their own operations of power. In its critical aspect, rationality challenges operations of power by raising questions that undermine traditional forms of authority and domination. At the same time, discourses of rationality raise their own standards of legitimation that valorize certain ways of thinking and proscribe others. For Horkheimer and Adorno, the 'dialectic of enlightenment' is inescapable for attempts at emancipatory social theory.

Since the term 'critique' is often used to denote the unmasking side of this dialectic, it may seem that we can avoid the traps of the 'dialectic of enlightenment' by engaging in critique rather than rational discourse.²⁷ But, since any notion of critique requires its own legitimation, calling our discourses critical rather than

²⁶ Ibid. pp. 111-112, translation modified, German pp. 119-120.

²⁷ For a reading of Nietzsche as an enlightenment thinker along these lines see: Heinz Rottiges Nietzsche und die Dialektik der Aufklärung, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1972).

rational still makes us vulnerable to the hegemony implied by any rational discourse.

Critiques of rationality are thus in a certain sense circular. Since we always begin our critiques with a set of views which will remain unquestioned for a certain time, we rely on a form of rationality (defined here as thinking taken to be legitimate) while rejecting another.

Section 5:

Pointing out the way that discourses of reason set up systems of validity that exclude the interests and desires of women, feminists have often been driven to the position of rejecting reason as necessarily expressing only male interests. Some radical feminists have used this insight to argue that reason is an inherently masculine domain. In the radical feminist classic, Gyn-Ecology, Mary Daly posits a female harmony which exists beyond the patriarchal discursive structures of philosophical reason,

This book has to do with the mysteries of good and evil. To name it a 'feminist ethics' might be a clue, but it would also be misleading, pointing only to foreground problems. It would be something like arguing for 'equal rights' in a society whose very existence depends upon inequality, that is, upon the possession of female energy by men. The spring into free space which is woman identified

consciousness, involves a veritable mental/behavioral mutation.²⁸

The 'free space' that Daly encourages us to spring into is the realm of a natural female solidarity that requires no discursive articulation, except in so far as articulation is required to free us from the hold of the current patriarchal discursive system.

An unfortunate consequence of this approach to the question of reason is that it keeps women on the outside of discourses taken to be legitimate. As Joan Cocks points out in "Wordless Emotions: Some Critical Reflections on Radical Feminism," there is a tendency in much of the work of radical feminists to accept the position of alterity within the conceptual framework set up by its enemy.

Thus it is that the dominant culture and the counterculture engage in a curious collusion, in which the established conceptual apparatus dictates what counts as the opposite of what, and a rebellious feminism takes up its assigned position at the negative pole.²⁹

Accepting the split between reason and passion as a natural given, radical feminists have achieved some positive ends by valorizing the emotional side of life with which women are often identified. But this positive aspect is offset by their accepting this split as

²⁸ Mary Daly, Gyn-Ecology (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978) p. 12.

²⁹ Joan Cocks in Politics and Society, 13, #1 (1984) pp. 27-57.

characterizing natural differences between men and women and not challenging the discursive structures which encode women's capacities as irrational. Cocks points to the notion of 'women's intuition' as an example of this ideological coding,

By accepting the validity of a female 'sixth sense,' women help obscure the fact that their insights stem from careful attention to the nuances of personal relationships, from an intelligence trained on the minutely perceptible exterior signs in people around them of loneliness, pride, disappointment, and changes of heart. Knowledge about life in close emotional quarters is a mystery only for those who have not had to sharpen their powers of psychological observation and analysis in order to fathom, day in and day out, the unexplained moods, mute thoughts, and sudden desires of others.³⁰

Thus, there has been a tendency to call the kinds of knowledge most commonly associated with women irrational, mystical or at least, not rational. In accepting this view, however, as Cocks points out,

radical feminism forfeits a key ideological weapon in its war against patriarchy. Recognition of that aspect of the life of the mind that is focused on the life of the heart, and recognition of the knowledge women exhibit in the narrowest of social spaces, is a far more astute demand to make of the larger culture than the cognizance of a female identity with natural or mystical forces.³¹

³⁰ Ibid. p. 47.

³¹ Ibid. p. 48.

In order to combat the position of marginalization to which women are relegated by the dominant ideological systems, it is necessary to move beyond valorizing the position of alterity to reason. While such a valorization is often an important part of the struggle for a redefinition of our gendered identities, more than this is needed.

In dealing with the gender system according to which women are debased as non-thinking nurturers, we need to re-valorize the role of nurturer, but we should also question the necessity of the gender allocations associated with nurturing. Given what I have been arguing about the openness of the notion of rationality, the situation here is a bit more complicated. We can valorize the associative and non-rigid thinking sometimes associated with women and we can reject rationality as meaning thinking which is rigidly lawlike. But if we do not accept the fetishization of accepted concepts of rationality and instead see rationality as being a placeholder term for discourses of legitimation, then it might be a better tactical move to argue that rigid thinking is irrational, rather than conceding the terrain of legitimized discourse to what has traditionally been construed as rational.³²

³² Here I am not arguing that we must hold on to the term 'rational.' Rather, I am arguing that rationality has no existential status except as a discourse of

Any rigid construal of the choice between reason and passion should be seen as false. Once we have clearly understood the radical openness of discourses of reason, we can begin to see how it is that the hegemonic operations implied by women's exclusion from dominant conceptions of Reason could be challenged. If we accept the view that Reason is up for grabs, we can see how it is possible to take over the terms of the debate and reformulate reason in a more congenial way.

Section 6:

A critique of rationality can reject specific notions which are found to be problematic on the basis of principles not under question at the moment. A view of critique as an unending process, motivated by the concerns of real people, allows us to admit that notions of critique or rationality are always partial, and potentially hegemonic, but that choosing not to engage in them is not possible either.

I would like to follow Marx in looking at critique as the self clarification of the struggles and desires of an age. If we look at critique this way we are lead to see

legitimation. If we reject reason we are rejecting a specific concept of what it is right to think or how it is right to think. I am choosing to hold onto the term as a tactical move, because I believe that the power invested in the space that this term occupies warrants its being displaced rather than its being ignored.

notions of reason as growing out of the situated concerns of life. From this approach to reason, it will be shown that the traditional split between reason and passion in the modern Western philosophical tradition is one of the most fundamental hegemonic operations of reason. By rejecting ways of thinking that ground themselves in the body or that take the situated concerns of the body as central, the interests of those groups associated by this tradition with the body are ruled as irrational by definition. Far from separating the higher, universal concerns of the mind from the base ones of the body, reason should be seen as a specific species of passion and one that operates to reinforce social hegemony by legitimizing certain forms of passion while excluding others.

Section 7:

In Chapter Two I argue for Nietzsche's view that reason is a species of passion. Since discourses of rationality raise only the passions of some people to a level at which they achieve legitimation, they will be shown to have a hegemonic function. Nietzsche has two very different doctrines of the will operating in his work. I will argue that there is a different epistemology corresponding to each of these doctrines of the will. One of these can be used as the basis for a counterhegemonic epistemology,

while the other reinforces dominating discourses of reason. According to the first view, the will has a natural liveliness to it, and the most valid notion of reason is one that allows the expression of the wills of those operating with it. On the other view, the will is in constant danger of atrophy, a doctrine of truth as non-perspectival, as something heroic and unattainable leads to a strengthening of the will. Truth is a woman who must be appreciated at a distance in order for man's drives to be heightened and sublimated. Nietzsche shows how discourses of reason and truth operate as social practices allowing certain concerns to be expressed while suppressing others. Nietzsche himself is ambivalent in his preference between dominating and non-dominating epistemologies.

In Chapter Three I show how Luce Irigaray uses a Nietzschean epistemology to point out some of the ways in which traditional philosophical notions of rationality have functioned to suppress the articulation of the interests of women. She shows how traditional philosophical notions of rationality are built upon a denial of the rational potential of women, thus making it difficult for the interests of women to enter into discourse as legitimate. Against much of the literature on her work, I argue that Irigaray is not an irrationalist who believes that language is a necessarily patriarchal

realm, but rather that she displaces the opposition between reason and passion such that we can see the hegemonic function of its operation.

In Chapter Four I use the epistemological views developed in the previous chapters to reveal a masculine and eurocentric bias in the work of Jurgen Habermas. Habermas claims to accept the view that reason has no universal content. On first glance his work seems helpful for the present project of discussing how it is possible to talk about reason as a place holder term for discourses of legitimation. His view that the rational decision is one that is reached through the uncoerced consensus of all participants in a discussion is helpful up to a point. If we accept no a priori content for the concept of reason, yet we also claim that reason is unavoidable, it makes sense to then begin to look at the agreement of participants in a discussion as the mark of rationality. Where Habermas' position becomes problematic is in his insistence that a rational consensus can be distinguished philosophically from a non rational one. It is just at the point where he claims to be able to make this distinction that Habermas' position operates to reinforce dominant exclusionary mechanisms.

In Chapter Five I draw out the implications of this critique of discourses of rationality to show that critique can be rational if we do not suppose that we can

ever have a fixed notion of what counts as rational, but rather if we accept that rationality is a place holder concept for the discourses which we take to be legitimate. From this it follows that the rational is the site of inevitable struggles over legitimation.

CHAPTER 2

Reason as a Discourse of Desire: Nietzsche's Social Epistemology

Thoughts are the shadows of our feelings- always darker, emptier, and simpler.¹

In this chapter I will argue for the value of using Nietzsche's work in developing a feminist epistemology. This task is fraught with dangers since Nietzsche's misogyny is both extreme and pervasive. Before appropriating ideas in Nietzsche's work which seem attractive and rejecting those which seem problematic, we should first see how these ideas hang together, we need to look into the question of the relationship between Nietzsche's misogynist views and his philosophical positions. What I shall argue in this chapter is that there are two distinct doctrines of the will operating in Nietzsche, one misogynist the other not, and that these doctrines of the will are related to different epistemological strategies in Nietzsche's work. Before using Nietzsche for feminist epistemological projects we need to be clear in our rejection of the hegemonic

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Random House, 1974), p. 203, section # 179. In many of the quotations from Nietzsche the translations have been modified slightly.

Nietzsche just as we appropriate Nietzsche the epistemological pluralist.

For many commentators, what is significant about Nietzsche's discussion of truth and reason is his rejection of their validity. There is a tendency in the literature for Nietzsche to be read as a skeptic or an irrationalist. And Nietzsche of course wrote much that can be used to support a skeptical view. His is one of the more powerful critiques of the concepts of reason that can be found in the Western tradition. And yet, to read Nietzsche this way is to miss the real power of his discussion of reason. Nietzsche had much more to say about reason than simply that it does not hold up to critical scrutiny. Once we begin to look at reason the way that Nietzsche did, the terms of the discussion shift so radically that we end up speaking about something fundamentally different than what we began with.

Nietzsche shows us that rationality cannot be an autonomous faculty through which we know the truth of the world. After having made this point, he then goes on to ask what reason could be. For Nietzsche it is certain that reason is something that is very powerful in our lives. Even if it does not have the kind of existence its metaphysical supporters have claimed, it has some sort of existence. Nietzsche sees reason as a kind of social practice and he wants to know how it works, and how it can

be made to better serve life. Knowing that reason is not what we have seen it as does not make it disappear. In fact, Nietzsche does not see its elimination as desirable. Living in the world we need to make sense of it, and Nietzsche sees reason as the name we give for our making sense of the world. He wants to investigate the effects different ways of making sense have on our culture and our individual experiences.

In this chapter, I will argue that Nietzsche had an epistemology, but that it was a social epistemology. Approaching the problem of truth from the perspective of social construction, Nietzsche shows how reason functions as a social practice which mediates our consciousness of our experience in the world through socially constructed discourses of reason, and how these discourses of reason profoundly effect our lived experience of our own being in the world. From a Nietzschean perspective it still makes sense to speak of the validity of truth and reason, but the basis for validity has been shifted. Having rejected the notion that reason has a transcendent nature it no longer makes sense to search for timeless and universal principles as the ground of reason's validity. For Nietzsche the validity of a discourse of truth is based in its healthiness for the will.

Because he has two contradictory theories of the will, he has two different theories of the kinds of

epistemological practices that are healthy for the will. On one view, discourses of reason grow out of the willing practices of individuals. Each individual has a will which grows out of a lively engagement with life. This will has a natural liveliness to it that only becomes nihilistic when it is not allowed expression. These willing practices are mediated through the social practice of language. While this mediation through language brings a necessary social element into the articulation of the will, there is no reason that a range of truths cannot be articulated within a linguistic system. Thus, on this view we can imagine a multiplicity of epistemological practices growing out of the linguistic articulation of the varied experiences of individuals.

On the other view, the will has an inherent tendency to atrophy. The will gains its vitality through sublimation and negation. It must constantly create a dominated other. The will gains the stability it needs to ward off nihilism through the creation and negation of the other. Epistemological differences are threatening as alterity undermines the stability needed for keeping the will coherent. The tendency toward diffusion and hence nihilism can only be overcome by stimulating the will through the creation of unattainable goals and the sublimation of desire through games of seduction.

Nietzsche's doctrine of the will to power remains ambiguous between these two concepts of will. He often writes as if the will to power means the will to the expression of the will. In other places it seems clear that the will to power means the will to dominate. Given the history of Nietzsche interpretation, it is not surprising the will to power as mostly been read as the will to dominate.² Nietzsche has been conveniently used by conservative and fascist thinkers beginning with the edition of The Will to Power prepared by his sister, Elizabeth Foerster Nietzsche, who herself was a fascist.³ While Nietzsche himself clearly held elitist views, only one of his doctrines of the will supports these views.⁴

Looking at reason as Nietzsche did allows us to see how discourses of reason have operated to reinforce social hegemony, by legitimizing interpretive frameworks which

² For an interesting history of Nietzsche reception in Germany see: R. Hinton Thomas, Nietzsche in German Politics and Society, 1890- 1914 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983).

³ At the onslaught of his madness, and the end of his writing career, Nietzsche left volumes of unpublished notes and had intended to publish a book called The Will to Power. For a history of the politics surrounding the editing of these notes by his sister, and of her political interests, see the introduction to the English translation of The Will to Power, translated and edited by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1968).

⁴ In Nietzsche and Political Thought, Mark Warren makes a strong case for the view that Nietzsche's elitism is accidental to his most significant philosophical positions. Mark Warren, Nietzsche and Political Thought (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988).

serve the interests of some members of society and suppress those of others. It also encourages us to look at reason as growing out of a dynamic relationship with the body. From this we conclude that reason is a specific way of interpreting certain passions. It is not a separate faculty through which we control the passions.⁵

While Nietzsche lays the groundwork for a social epistemology that is useful for questioning hegemonic operations of power, Nietzsche himself was not interested in challenging certain forms of hegemony. In order to use his epistemology for a radical project, we must be careful to notice Nietzsche's own hegemonic operations. I shall argue that Nietzsche's belief that the will must be made heroic through a form of asceticism idealizes a masculine relation to autonomy and hence serves the hegemonic function of preventing women's interests from being able to be articulated in legitimate discourse.

⁵ In Thinker on Stage: Nietzsche's Materialism, Peter Sloterdijk claims that Nietzsche's most significant innovation is his "uncovering of the physicality of thought." [p.67] Curiously, though, Sloterdijk goes on to distinguish thought in which physis is illuminated from the operation of logos' descent into the body. One of our central theses here is that there is no logos in itself that could descend into the body. If we reject the idea that ideas ever could exist autonomously and go "in search of a body" [p. 83], then we cannot use the model of internally versus externally derived ideas to distinguish between positive and negative epistemological practices. Peter Sloterdijk, Thinker on Stage: Nietzsche's Materialism, trans. Jamie Owen Daniel (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

In Section 1 of this chapter, I argue that Nietzsche has a coherent critique of reason and that this critique does not lead him to a position from which no critique is possible. Rather, he offers a pragmatic epistemology according to which knowledge is a social practice that grows out of situated human concerns. In Section 2, I give an interpretation of how Nietzsche sees reason operating as a hegemonic social practice. In Section 3, I discuss Nietzsche's distinction between these two forms of knowledge and ask what the value of Universal reason is for Nietzsche. Then, in Section 4, I discuss the problem of abstinence and distance with respect to women and argue that Nietzsche's call for a heroic form of willing is based on a masculine fear of contact with the other. In Section 5 I draw out the conclusions from this discussion and argue that if we reject Nietzsche's heroism of the will we can reinterpret his epistemology as the foundation for epistemological practices which are healthy for the body and useful for challenging domination.

Section 1

"Truth is the kind of error without which a certain species could not live."⁶ What could Nietzsche mean by such an obviously self-contradictory statement? If Nietzsche is really denying the possibility of truth, how

⁶ Nietzsche, The Will to Power, p. 272, section #493.

can he call anything an error? One finds this paradoxical way of approaching the question of truth throughout Nietzsche's work. Two obvious and typical reactions to this paradox are to either accept Nietzsche's view and use it to reject out of hand any epistemology, or to reject Nietzsche's view by arguing that Nietzsche's position is incoherent.⁷ A third way of reading the aphorism may prove more fruitful. Nietzsche is showing that discourses of truth are not what they have traditionally been thought of as, that they do not have the metaphysical validity they have traditionally been granted. Discourses of truth are, however, necessary to life and therefore not to be totally rejected.⁸ For Nietzsche, the question of truth becomes a question about the social function of truth and how can we change the way we use discourses of truth to better serve human needs.

⁷ The debate between Habermas and Lyotard, referred to in Chapter one, can be seen in terms of the author's different views on Nietzsche. Lyotard reads Nietzsche as an anti-epistemologist and takes him as an ally. Habermas argues that this anti-epistemological position of Nietzsche's is incoherent. Jean-Francois Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985) and Jurgen Habermas, Der Philosophische Diskurs der Moderne, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1986).

⁸ Werner Stegmaier argues that Nietzsche does not have a theory of truth, but rather, he tries to re-define the latitude of such theories. Werner Stegmaier, "Nietzsche's Neubestimmung der Wahrheit," Nietzsche Studien, Band 14, 1985, pp. 69-95.

For Nietzsche, the concept of truth is an inherently paradoxical one. It is paradoxical in that any concept of truth requires a grounding, but any grounding must make reference back to some already legitimized principles of truth if it is to count as grounding.

The view that any concept of truth or reason implies a necessary circularity has often provoked the charge that this view is self-undermining. The rejection of the validity of truth claims must itself raise truth claims. As I have argued in Chapter 1, Joseph Simon credits Nietzsche with being aware of this paradox of reason and with responding to it by developing an open ended, perspectival epistemological strategy.

Nietzsche was not interested in coming up with a general truth criterion.⁹ He saw such a criterion as both

⁹ In Nietzsche's Theory of Knowledge, Rudiger Hermann Grimm argues that the paradox of self-referentiality does not arise for Nietzsche. When making the claim that there is no truth, Nietzsche means that there are no eternally valid standards of truth. Grimm's central thesis is that the will to power is the founding notion in Nietzsche's philosophy. On his view, the criterion of truth for Nietzsche becomes: that which increases the will to power. This is not self-contradictory, says Grimm, because Nietzsche is claiming that this is an interpretation of the world which Nietzsche finds appealing, and its appeal is its own ground. It is therefore self-referentially consistent.

While this reading succeeds in getting Nietzsche out of the paradox of self-referentiality, it misses much of the power of Nietzsche's critique of epistemology. If we are not convinced, as I am not, that the will to power is an appealing idea, the dialogue with Nietzsche must come to a grinding halt. The grounds for a discussion are undermined by an individualistic and voluntarist aesthetics. Rudiger Hermann Grimm, Nietzsche's Theory of

impossible and undesirable. In section #344 of The Gay Science he argues that science rests on faith in the value of truth, on a resolve to avoid illusion, to not deceive. The value of this resolve needs to be questioned.

Charitably interpreted, such a resolve might be a quixotism, a minor slightly mad enthusiasm; but it might also be something more serious, namely, a principle that is hostile to life and destructive. 'Will to truth'- that might be a concealed will to death.¹⁰

The will to truth rests on a nihilistic impulse to deny the perspectival nature of knowing existence in the world. Discourses of truth are valuable to life when they express our existential concerns and allow for the expression of the multiplicity and fluidity of our perspectives.¹¹

For Nietzsche, there is no pragmatic self-contradiction for the critical thinker who knows that her/his concepts are temporary, and related to specific contexts. Only when one attempts to claim a wider scope of validity for one's truths do the problems of the paradoxes inherent in a theory of truth come to bear. The self-critical critical

Knowledge (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1977).

¹⁰ Nietzsche, The Gay Science, p. 282, section #344.

¹¹ For discussions of perspectivism in Nietzsche see: Volker Gerhardt, "Die Perspektive des Perspektivismus," Nietzsche Studien, Band 18, 1989, pp. 260-281 and Daniel W. Conway, "Perspectivism and Persuasion," Nietzsche Studien, Band 17, 1988, pp. 555-562.

thinker is prepared to enter into a discussion of the validity of concepts being used when a participant in the discussion finds something being assumed to be problematic. The discussion can proceed until the conflict or misunderstanding is resolved or at least clarified. After this point there can be moment of acceptance of a truth, until the next problem arrives on the scene.

Nietzsche sees the nihilism of Western civilization as intimately related to the attempt to come up with a final truth.¹² If we believe that truth is something to be reached, we negate the validity of our own thinking being in the world. We posit a possible end to our intellectual living and we fundamentally misperceive what it is we are doing when we are engaged in discourses of truth. Our acting in the world requires that we hold things as true. For this reason discourses of truth are necessary. But since they can never be given a solid grounding, that is, one that does not make some presuppositions and assumptions, discourses of truth are never 'true' in the sense of the word usually meant by metaphysical thinkers.

Prior to any epistemological question for Nietzsche is the question of our goals in searching for truth. As Tracy Strong points out in his Friedrich Nietzsche and the

¹² Josef Simon, "Die Krise des Wahrheitsbegriffs als Krise der Metaphysik," Nietzsche Studien, Band 18, 1989, p. 257.

Politics of Transfiguration, rather than assuming that the search for truth is an end in itself, Nietzsche raises many interesting questions simply by asking why we feel compelled to engage in this search.¹³ Nietzsche argues that science, with its underlying assumption of the desirability of knowledge, is not as antithetical to religion as it has traditionally seen itself:

This pair, science and the ascetic ideal, both rest on the same foundation- I have already indicated it: on the same overestimation of truth (more exactly: on the same belief that truth is inestimable and cannot be criticized).¹⁴

Or, from The Gay Science,

But you will have gathered what I am driving at, namely, that it is still a metaphysical faith upon which our faith in science rests- that even we seekers after knowledge today, we godless anti-metaphysicians still take our fire, too, from the flame lit by a faith that is thousands of years old, that Christian faith which is also the faith of Plato, that God is the truth, that truth is divine.¹⁵

By questioning the value of truth, Nietzsche invites us to ask what sort of social role it plays. If the search for truth is not an end in itself, why do we engage in it,

¹³ Tracy Strong, Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

¹⁴ Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 153, essay #3, section #25.

¹⁵ Nietzsche, The Gay Science, p. 283, section #344.

what interests does it serve and how might these interests better be served? Nietzsche's views on the interests served by different discourses of truth is both complex and contradictory. While Nietzsche argues for the value of viewing truth as perspectival, as growing out of the situated concerns of the individual, he also sees some value in the traditional philosophical view of reason as absolute, unitary and hostile to the body. The search for an absolute, perspective free truth has nihilistic implications, (he sees perspective free truth as a castration of the intellect¹⁶) but he also thought that it can serve a useful function. The creation of a great and unattainable goal leads to a heroism of the will which he claims will lead to cultural greatness, if we can aim for this goal without at the same time having the hostility to lived experience inherent in it lead to an atrophy of our wills. As I shall argue later, this connection between heroism and perspective free truth is at the heart of Nietzsche's misogynist and hegemonic epistemological strategies.

Section 2

While truth is the sort of lie without which the human species cannot survive, different lies about truth

¹⁶ Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals, p. 119, essay #3, section #12.

structure human life in different ways. Nietzsche's criticism of Christianity is not simply that it is not true, but that it is a way of structuring our understanding of the world such that an unhealthy relationship to the body is encouraged. The point for Nietzsche of claiming that god is dead is not that the doctrines of religion have been proven to be false or self contradictory. For Nietzsche this would be a weak and almost irrelevant criticism. The point for him is that religion still has negative effects on people. By bringing attention to them, he hopes to rid human society of these effects.

An example of this is his critique in The Genealogy of Morals of the ascetic ideal of Christianity. Here he claims that asceticism is an unhealthy response to the nihilism of Western culture.

...the ascetic ideal springs from the protective instinct of a degenerating life which tries by all means to sustain itself and to fight for its existence; it indicates a partial physiological obstruction and exhaustion against which the deepest instincts of life, which have remained intact, continually struggle with new expedients and devices. The ascetic ideal is such an expedient; the case is therefore the opposite of what those who revere this ideal believe: life wrestles in it and through it with death against death; the ascetic ideal is a trick [Kunstgriff] for the preservation of life.¹⁷

¹⁷ Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals, p. 120, essay #3, section #13.

Here, Nietzsche argues that Christianity is an unhealthy response to unhealth. It is a way of organizing the specific combination of dying and vital impulses found in European society. This organizational structure allows the vital aspects of this culture to survive the death it cannot throw off. It is a holding pattern against total collapse. Having said this, however, Nietzsche also believes that the negative aspects of this holding pattern are beginning to outweigh the positive and that it is time to overthrow this ideological structure and replace it with one that would cast off some of the deadly impulses that Christianity has attempted to deal with. An interpretive structure that grows out of unhealth must be replaced by one that integrates only healthy impulses.

For Nietzsche it is not possible to move beyond the use of interpretive structures to a 'true' understanding of reality. What leads us to accept one interpretation and reject another is not based on the truth of the interpretation, since all interpretation is a making of errors. That is, no interpretation bears an essential or necessary relation to the reality being interpreted.¹⁸ In

¹⁸ Michel Foucault sees interpretation as the key category for understanding Nietzsche's theory of truth. see: Michel Foucault "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx", Philosophie, NV 1, Nietzsche, (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1964). Sarah Kofman argues that Nietzsche undermines the distinction between concepts and metaphors. Once this has been done we can no longer distinguish a

molding our perceptions into perceptions of things we reify the flux of experience according to categories that make the world make sense to us. Some reifications are more helpful than others for our projects, but none can be given an absolute justification.¹⁹

This process of reification is not an individual one, based on our each making sense of our own world. Conceptualization takes place through the medium of language. Through using language, we engage in a process of social fetishism. We experience the world as mediated

'proper' and non-metaphorical use of language from a poetic use. The result of this is that epistemological questions cannot be sharply distinguished from questions of meaning and interpretation. See: Sarah Kofman, Nietzsche et la Metaphore, (Paris: Payot, 1972).

¹⁹ John Wilcox makes a helpful point that Nietzsche's critiques of traditional epistemological theories should not be seen as a blanket rejection of 'the correspondence theory of truth'. Danto's position that the main thrust of Nietzsche's epistemology is a rejection of the correspondence theory of truth is misleading on two grounds. It assumes that there is a correspondence theory of truth. Wilcox argues that what is meant when we say that the truth of something lies in its correspondence to its object is open enough to dispute that we cannot simply claim that Nietzsche rejected this doctrine without first clarifying what it is that we see Nietzsche as rejecting. Secondly, Wilcox argues that correspondence is not a truth bearing relation, denotation is. Nietzsche's critique of the epistemological theories he encountered was that they assumed that there could be a legitimate denotative relationship. This is false since all denotation implies the existence of something denoted. From the point of view of the doctrine of dionysian flux, however, all denotation is false. John T. Wilcox, "Nietzsche Scholarship and 'The Correspondence Theory of Truth': The Danto Case," Nietzsche Studien, Band 15, 1986. Arthur Danto, Nietzsche as Philosopher, (New York: Macmillan, 1965).

through the categories created through joint processes of reification. This means that language is the site of the production of ideology.²⁰ It is the place where individual experience and social understanding are the most intimately mediated.

Nietzsche sees discourses of reason as a necessary consequence of our using language.

Today, on the contrary, we see ourselves entangled in error, necessitated to error, to precisely the extent that our prejudice in favor of reason compels us to posit unity, identity, duration, substance, cause, materiality, being...²¹

Out of the positing of things as things and of positing relations between things, we must also posit stability and order. This positing of stability leads us to experience reality as composed of elements of categories. By fixing things linguistically we are driven to posit them metaphysically. That is, we are driven to believe that the categories expressed in language have some sort of metaphysical existence. From this metaphysical view of the world it is a short step to the Platonic view that things exist by virtue of their participation in the categories

²⁰ See Mark Warren p. 58. For a general discussion of Nietzsche's work in terms of ideology critique see: Monika Funke, Ideologiekritik und Ihre Ideology bei Nietzsche, (Stuttgart: Fromann, 1974).

²¹ Nietzsche, The Twilight of the Idols, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth England: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 38, 'Reason in Philosophy', section #5.

that we believe are foundational, and that reason derives from somewhere other than experience.

Very much later, in a world a thousand times more enlightened, the security, the subjective certainty with which the categories of reason could be employed came all of a sudden into philosophers' heads: they concluded that these could not have originated in the empirical world—indeed, the entire empirical world was incompatible with them.²²

Reason is then posited as the structural principle behind this system of categorization. Nietzsche argues that this prejudice in favor of reason is not one we can possibly overcome as long as we use language. "[W]e find ourselves in the midst of a rude fetishism when we call to mind the basic presuppositions of the metaphysics of language—which is to say, of reason."²³

While here Nietzsche is arguing that we cannot avoid a sort of Platonic metaphysics if we engage in linguistic practices, in other places his position is not so strong. Language necessarily fetishizes, but the specific sorts of fetishism which become accepted are contingent on the categories accepted by a given linguistic group. In the first book of Human, all too Human, Nietzsche explores the view that empirical science can be used as a corrective to our metaphysical view of the world. By relying more on sense experience as the foundation of our understanding of

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

the world, we can come up with categorization schemes that do not posit a supersensible world and hence devalue the lived experience of the body. While scientific explanations distance one from a feeling of responsibility for the external world as much as metaphysical ones do, since both types of explanation posit the external world as fundamentally distinct from the subject, scientific explanations are more attractive since through them an "interest in life and its problems is kindled..."²⁴ This example shows that we have some control over the specific nature of the reified world of our understanding.

This control is more social than individual, though, since the discourses of reason, or operations of truth, we engage in are inextricably bound up with the necessarily social practice of language. Consciousness resides in the individual, and always bears the marks of the unique experience of the individual, but it also always is articulated through the conceptual frameworks of the larger linguistic group.

Words are acoustical signs for concepts; concepts, however, are more or less definite image signs for often recurring and associated sensations, for groups of sensations. To understand one another, it is not enough that one use the same words; one also has to use the same words for the

²⁴ Nietzsche, Human all too Human, trans. Walter Kaufmann (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984) p. 25.

same inner experiences; in the end one has to have one's experience in common.²⁵

Nietzsche sees this as problematic, since there is a tendency for the group understanding to be simplified such that "The human beings who are more similar, more ordinary have had, and always have, an advantage."²⁶ Thus, the way we experience our world as mediated through language is continually dragged toward "the similar, ordinary, average, herdlike- common!"²⁷ While we should question the elitism in Nietzsche's conception of 'the herd', he is making a valuable point about the way that language offers a framework of interpretation of our experience such that our individual experience is seen through the eyes of a larger social group. Even though all language reifies experience, we should look at how linguistic practices function to reify it in ways which serve different social groups.

In The Gay Science #354 Nietzsche argues that consciousness, as the mirror of experience, grows out of the social need for communication. "The whole of life would be possible without at the same time seeing itself in a mirror: even now for that matter, by far the greatest

²⁵ Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 216, section #269.

²⁶ Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, p. 217, section #268.

²⁷ Ibid.

portion of our life actually takes place without this mirror effect...."²⁸ "Where need and distress have forced men for a long time to communicate and to understand each other at the same time quickly and subtly, the ultimate result is an excess of this strength and art of communication...."²⁹ "It was only as a social animal that man acquired self-consciousness."³⁰

My idea is, as you see, that consciousness does not really belong to man's individual existence [Menschen] but rather to his social or herd nature; that, as follows from this, it has developed subtlety only insofar as this is required by social or herd utility. Consequently, given the best will in the world to understand ourselves as individually as possible, "to know ourselves," each of us will always succeed in becoming conscious only of what is not individual but 'average.' Our thoughts themselves are continually governed by the character of consciousness- by the 'genius of the species' that commands it- at the same time outvoted [majorisiert] and translated back into the perspective of the herd....This is the true phenomenalism and perspectivism....³¹

Thus, for Nietzsche, perspectivism is not simply the thesis that each of us has a unique perspective that grows out of our making sense of our own experiences. Rather, he argues that our conscious understanding of our own experiences is mediated through social processes. Our

²⁸ Nietzsche, The Gay Science, p. 297, section #354.

²⁹ Ibid. p. 298, section #354.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid. p. 299, section #354.

perspective is related to these. Through the process of social reflection, our knowledge comes to us as already necessarily bearing the mark of the social. We cannot know ourselves apart from the 'genius of the species.'

Although the social is an undertheorized category in Nietzsche, an understanding of its operations is clearly an important part of Nietzsche's project. In analyzing the operations of truth and systems of values, Nietzsche shows a keen understanding of the importance of social determination. We find ourselves in a discursive space in which our instincts and interests are structured in certain ways and not in others. Knowledge is a social and not an individual construct.

In the case of Christianity, it is clear that Nietzsche believes that ideologies are perpetuated to serve social interests. The Christian denial of the body serves the interests of the priestly class.

We must count the ascetic priest as the predestined savior, shepherd, and advocate of the sick herd: only thus can we understand his tremendous historical mission. Dominion over the suffering is his kingdom, that is where his instinct directs him, here he possesses his distinctive art, his mastery, his kind of happiness.³²

³² Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals, pp. 125-126, essay 3, section #15.

Christian priests have a group interest in dominion over the suffering, in maintaining a group of slavish followers.

Similarly, Nietzsche argues that those in positions of power have been able to define terms in ways beneficial to themselves,

The lordly right of giving names extends so far that one should allow oneself to conceive the origin of language itself as an expression of power on the part of the rulers: they say 'this is this and this,' they seal every thing and event with a sound and, as it were, take possession of it.³³

The power to give names to things is the power to construct the categories through which an entire linguistic group understands its experiences. In the case of the terms 'good' and 'evil' Nietzsche claims that

...the judgement 'good' did not originate with those to whom 'goodness' was shown! Rather, it was 'the good' themselves, that is to say, the noble, powerful, high-stationed and high-minded, who felt and established themselves and their actions as good, that is, of the first rank, in contradistinction to all the low, low-minded, common and plebeian.³⁴

The concept of goodness did not arise out of utilitarianism or a dispassionate investigation of the nature of goodness, rather, it serves to enshrine the values that the powerful saw as distinguishing themselves from those they wanted to be distinguished from.

³³ Ibid. p. 26, essay #1, section #2.

³⁴ Ibid. p. 26.

Here, Nietzsche shows linguistic practices to have profound hegemonic implications. Once a term like 'good' is defined by a group it serves that group's interests, until this hegemony is broken by having the term appropriated for another use. This is what Nietzsche argues happened with the slave revolt in morality. The terms good and evil which served the interests of the aristocrats were appropriated by the Christians to enshrine another hegemonic interpretation on reality, the rule of the ascetic priest.

For Nietzsche, then, knowledge is a social practice. Discourses of truth mediate both human interaction and the consciousness an individual has of her/his experience. But how can we know the value of a discourse of truth if we reject any correspondence theory of truth? For Nietzsche the answer lies in his physiological pragmatism. We should accept a discourse of truth if acceptance of it leads to a healthy willing, if it puts us in a relationship to the world such that healthy impulses are able to be expressed and generated.

Nietzsche's views of what leads to a healthy willing are, however, highly problematic. In the following section I will discuss one example in which Nietzsche attempts to distinguish two discourses of reason and to argue for a more healthy relationship between them. While Nietzsche gives us some hints as to where to look for hegemonic

operations of truth, I will argue that his discussion of the value of heroism in truth is based on his own defense of a hegemonic operation which benefits men over women.

Section 3

In section 110 of The Gay Science, Nietzsche makes a distinction between two kinds of knowledge, that which is based on direct interpretations of experience and that which is based on more abstract relations to experience. In this section he refers to these as 'life preserving errors' and 'truth.' The kind of truth he sees as fundamental errors are those judgments by which we make sense out of our sensuous experience.

Over immense periods of time the intellect produced nothing but errors. A few of these proved to be useful and helped to preserve the species: those who hit upon or inherited these had better luck in their struggle for themselves and their progeny.³⁵

The other form of truth aims at a higher level of universality, it sees knowledge as fundamentally dissociated from sense experience and sees rationality as autonomous. Nietzsche argues that this form of knowledge which posits itself as universal is the weakest form of knowledge. It is a practice of truth which takes doubt and consistency as its highest goals, its usefulness for life is therefore more difficult to see.

³⁵ Nietzsche, The Gay Science, p. 169, section #110.

Nietzsche argues that in earlier phases of human history, the truths which oriented human action were always those based on false generalizations from experience. Since the time of the Eleatics, however, truth has become alienated from sense experience. The Eleatics developed a skepticism toward experience based knowledge. By denying the perspectival nature of their own knowledge they could present their way of looking at the world as valid for all.

[T]hey had to misapprehend the nature of the knower; they had to deny the role of the impulses in knowledge; and quite generally they had to conceive of reason as a completely free and spontaneous activity. They shut their eyes to the fact that they, too, had arrived at their propositions through opposition to the commonly accepted, or owing to a desire for tranquility,³⁶ for sole possession, or for domination.

This so called knowledge of the Eleatics is as much based on error as the experience based knowledge which preceded it. The difference is that it presents itself as universally valid, and thus has a heroic quality not available to its predecessor.

This heroism, though, requires a problematic relationship to the body. Like all forms of knowledge, it originates in the body, as an interpretation which gives expression to a kind of desire, in this case a "desire for tranquility, for sole possession or for domination." It is

³⁶ Ibid.

a relationship to the body which posits itself as non-bodily, as transcendent. Thus, an internally contradictory and hostile relation to the body is initiated.

Nietzsche argues that universalistic knowledge, with its requirements to consistency, has a natural tendency to rule out as illegitimate other forms of knowing.

Skepticism is an unhealthy atmosphere for 'basic errors.' With the victory of universalistic knowledge in our culture,

The intellectual fight became an occupation, an attraction, a profession, a duty, something dignified- and eventually knowledge and the striving for the true found their place as a need among other needs.^{37]}

As a result of the struggle between experience based and universalistic reason, a human interest in philosophical knowledge has developed.

Thus knowledge became a piece of life itself, and hence a continually growing power- until eventually knowledge [universal knowledge] collided with those primeval basic errors [experience based knowledge]: both as life, both as power and both in the same human being.³⁸

Now in human beings there is a fight between basic errors and the impulse for 'truth.' Nietzsche writes that these two forms of knowledge are locked in a struggle, the outcome of which will have profound consequences. He

³⁷ Ibid. p. 170, section #110.

³⁸ Ibid. p. 171, section #110.

writes that the most important question raised by this struggle is "To what extent can truth endure incorporation"³⁹ That is, Nietzsche asks if our universal discourses of knowledge can be brought into a vital relationship to the body, as primordial errors are.

This is one of the great imperatives of Nietzsche's epistemology- to incorporate knowledge, to bring universal discourses of knowledge into a healthy relationship with the will, rather than having them castrate the will by denying the bodily origin of knowledge. The power of this imperative is muted, practically lost, in translation. Nietzsche says we need to ask to what extent truth can bear einverleibung. At the center of the word einverleibung is leib, body. While the Latin corpus is to be found in the word incorporate, the implication of physicality is not as strong in the English as it is in the German. In the German, Nietzsche's question is harder to misunderstand: can truth bear to be made bodily?⁴⁰

The relationship between truth and physicality is a central theme for Nietzsche, and his criterion for what counts as useful truth- and hence true truth- is bound up with the question of what sorts of epistemological practices are healthy for the body.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Since there is no object for the einverleibung, there is an implication of reflexivity, the incorporation is into itself or into the body.

For Nietzsche, knowledge does not originate in a faculty separate from the body. In Beyond Good and Evil, Nietzsche points out the futility of answering questions about the source of knowledge by referring to a faculty for knowledge. Kant asks "How are synthetic a priori judgments possible?" He answers his own question "By virtue of a faculty". But, Nietzsche says,

...is that an answer? An explanation? Or is it merely a repetition of the question? How does opium induce sleep? "By virtue of a faculty," namely the virtus dormativa, replies the doctor in Moliere, "Because it contains a sleepy faculty whose nature it is to put the senses to sleep."⁴¹

Rejecting the possibility of autonomous reason, Nietzsche sees knowledge as growing out of bodily concerns.

Nietzsche claims that knowledge is the form that the relations between our instincts take in consciousness.

Before knowledge is possible, each of these instincts must first have presented its one sided view of the thing or event; after this comes the fight of these one sided views, and occasionally this results in a mean, one grows calm, one finds all three sides right, and there is a kind of justice and a contract; for by virtue of justice and a contract all these instincts can maintain their existence and assert their rights against each other. Since only the last scenes of reconciliation and the final accounting at the end of this long process rise to our consciousness, we suppose that intelligere must be something conciliatory, just, and good- something that stands essentially opposed to the instincts, while it is actually nothing

⁴¹ Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, pp. 18-19, part #1, section #11.

but a certain behavior of the instincts toward one another.⁴²

Consciousness grows out of our integration of our experiences into complex systems.

Philosophers have made the naive mistake of believing that their views come from somewhere other than their interests and instincts.

They all pose as if they had discovered and reached their real opinions through the self-development of a cold, pure divinely unconcerned dialectic (as opposed to the mystics of every rank, who are more honest and doltish- and talk of 'inspiration'); while at bottom it is an assumption, a hunch, indeed a kind of 'inspiration' - most often a desire of the heart that has been filtered and made abstract- that they defend with reasons they have sought after the fact.⁴³

The so called basic errors are much closer to the bodily needs of the individual than the great philosophic systems since they grow out of the generalizations required to solve existential problems. One encounters a dangerous animal. One is successful in survival if one generalizes from this experience and identifies as the same another animal which poses the same danger, and if one is able to communicate this generalization with other people. This generalization is false in the sense that there are differences between the two animals that are missed by the generalization, but right pragmatically.

⁴² Nietzsche, The Gay Science, p. 261, section #333.

⁴³ Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, p. 12, section #5.

This form of knowledge answers questions that grow out of everyday experience. By offering a network of meaning by which we can make sense out of the world of experience, this form of knowledge not only offers us a pragmatic orientation for our actions, it also makes possible a practice which is expressive of our wills.

Universalistic, or philosophical knowledge on the other hand bears a more complex relation to the body and experience than does the knowledge founded on basic errors. Even though both forms grow out of experience, the distinguishing feature of universalistic knowledge is that it denies this derivation. By positing itself as perspective free, universalistic knowledge makes claims to a validity beyond its ability to make sense out of our experiences. This error is of a different order than the errors inherent in basic knowledge. Most significant for Nietzsche is that universalism must deny the relationship between the body and knowledge. By denying that the source of consciousness resides in the senses, a hostile relation between mind and body is set up in which the growth of knowledge leads to an increased desecration of the body.

Given Nietzsche's view that in the modern West we live with two fundamentally different sources of knowledge, one which expresses a positive relation to the body and another which expresses a hostile one, why does Nietzsche claim that we need to incorporate universalistic

knowledge? What does the knowledge founded on "basic errors" lack that the more philosophic form has?

Given everything that has been said here about the way Nietzsche uses the concept of truth, the answer cannot be that philosophic knowledge is more true than experience based knowledge. In fact, one often gets the impression that Nietzsche thinks quite the opposite: that the greatest errors have been perpetrated by the great philosophical systems. The answer lies in their call to heroism.

In the preface to Beyond Good and Evil, Nietzsche discusses the complex role that philosophical systems, such as Platonism have played in history.

The dogmatist's philosophy was, let us hope, only a promise across millennia- as astrology was in still earlier times when perhaps more work, money, acuteness, and patience were lavished in its service than for any real science so far: to astrology and its 'super-terrestrial' claims we owe the grand style of architecture in Asia and Egypt. It seems that all great things first have to bestride the earth in monstrous and frightening masks in order to inscribe themselves in the hearts of humanity with eternal demands: dogmatic philosophy was such a mask; for example, the Vedanta doctrine in Asia and Platonism in Europe.⁴⁴

Platonism, through its rejection of the perspectival nature of truth, has created a great tension in the human soul. The fight against Platonism, and its popular form-

⁴⁴ Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, pp. 2-3, preface.

Christianity-, "has created in Europe a magnificent tension of the spirit the like of which had never yet existed on earth: with so tense a bow we can now shoot for more distant goals."⁴⁵ By creating an unattainable goal to strive for, namely a perspective free truth, Platonism created a striving spirit, one which identifies with something heroic. At the same time, by denying perspective "the basic condition of all life"⁴⁶, it alienated human beings from the source of their wills, the embodied experience of life.

The answer to our question as to the value of the dogmatic philosophical systems, then, is that they add the heroism lacking in other forms of knowledge. But what is the value of heroism? One might think, on the basis of much of Nietzsche's writing, that when we are able to live in a system of understanding which allows us to express the desires generated in that system, that is, when our wills find expression, that we have found a healthy form of truth. Why does Nietzsche add the requirement that our perspectives be made heroic, that our passions be spiritualized?⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 3, preface.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Nietzsche, The Twilight of the Idols, p. 42, 'Morality as Anti-Nature', section #1.

Here it is important to recognize that Nietzsche's doctrine of the will is not the same as the traditional Freudian doctrine of drives. The will is not something that we are born with, that has a fixed intensity that we need to find a way to discharge. There is a dynamic relationship between lived experience and willing. Nietzsche asks how our passions can be integrated into a consciousness that maintains their vitality. It is not a matter of imposing a consciousness on the will that does not suppress the will. Consciousness is an expression of the will. The problem of knowledge is the problem of how to have a consciousness which is the expression of the healthy aspects of our wills. To the question as to what counts as a healthy form of willing, which arises out of looking at the willing this way, I do not believe Nietzsche has a satisfactory answer.

He seems to have two contradictory views of the will. According to one, there is a natural liveliness to the will which is maintained when our discourses of knowledge are able to express and integrate our experiences. Desires grow out of lived existence. What we desire and how we desire it develop out of the context of the meaning the world has for us. As our worlds change, so do our wills. The sign of a healthy will is that it continually responds in a lively way to experience. Epistemological questions are raised by unsatisfied desires and interests. When

there is a healthy willing, epistemological questions are raised as the result of questions which require answers, as questions are answered, interest in the question disappears.

On this view of the will, the 'will to knowledge' could be seen as an unfortunate result of a social structure in which certain desires never achieve satisfaction, the result of this lack of satisfaction is that this desire comes to look like a natural and universal form of the will. The skepticism of the Eleatics is, on this view, a reaction to a lack of power, or ability to have the will achieve satisfaction, this lack achieves the status of a doctrine according to which a certain complex of desire then becomes reified.

Skepticism, for Nietzsche's other doctrine of the will, is anything but unfortunate. On this view, the will requires cultivation and mastery. Healthy willing requires asceticism and sublimation to fight off the nihilism constantly grabbing at its heels and dragging it down. Skepticism is a healthy articulation of the will because it posits an impossible goal: the attainment of perspective free knowledge. By setting itself on the quest for this impossible goal, the skeptical will is heightened and becomes powerful enough to fight nihilism. One aspect of this doctrine of the will is that the sublimation required for reaching for higher goals requires repression

as a mechanism for gaining strength. For this reason, there is a strong tendency when resorting to this doctrine of the will for Nietzsche to be anti-sensualist. By denying the interests and desires of the body, the willing agent is able to raise his desires to a higher and more heroic plane. One of the ways that this can be done is through the playing of a game of seduction and denial in the sexual arena. This doctrine is especially close to Nietzsche's valorization of the domination of women, who are seen as seducers: contact with them leads to a degeneration of the will, whereas a seductive game with them, played from a strategic distance, ennobles the will.

One of the things I will argue in the next section is that this doctrine which sees the will as requiring sublimation through asceticism grows out of Nietzsche's fear of contact with the other.⁴⁸ We can see the doctrine of nihilism, which this view requires, as dependent on a fear of the loss of self that is only a problem for a

⁴⁸ In Nietzsche and Philosophy, Deleuze presents a very different interpretation of the doctrine of the will. According to Deleuze, there are two different wills in Nietzsche, one active and one reactive. The active form of the will is the one that dominates; the forces that are dominated are called reactive. It is hard to make sense out of this doctrine, since the distinguishing characteristic between the two forms of will is their relative successes. What this amounts to is a might makes right doctrine- those forces which win are called healthy because they have won. This interpretation seems to me to be both unhelpful philosophically and dangerous politically. [Gilles Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 39.]

certain sort of masculine subject. I will argue that the aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy which valorize domination grow out of this doctrine of the will. If we clearly distinguish these two doctrines of the will in Nietzsche's philosophy, we are able to see two different epistemological strategies operating in his work: one that is critical of hegemonic operations as destroying the liveliness of the will of individuals operating within a discursive system and the other which valorizes hegemony as leading to the heroism of the will of those few able to have the discursive system valorize the goals and interests, the pursuit of which lead to their own ennoblement.

Section 4

Nietzsche's call for a heroic form of knowledge shows all of the telltale signs of a sexual phobia, a fear of contact with the other- especially if that other is female.⁴⁹ There are many passages in which Nietzsche

⁴⁹ It is an interesting fact that Nietzsche never married and that his close relationships with women were in general quite difficult. His relationships with his mother and sister are reported to have been tortuous. He seems to have been in love with Cosima Wagner, the wife of his friend and mentor Richard Wagner. This relationship is an example of sublimated 'love at a distance'. His relationship with Lou Salome was extremely complicated. In her study of Lou Salome, Angela Livingstone writes that Salome shared Nietzsche's view that physical love should be avoided. "...she put the view that it was a great mistake to do away with the traditional prizing of virginity in middle class girls: virginity could lead them

argues that both woman and truth should be experienced from a distance. The kind of truth that Nietzsche associates with woman and distance is the universalistic truth of the philosophical systems. His view that abstinence, both sexual and epistemological, are required for the development of the will grow out of his fear of association. This valorization of abstinence is not to be found in his alternative view of truth as growing out of the integration of experience. On the contrary, this truth is fundamentally sensualist. When developing this view, Nietzsche calls for a valorization of sense experience as the source of knowledge and expression of the pleasures of the body as required for a healthy willing.

In Twilight of the Idols, Nietzsche criticizes the denial of the desires of the body in Greek philosophy.

The moralism of the Greek philosophers from Plato downwards is pathologically conditioned: likewise their estimation of dialectics. Reason= virtue= happiness means merely: one must imitate Socrates and counter the dark desires by producing a permanent daylight- the daylight of reason. One must be prudent, clear, bright at any cost: every yielding to the

to productivity, even to heroism. Nietzsche seems to have thought similarly." [Livingstone p. 46] Thus, although Nietzsche and Salome had a very close and intense relationship, the fact that it did not end in a physical one, or at least not a sustained physical one, follows the pattern we are suggesting. [Angela Livingstone, Salome: Her Life and Work (Mt. Kisko, New York: Moyer Bell Ltd., 1984).]

instincts, to the unconscious, leads
downwards.⁵⁰

The denial of the instincts required by philosophy is nihilistic since it encourages a denial of the will.

The harshest daylight, rationality at any cost, life bright, cold circumspect, conscious, without instinct, in opposition to the instincts, has itself been no more than a form of sickness, another form of sickness- and by no means a way back to 'virtue', to 'health' to happiness.... To have to combat one's instincts- that is the formula for decadence: as long as life is ascending, happiness and instinct are one.⁵¹

Everyday practices of knowledge imply a unity of reason and desire, reason becomes the expression of desire. The overheated, dominating will created by seduction and denial is required only for universalistic or philosophical knowledge.

In the preface to The Gay Science, Nietzsche deals with the relationship between philosophical knowledge, heroism and woman. In section #3 of the preface, he argues that philosophies are merely interpretations of the states of the body, and that bodily pain encourages a more profound philosophy.

Only great pain, the long, slow pain that takes its time- on which we are burned, as it were, with green wood- compels us philosophers to descend to the ultimate

⁵⁰ Nietzsche, The Twilight of the Idols, p. 33, 'The Problem of Socrates,' section #10.

⁵¹ Ibid. p. 34, 'The Problem of Socrates,' section #11.

depths and to put aside all trust, everything good-natured, everything that would interpose a veil, that is mild, that is medium- things in which formerly we may have found our humanity. I doubt that such pain makes us 'better'; but I know that it makes us much more profound.⁵²

This pain "is the ultimate liberator of the spirit" since it creates a suspicion in us that moves us beyond the surface to great philosophical depths. And, it develops the strength and heroism of the will. It also, however, leads to nihilism.

The trust in life is gone: life itself has become a problem. Yet one should not jump to the conclusion that this necessarily makes one gloomy! Even love of life is still possible, - only one loves differently. It is love for a woman who casts doubt in us...The attraction of all that is problematic, the delight in an x, however, is too great in such spiritual and excited men, for this delight cannot continue as a bright glow to engulf all need of the problematic, all danger of uncertainty, even the jealousy of a lover. We know a new happiness...

This love of the woman who casts doubts represents a sickness, a falling into an abyss from which the philosopher must find a way of extricating himself. The love of the unknown is not heroic, but rather morbidly self-indulgent when it leads to such an excitement with negation that all of that which excites him is constantly being annihilated by his penetrating gaze.

⁵² Nietzsche, The Gay Science, p. 36, preface, section #3.

In Section #4 of the preface, Nietzsche finds the new happiness referred to at the end of section #3 by renouncing the rape implied by too deep a searching after truth.

No, this is bad taste, this will to truth, to 'truth at any price,' this youthful madness in the love of truth is spoiled for us: for that we are too experienced, too serious, too merry, too burned, too profound. We no longer believe that truth remains truth when her veils have been stripped away; we have lived too much to believe this.⁵³

Nietzsche has been through a sickness that has strengthened his will, but using this strength to rip the veils off all earthly phenomena will only lead to annihilation. What is needed, rather is a will to remain at the surface, to not penetrate truth, but to keep her at arms length and admire her. The philosopher is strengthened by imposing his interpretation on reality from a distance. When one is aroused but abstinent, sexual desire leads to a heightened sense of the significance of our experiences, to an illusion of profundity.

Perhaps truth is a woman who has reasons for not letting us see her reasons? Perhaps her name is- to speak Greek- Baubo? ...O these Greeks! They know how to live. What is required for that is to stop courageously at the surface, the fold, the skin, to adore appearance, to believe in forms, tones, words, in the whole Olympus

⁵³ Ibid. p. 38, preface, section #4.

of appearance. These Greeks were superficial- out of profundity.⁵⁴

With reference to both truth and woman, the philosopher must stop at the surface and construct the other which pleases him the most. Too close a contact with her will open the great thinker to the possibility of a decentering by the other. Nietzsche conceptualizes this fear of contact as a disgust with the natural functions of a woman's body.

When we love a woman, we easily conceive a hatred for nature on account of all the repulsive natural functions to which every woman is subject. We prefer not to think of all this; but when our soul touches on these matters for once, it shrugs as it were and looks contemptuously at nature: we feel insulted; nature seems to encroach on our possessions, and with the profanest hand at that. Then we refuse to pay any heed to physiology and decree secretly: "I want to hear nothing about the fact that a human being is more than soul and form." "The human being under the skin" is for all lovers a horror and unthinkable, a blasphemy against God and love.⁵⁵

The aletheia-truth in the sense of unveiling- of woman gives sight to a grotesque and obscene physical body. What does the unveiling of truth show? Remember that for Nietzsche truth unveiled is no longer truth. If truth is a discourse through which we make sense out of the world, a naked truth would be impossible. What happens when one looks too deeply into the question of truth, though, is

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 122, section #59.

similar to what Nietzsche, the phobic philosopher, gets when he looks at a naked woman: the vertigo of looking into an abyss, the fragmentation of the self that comes from the realization of the lack of solidity and stability of that which lies beneath the veils.

The true otherness of woman, realization of which destroys the autonomy of the thinker, must be guarded against by maintaining one's distance from her, just as the flux of reality must be guarded against by reifying it into an organized, predictable and controllable interpretive framework for understanding experience.

When a man stands in the midst of his own noise, in the midst of his own surf of plans and projects, then he is apt also to see quiet, magical beings gliding past him and to long for their happiness and seclusion: women. He almost thinks that his better self dwells there among the women, and that in these quiet regions even the loudest surf turns into deathly quiet, and life itself into a dream about life. Yet! Yet! Noble enthusiast, even on the most beautiful sailboat there is a lot of noise, and unfortunately such small and petty noise. The magic and the most powerful effect of women is, in philosophical language, action at a distance, actio in distans; but this requires first of all and above all, distance.⁵⁶

The problem of the relationship between women, truth and distance is one of the central themes of Derrida's Spurs. David Ferrel Krell's book, Postponements, is

⁵⁶ Ibid. 124, section #60.

partially a reading of Spurs, and partially an original exploration of the problematic of woman and truth in Nietzsche. Both of these thinkers argue that there is a feminine side to Nietzsche that one sees in his discussion of woman and distance. I agree with Kelly Oliver that there is a strong cooptive tendency in this literature which ought to be challenged.⁵⁷

What Derrida and Krell see as feminine in Nietzsche is his view that truth does not really exist. According to Derrida, "that which will not be pinned down by truth is, in truth- feminine."⁵⁸ Here Derrida accepts the Lacanian schema according to which that which exceeds and cannot be incorporated into a symbolic network of meaning in language is the feminine. For Lacan, there is no such thing as woman. What it means to be woman is to be the other of language, and since the other of language cannot be described, it cannot be captured under any category- which would be required for us to know it as a thing.

In Spurs, Derrida wants to claim that in writing a truth that cannot be written, that is in showing truth to be something that exists only as a myth, as an other to be

⁵⁷ Oliver "Nietzsche's Woman: The Poststructuralist Attempt to do Away with Women," Radical Philosophy #48, Spring 1988, pp. 25-29. See also Robert Scholes "Eperon Strings" Differences, V.1, #2, pp. 93-104.

⁵⁸ Jacques Derrida, Spurs, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 55.

pointed to but not explicated, Nietzsche's writing of truth is a feminine operation.

Nietzsche's writing is compelled to suspend truth between the tender-hooks of quotation marks- and suspended there with truth is- all the rest. Nietzsche's writing is an inscription of the truth. And such an inscription, even if we do not venture so far as to call it the feminine itself, is indeed the feminine 'operation.'

Here Derrida is careful to distinguish writing the feminine, which is impossible, from writing which is a feminine operation. The first is impossible, since the feminine is precisely that which escapes discursive articulation. The latter is possible, for men or for women, as an undermining of the pretensions to truth of the masculine systems of truth. Derrida wants to claim that the feminine operation that Nietzsche effects in his writing on truth, is in a profound sense feminist.⁵⁹

Derrida understands the difficulty of calling Nietzsche a feminist:

Must not these apparently feminist propositions be reconciled with the overwhelming corpus of Nietzsche's venomous anti-feminism?⁶⁰

What Derrida goes on to argue is that Nietzsche's critique of feminism must be understood as a critique of women trying to become like men, and giving up the special

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 57.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

relationship women have to truth through their 'powers of simulation,' their not playing the game of truth.⁶¹

And in truth, they too are men, those women feminists so derided by Nietzsche. Feminism is nothing but the operation of a woman who aspires to be like a man. And in order to resemble the masculine dogmatic philosopher this woman lays claim- just as much claim as he- to truth, science and objectivity in all their castrated delusions of virility. Feminism too seeks to castrate. It wants a castrated woman. Gone the style.⁶²

Still, Derrida claims that there is a positive valorization of woman in Nietzsche, and presumably this is the apparent feminism he refers to.

Since she is a model for truth she is able to display the gifts of her seductive power, which rules over dogmatism, and disorients and routs those credulous men, the philosophers. And because she does not believe in the truth (still, she does find that uninteresting truth in her interest) woman remains a model, only this time a good model. But because she is a good model, she is in fact a bad model. She plays at dissimulation, at ornamentation, deceit, artifice, at an artists philosophy. Hers is an affirmative power. And if she continues to be condemned, it is only from the man's point of view where she repudiates that affirmative power and, in her specular reflection of that foolish dogmatism that she has provoked, belies her belief in truth.⁶³

Only from the perspective of the valorization of truth is the dissimulation of woman to be seen as negative. For

⁶¹ Ibid. p. 61.

⁶² Ibid. p. 65.

⁶³ Ibid. p. 67-69.

Derrida, Nietzsche's feminism lies in his insight into the superiority of being the other of reason.

Krell's reading of this view of Nietzsche as a feminist takes the point even further:

Writing now with the other hand, as it were, both Nietzsche and Derrida record the plaint of women against "The foolishness of the dogmatic philosopher, the impotent artist, or the inexperienced seducer."⁶⁴

Nietzsche is a feminist because he feels for women's suffering at not having an adept seducer. Woman is the other of discourse and her one legitimate demand is that the man who engages her in a seductive relationship—though not one that ends in consummation—be potent and experienced.

Derrida believes that women, and philosophers engaged in a feminine operation, can see the untruth of discourses of truth. But this whole schema implies that we do not need to question the content of discourses of truth. The sophisticated can choose not to believe in them, women can mock them. The effects of women's being conceptualized as the other of reason, or of men's living under a specific regime of truth are left unexplored in the play in the untruth of truth. And yet, for there to be a realm of untruth, there must be one of truth, even if it is mythological. In order to operate in the symbolic realm,

⁶⁴ David Farrell Krell, Postponements (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 10-11.

man needs to keep a distance from the other, the negation of which is constitutive for the same. On this reading of Nietzsche, truth and woman must be kept at a distance in order for the symbolic realm to have the illusion of solidity required for language. Thus, although he claims to be valorizing Woman's position, this has little effect on the lives of real women: the symbolic structure remains unchallenged.

Nietzsche himself at least had the honesty to not claim that he valorized actio in distans for the sake of women. Nietzsche was not interested in asking what operations of truth are the most beneficial for women. His problem was how to create a relationship to truth which increases his own power and the power of the male free spirits he hoped would revive European culture. Because of his fear of the sexual relation, his answer to this problem was to engage in a seductive/ascetic game which strengthens the will by generating both desire and a will to resist.

Nietzsche's demand for heroism through abstinence needs to be questioned in light of its negative implications for women and also in light of Nietzsche's own critique of asceticism. As I will argue in the following section, Nietzsche has a critique of asceticism that can be applied to his own view of the will as requiring negation in order to achieve heroism. One explanation for this contradiction

is that this view of the will was developed as a philosophical defense of male power.

In section #285 of The Gay Science, Nietzsche asks how modern people will be able to renounce our faith in god when it means giving up on belief in a perpetual guardian and friend, when it means "there is no longer any reason in what happens...."⁶⁵ The renunciation of god will require an enormous loss which we must find a way to give ourselves the power to accept. Nietzsche offers a solution to this problem with a metaphor:

There is lake that one day ceased to permit itself to flow off; it formed a dam where it had hitherto flown off; and ever since this lake is rising higher and higher. Perhaps this very renunciation will also lend us the strength needed to bear this renunciation; perhaps man will rise higher as soon as he ceases to flow out into a god.⁶⁶

Giving up on the old forms of knowledge which have given our culture security and meaning requires above all else, the power to say no, and to say no to something very appealing.

In The Genealogy of Morals, Nietzsche rails against the anti-life tendencies of the ascetic priest. One might be tempted to read his diatribe against Christianity as a call for a return to sensuality, for using our sensuous experience as the basis for our discourses of knowledge.

⁶⁵ Nietzsche, The Gay Science, p. 230, section #285.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

But what Nietzsche calls for in his discussion of asceticism and philosophy is a new sublimation of sensualism.

He begins his discussion of asceticism and philosophy with a section on the aesthetic theories of Kant and Schopenhauer. He argues that their equation of beauty with disinterestedness comes from a fear of their own sexual desire.

Of few things does Schopenhauer speak with greater assurance than he does of the effect of aesthetic contemplation: he says of it that it counteracts sexual 'interestedness,' like lupulin and camphor; he never wearied of glorifying this liberation from the 'will' as the great merit and utility of the aesthetic condition.⁶⁷

Nietzsche contrasts this view of aesthetic beauty as protection from sexuality with Stendahl's view that "the beautiful promises happiness."⁶⁸ He claims that for Stendahl "the beautiful arouses the will ('interestedness')." Turning this into a critique of Schopenhauer, he claims that the theory of disinterestedness masks the philosopher's real interest: "that of a tortured man who gains release from his torture." Nietzsche reminds us that Schopenhauer wrote The World as Will and Representation when he was a young man,

⁶⁷ Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals, pp. 104-105, essay #3, section #6.

⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 105.

presumably tortured by unfulfilled sexual desire.⁶⁹ The philosopher should not however, run in fear of contact with the other, but should play with his desire, gain mastery over it and use it to generate a more powerful, controlling self.

Nietzsche argues that the asceticism of the philosopher is currently anti-life and must be transformed into a more sublimated form of asceticism. The current philosophical asceticism does serve a certain life interest, however. Just as Nietzsche claims that the asceticism of the priest serves the interest of decaying humanity, the asceticism of the philosopher serves his interest in a liberation from desire.

They think of what they can least do without: freedom from compulsion, disturbance, noise, from tasks, duties, worries; clear heads; the dance, leap, and flight of ideas; good air, thin, clear, open, dry, like the air of the heights through which all animal being becomes more spiritual and acquires wings; repose in all cellar regions; all dogs nicely chained up; no barking of hostility and shaggy-haired rancor; no gnawing worm of injured ambition; undemanding and obedient intestines, busy as windmills but distant; the heart remote, beyond, heavy with future posthumous- all in all, they think of the ascetic ideal as the cheerful asceticism of an animal become fledged and divine, floating above life rather than in repose.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 108, essay #3, section #7.

The traditional philosopher is someone who has an interest in autonomy from other people and from the various needs of the body. Nietzsche claims that the life denying attitude of the philosopher is a version of the asceticism of the priest. Even in the case of anti-religious philosophers, the impulse to "intellectual cleanliness" comes from the tradition of the ascetic priest.⁷¹

To put it vividly: the ascetic priest provided until the most modern times the repulsive and gloomy caterpillar form in which alone the philosopher could live and creep about.⁷²

We should not, however, think that Nietzsche's disgust for this life denying type leads to a complete rejection of him. Nietzsche claims that philosophy could not have developed without the asceticism of the priest. He does not argue for an end to philosophy. He wants for there to be a new revived philosophy which takes the strength gained through asceticism and turns it to more life affirming ends.

Nietzsche praises Stendahl as one who wants to relish in an increased desire. But Nietzsche sees the value in this not in terms of sexual expression, but rather, in terms of sublimation.

Every artist knows what harmful effect sexual intercourse has in states of great spiritual tension and preparation; those

⁷¹ Ibid. p. 148, essay #3, section #24.

⁷² Ibid. p. 116, essay #3, section #10.

with the greatest power and the surest instincts do not need to learn this by experience, by unfortunate experience—their 'maternal' instinct ruthlessly disposes of all other stores and accumulations of energy, of animal vigor, for the benefit of the evolving work: the greater energy uses up the lesser.⁷³

The ascetic philosopher is tied to a nihilistic practice to the extent that he attempts to suppress the will which arises out of the desires and interests of the body. What Nietzsche wants him to try to do is to cultivate and channel this desire to a heroism that is constructive for culture.

But why is heroism necessary for culture? In the preface to Beyond Good and Evil, Nietzsche writes "It seems that all great things first have to bestride the earth in monstrous and frightening masks in order to inscribe themselves in the hearts of humanity with eternal demands."⁷⁴ The greatest things of humanity have grown out of monstrous errors such as Platonism and Vedantism. But by virtue of what are these things great? Nietzsche himself, in many places criticizes the weak sort of spirit who would need to believe in a greatness which is other, such as god or truth in order to position himself in reality.

In aphorism #283 from The Gay Science, Nietzsche is jubilant at the prospect of a masculine and

⁷³ Ibid. p. 111, essay #3, section #8.

⁷⁴ Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, pp. 2-3, preface.

warlike age in which knowledge will become heroic. Men will "wage war for the sake of ideas and their consequences....Be robbers and conquerors as long as you cannot be rulers and possessors, you seekers of knowledge."⁷⁵ So long as the philosopher cannot possess knowledge, or woman for that matter, he should at least not allow himself to be emasculated by giving up the quest "Soon the age will be past when you could be content to live hidden in the forest like shy deer." If he maintains a warlike stance, if he poses as a fighter, as one who knows what he is looking for, woman will find him attractive and give him the illusion of conquest. "Finally, knowledge will reach out her hand to him who deserves her...."⁷⁶ Similarly, in the preface to Beyond Good and Evil, Nietzsche writes of the failures of the traditional philosopher at the game of seduction.

Assuming truth is a woman- what then? Are there not grounds for the suspicion that all philosophers, insofar as they were dogmatists, have been very inexpert about women? That the gruesome seriousness, the clumsy obtrusiveness with which they have usually approached truth so far have been very awkward and indecent attempts to win themselves a wench.⁷⁷

Nietzsche's rhetoric of the need for a masculine and warlike knowledge that will lead us to greatness in

⁷⁵ Nietzsche, The Gay Science, p. 228, section #283.

⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 229, section #283.

⁷⁷ Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, p. 2, preface.

culture and attract truth toward him grows out of his own need for an other to dominate. By creating a discourse of knowledge that keeps women as the other, and as the object of desire, Nietzsche guarantees for himself a solid other, a reflection from which a stability is given to the self that prevents the madness of falling into the abyss. If Nietzsche gets so close to woman that she begins to speak and show herself to also be a fluid subject, the tain is removed from the mirror and the self is in danger of dispersing into the dionysian flux.

Nietzsche views the self as a fiction which grows out of a reification of the actions of one body, as coherent and generated by one source- consciousness. This myth of the originary self allows the individual to see him/her self as the author of her/his actions. On his view of the will as self generating, we could see the self as generated out of the situated practices of the concrete individual. The fluidity of the self that follows from this could in theory be lived unproblematically. The 'I' that is the author could be recognized as a myth and yet still be lived through.

Why then, must the self be seen as heroic? What I am arguing here is that there is another view of the self which requires more stability than this- this is the view of the self associated with the heroic notion of the will. As I will argue in the following chapter, Irigaray shows

that this is the notion of the self which makes male domination possible.

In her book Amante marine: de Friedrich Nietzsche, Irigaray writes that the distance that Nietzsche associates with women does not originate with them.

Distance does not come from her, even if, for him, her seduction operates at a distance. Even if he lends her, at present, this element of her power. Not wishing to see the effect of his operation: the abyss between. Which averts and fascinates him with the attraction of a knife blow given to the other. In the belly/womb of the other. Whom he no longer simply approaches without risking death itself: by the dreadful return of his own action. The seizing for himself, the definitive incision between the lips which renders her silent and alluring as a tomb.⁷⁸

Through seeing themselves as free from human interdependencies, men are able to ignore the debt their selves owe to women and to sensual existence. This enables them to set up a system of symbolic exchange in which women are objects of exchange. Using the Marxian theory of the unequal exchange of commodities as a metaphor, Irigaray writes:

-just as commodities, despite their resistance, become more or less autonomous repositories for the value of human work, so, as mirrors of and for man, women more or less unwittingly come to represent the

⁷⁸ Luce Irigaray, Amante Marine de Friedrich Nietzsche (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1980), p. 113. This passage is included in a section translated by Sara Speidel as "Veiled Lips," Mississippi Review, 11:3, 1983, p. 106.

danger of a disappropriation of masculine power: the phallic mirage....This transformation of women's bodies into use values and exchange values inaugurates the symbolic order, but that order depends upon a nearly pure added value. Women, animals endowed with speech like men, assure the possibility of the use and circulation of the symbolic without being recipients of it. Their nonaccess to the symbolic is what has established the social order. Putting men in touch with each other, in relations among themselves, women only fulfil this role by relinquishing their right to speech and even to animality.⁷⁹

The problem with perceiving the lack of solidity of the self

that a man encounters upon contact with the concrete other is that the symbolic order of meaning is disrupted. This order must maintain its solidity if male domination is to be replicated through the system of unequal exchange.

Although Nietzsche is highly critical of the reifications implicit in the symbolic order, as a man he receives certain benefits from this system of unequal exchange. At the end of a long section on women, in The Gay Science Nietzsche writes,

If the majority of men had not always considered the discipline of their minds- their 'rationality'- a matter of pride, an obligation, and a virtue, feeling insulted or embarrassed by all fantasies and debaucheries of thought because they say themselves as friends of 'healthy

⁷⁹ Luce Irigaray, This Sex Which is Not One, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 190.

common sense,' humanity would have perished long ago.⁸⁰

It is necessary for the maintenance of social order that the majority of individuals believe in rationality and truth. The free spirit is able to play freely within the structure of domination and privilege set up by these beliefs.

Thus the virtuous intellects are needed—oh let me use the most unambiguous word—what is needed is virtuous stupidity, solid metronomes for the slow spirit, to make sure that the faithful of the great shared faith stay together and continue their dance. It is a first-rate need that commands and demands this. We others are the exception and the danger—and we need eternally defense. —Well there actually are things to be said in favor of the exception, provided it never wants to become the rule.⁸¹

While Nietzsche does not explicitly argue here that this stability is required for the maintenance of the current gender system, this passage is placed at the end of a long polemic on the need for women to stay in their place.⁸² Thus, Nietzsche can be seen as arguing for the need for woman to remain the other of the symbolic in order for there to be enough stability for the present power relations to be maintained.

⁸⁰ Nietzsche, The Gay Science, p. 130, section #76.

⁸¹ Ibid. p. 131, section #76.

⁸² The passage is from section #76 of The Gay Science. The woman question is the main theme from sections #59-#75.

The strength of will required for abstinence is therefore not developed simply in the interest of sublimation. For Nietzsche the will is self generating as long as a healthy relationship to life is maintained. There is no reason to suppose that the will requires stimulation, life itself is stimulating enough for a healthy willing. Cultivation of the will is only required to fight against nihilism. And nihilism only develops when the will is suppressed. Nietzsche's call for distance from the other through sexual abstinence as a means of elevating the will, is therefore a charade to cover his fear of annihilation or loss into the other.

Section 5

Now we have an epistemological challenge before us: how will it be possible to have a form of knowledge that is perspectival, meaning that it grows out of the situated perspectives of human agents, yet common, meaning that there is a shared interpretive framework for all those in a discussion which still does not crush the will? In the following passage from The Gay Science Nietzsche points to how he sees this unity as coming about:

Appearance for me is life and effectivity itself. It goes so far in its self-mockery that it makes me feel that it is nothing more than appearance, and will-o'-the-wisp and a dance of spirits- that among all of these dreamers, also I the 'one who knows'[that I am dreaming], dance my dance, the 'one who knows' is a means for

prolonging the earthly dance and thus belongs to the masters of ceremony of existence, and the sublime consistency and interrelatedness of all knowledge perhaps is and will be the highest means to preserve the universality of dreaming and the mutual comprehension of all dreamers, and thus the continuation of the dream.⁸³

Nietzsche knows that truth is an error, that understanding is based on a dream or illusion through which a group is able to have consciousness of a common reality. This common understanding, while based on illusion, is necessary for language and human interaction. The myth of truth is necessary to life.

But why does this dream require masters of the ceremonies? Why is it not possible for the common illusion to simply grow out of communicative interaction? Nietzsche does not even begin to answer the question of how we can do without masters of the ceremonies, since this is in no way his question. Nietzsche didn't ask this question because for him it was quite enough that he himself, and a small community of male comrades were able to find a discourse of knowledge in which their wills were able to find expression. His need to suppress his will when it came to sexual connection with the other led him to make bizarre claims about the need for heroism and domination which are not required for at least one possible reading of his doctrine of the will. Nietzsche himself was not

⁸³ Ibid. p. 116, section #54.

aware of the nihilistic implications of positing woman as an absolute other and the impossibility of an affirmative culture on the basis of this denial of the will.

If we reject Nietzsche's demand for a heroic, universalistic form of knowledge, we are left with an interesting approach to the question of truth. Linguistic practices always generate interpretive frameworks which themselves always imply discourses of truth and reason. But they do not need to imply doctrines of truth that posit a hostile relationship to the body or to perspectivism. Since discourses of truth always abstract from experience and reify it according to the interests of those with the power to control the discourse, we can see the sources of the hegemonic nature of reason. If we accept the reading of Nietzsche's doctrine of the will, according to which willing is a self generating engagement with life, then we can use instances of repression as evidence of nihilistic, unhealthy and hegemonic discourses of truth.⁸⁴ In working to bring the voices of women, and all those whose interests have been excluded from articulation in the current dominant discourse of reason,

⁸⁴ This is not to say that all negation of the will necessarily implies a hegemonic operation. Given the flexibility of the will and of desire, the interests of the will are constantly being formed and cultivated through social practices. Still, we can look to instances of sustained resistance as cites of operations of domination. These issues will be dealt with in more depth in Chapter 5.

we can begin to move beyond the nihilism generated by philosophical reason.

CHAPTER 3

Woman as Other than the Other of Reason: Irigaray and the Rationality of Suppressed Voices

Every operation on and in philosophical language, by virtue of the very nature of that discourse- which is essentially political- possesses implications that, no matter how mediate they may be, are nonetheless politically determined.¹

In her work, Luce Irigaray follows Nietzsche in claiming that what we call reason is the expression of the will, or desire, of those subjects who have been able to impose their will as truth. In The Gay Science, Nietzsche writes that the seeming autonomy of truth derives from a denial of truth's relation to a desire for control,

[Exceptional thinkers] had to deny the role of the impulses in knowledge; and quite generally they had to conceive of reason as a completely free and spontaneous activity. They shut their eyes to the fact that they, too, had arrived at their propositions through opposition to the commonly accepted, or owing to a desire for tranquility, for sole possession, or for dominion.²

¹ Luce Irigaray, This Sex Which is not One, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1985) p. 81.

² Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books) p. 170 Section 110, (translation modified).

In The Gay Science, Nietzsche claims that the desire for truth grows out of a desire for control. He also claims that the content of a concept of truth grows out of the needs of those positing the truth.

How did logic come into existence in man's head? Certainly out of illogic, whose realm originally must have been immense. Innumerable beings who made inferences in a way different from ours perished; for all that their ways might have been truer. Those, for example, who did not know how to find often enough what is 'equal' as regards both nourishment and hostile animals-those in other words, who subsumed things too slowly and cautiously-were favored with a lesser probability of survival than those who guessed immediately upon encountering similar instances that they must be equal. The dominant tendency, however, is to treat as equal what is merely similar-an illogical tendency, for nothing is really equal-is what first created any basis for logic.³

Irigaray takes this notion that the need for control is fundamental to discourses of truth and goes a step further. She argues that the dominant discourses of truth grow out of specifically male psychic needs. Because the oedipal complex requires that the boy renounce his attraction for the mother, he sets up a system of knowledge which offers him an illusion of autonomy. Irigaray argues that Freud was caught up in this logic in his theory of subjectivity.

³ Ibid. p. 171 section 110.

For, when Freud reaffirms the incest taboo, he simply reannounces and puts back in place the conditions that constitute the speculative matrix of the 'subject.' He reinforces his positions in a fashion yet more 'scientific,' more imperious in their 'objectivity.' A demonstration he clearly needed himself if he is to 'sublimate' in more universal interests his own desire for his/the mother. But as a result of using psychoanalysis (his psychoanalysis) only to scrutinize the history of his subject and his subjects, without interpreting the historical determinants of the constitution of the 'subject' as same, he was restoring, yet again, the newly pressed down/repressed earth, upon which he stands erect, which for him, following tradition though in more explicit fashion, will be the body/sex of the mother/nature. He must challenge her for power, for productivity. He must resurface the earth with this floor of the ideal.⁴

Thus, for Irigaray, the whole discourse of truth is founded on the psychic needs of the male child for autonomy. This implies that there is an internal relationship between what is constituted as truth and the desires of those subjects whose psychic needs have been able to gain dominance.

Irigaray agrees with Lacan that desire is constructed through human interaction. For both, interests come to be experienced in consciousness as unfulfilled desire. This desire in turn is key for structuring the symbolic system of meaning that is language. According to Irigaray, the

⁴ Luce Irigaray, Speculum of the Other Woman, trans. Gillian Gill (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1985) pp. 139-140.

desire that women experience is excluded from language through women's lack of access to control over the symbolic. One of the goals of her work is to investigate what keeps this desire from being able to find expression in the dominant discourses of Western society.

For Lacan, language is the primary locus of human alienation. Language acts as a mediating principle between consciousness and experience. Whenever we use language we are alienated from direct access to our sensuous existence. Both men and women are alienated according to Lacan, but in different ways. Because he sees language as necessarily instituting a masculine system of meaning, men are able to adopt a subject position in language that gives them access to control in social institutions, but this alienates them from direct access to their sensuous existence. Women on the other hand, are not even able to legitimately take up a subject position in language. While women are able to maintain a more direct relationship to their sensual existence, their needs and desires are not able to find expression in language. As a result of this women are excluded from the sphere of social control.

Most Lacanian feminists see the alienation experienced in language by men and the exclusion from language experienced by women as the most important cause of the social differences between men and women. Since language damns us to a necessary form of alienation, human

liberation is made impossible. Thus, in this discourse there is very little talk of domination or of oppression.

In contrast with this, Irigaray looks at how language functions ideologically to keep the interests of women from being coded in the symbolic system, but she never argues that these interests cannot be linguistically coded. She follows Lacan in seeing language as an important locus of domination, but not as the only one. To the extent that women's interests cannot find expression in language, it is difficult for women to make demands in the social arena. Thus, gaining access to the symbolic system is a necessary but not sufficient condition for overcoming male domination.

The apparent paradox of writing about the impossibility of writing is central to Irigaray's work. In her work she attempts to represent the feminine desire which she claims is unrepresentable in our language. Irigaray herself is often unclear in her discussions of whether or not language must perpetuate a patriarchal hegemony. Thus in This Sex Which Is Not One Irigaray claims that any concept of the feminine is necessarily patriarchal. "To claim that femininity can be expressed in the form of a concept is to allow oneself to be caught up again in a system of 'masculine' representations..."⁵ It is easy to read such

⁵ Irigaray, This Sex Which Is Not One, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1985) p. 123.

statements as implying that conceptualization in general is patriarchal. Since concepts are necessary to language, this would lead us back to the position that feminist language would be impossible. Yet she often writes of the need to change our modes of conceptualizing, implying that the problem is with the conceptual systems operating within the current system of representation, and not with the possibility of a non-patriarchal mode of conceptualizing.

What is complicated is that there can be no 'woman's discourse' produced by a woman, and that furthermore, strictly speaking, political practice, at least currently, is masculine through and through. In order for women to be able to make themselves heard, a 'radical' evolution in our way of conceptualizing and managing the political realm is required.⁶

There are tendencies among both her critics and her supporters to underplay the aspect of her work which calls for a radical evolution in our way of conceptualizing, and to see her as giving up the linguistic realm entirely. She is often read as following Lacan in arguing that woman is the other of language, that female desires and interests are constitutionally incapable of finding expression in any language and thus, as advocating a renunciation of language and critique. Beginning with this view, readers have tended to either reject her work as a feminist

⁶ Ibid. p. 127.

irrationalism⁷ or accept it as a valorization of women's experience over the straightjackets of language.⁸

Each of these approaches misses the way in which Irigaray criticizes traditional notions of critique and reason, while opening the door to new forms. While much of Irigaray's work does seem to accept the view that there is a necessary conflict between women's experience and language, other aspects of what she has to say about the relationship between women and language however, escape the dualism which this view implies. Both her critics and her supporters allow the dualism of reason and passion to remain intact. One valorizes reason, and thus rejects Irigaray for being unable to offer a basis for a critical perspective. The other valorizes non-linguistic passion, and sees her as an advocate for the value of the unsayable. Absolutely central to Irigaray's work, however, is the way in which she explodes this dualism.

⁷ See: Margaret Homans "'Her Very Own Howl' The Ambiguities of Representation in Recent Women's Fiction" in Signs #2, vol. 9 (1983), pp 186-205; Monique Plaza "'Phallomorphic Power' and the Psychology of 'woman'" in Ideology and Consciousness vol. 4, (1978), pp 5-35; Rachel Bowlby "The Feminine Female" in Social Text #7 (1983) pp 54-68.

⁸ See: Robert de Beaugrande "In Search of Feminist Discourse: The 'Difficult' Case of Luce Irigaray in College English #3, vol. 50 (March 1988), pp 253-272; Diana J. Fuss "'Essentially Speaking': Luce Irigaray's Language of Essence" in Hypatia #3, vol. 3 (Winter 1989), pp 62-80; Jane Gallop "Quand nos Levres S'ecrivent: Irigaray's Body Politic" in Romanic Review #1, vol. 74 (1983) pp 77-83.

Irigaray begins with Lacan's theory of subjectivity and language, but where Lacan claims that the symbolic is necessarily a masculine function, Irigaray shows how the symbolic is only masculine under certain circumstances. She then theorizes the coming into language of female desire. An important aspect of her work is how she analyzes the mechanisms whereby the desires of women come to be encoded as irrational, suppressed from thematization in conceptual systems or simply censored from language.

In the following I hope to show, 1- Irigaray's critique of the patriarchal bias built in to western notions of reason, how the enlightenment view of reason as a neutral measure of the validity of thinking cannot be lived up to as long as discourses of reason act to exclude the desires of women; 2- how it is that Irigaray can use a Lacanian framework for her theory, and yet still argue for the possibility of women articulating their desires in language; 3- how given the way that female imaginaries can come into language, what the mechanisms for its exclusion are in our current symbolizing systems.

Section 1

In her work, Irigaray criticizes the content which reason has come to be seen as having without giving up on the notion of critique. In doing this she reformulates the notion of critique- and reason itself in a way which opens

up the critical enterprise in precisely some of the ways needed if women are to be able to participate in this enterprise in a fruitful way. She shows how traditional notions of reason are systematically based on denials of the connection to matter and to desire. She rejects the notion of reason as the faculty that divides the mind from the body, or that allows for the assertion of universal truths.⁹

Irigaray launches a critique of 'reason' in which she shows how the currently dominant systems for the representation of truth require the exclusion of the desires of women for their functioning. An example of her critique of the distortions inherent in traditional notions of reason can be found in her reading of Plato in the final section of Speculum. Here Irigaray asks what would motivate someone to leave the cave of 'ignorance,' and how could we know whether or not what is found on the outside is preferable to the sensuous depths of the cave.

Once he has left his underground home, the man will not see the outside- outside and up on top- what used to happen in- outside and underneath- the cave. He will see both more and less. In a way other than he had from "inside" that confined space. And it is not fair to say that the scene has simply been raised up out of the "nether"/regions, which are also the regions of the soul. Out of the senses

⁹ If he deigned to deal with feminist theorists, we could imagine Jurgen Habermas painting Irigaray with the same broad brush he uses to wipe out Nietzsche, Foucault, Adorno, Horkheimer Derrida, etc.

into the intellect, out of the passions into the harmonious love of truth, out of doxa into episteme. The precautions taken to prevent the neophyte from returning to his former place, and to ensure that he only goes back down once he has been confirmed in his belief in the new knowledge to convert others in turn, is enough evidence that something is lost in this accounting.¹⁰

She goes on, "He has been seduced, without realizing it, by the authority of a philosophy teacher who sometimes abuses his power a little."¹¹ The move from the cave into the light cannot be motivated by light. Perhaps the cave dweller is seduced by the seeming authority of the philosopher. That the light outside the cave is superior to the coziness of the inside is only obvious from the perspective of those who have already accepted the authority of reason as one truth.

If people saw it [the source of being and truth as mother/the back of the cave/the back of the mirror of truth], they might demand some accountability or, even, take back some part of the father's goods, of his Good. Dismember value, capital. Divide it up between two genders, at least, two kinds of resources and specularizations. The logos would no longer simply be, for itself, the means of translating his will alone; of establishing, defining and collecting his properties into one Whole. Truth would lose its univocal and universal character....There would be no way of knowing which way to look anymore...¹²

¹⁰ Irigaray, p. 286.

¹¹ Ibid. p. 313.

¹² Ibid. p. 308.

For Irigaray men's rejection of the cave and their faith in the superiority of the world of ideas is motivated by the need to establish their autonomy. The problem according to Irigaray is that in order for men to be able to gain a sense of themselves as independent subjects, a need which Irigaray takes as fundamental to patriarchal structures, but not necessarily as the cause of their existence, they must deny their originary relation to the mother and to materiality.

The head of the family has to re-insure his potency. Every single day, therefore, he is enjoined to reappropriate the right to exploit blood and then, as a result, to go on to more sublime pursuits. The master is a vampire who needs to stay in disguise and do his work at night. Otherwise he is reminded that he is dependent on death. And on birth. On the material, uterine foundations of his mastery. Only if these be repressed can he enjoy sole ownership.¹³

Men must set women up as the absolute Other, as an object over and against which their subjectivity gains meaning. "Subjectivity denied to woman: indisputably this provides the financial backing [Mortgage] for every irreducible constitution as an object: of representation, of discourse, of desire."¹⁴ For this structure to remain

¹³ Ibid. p. 126, see also Ibid. p. 308.

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 133.

intact, it is critical that the desire of women not be allowed into the system of representation.

But what if the 'object' started to speak? Which also means beginning to 'see' etc. What disaggregation of the subject would that entail? Not only on the level of the split between him and his other, his variously specified alter ego, or between him and the Other, who is always to some extent his other even if he does not recognize himself in it, even if he is so overwhelmed by it as to bar himself out of it and into it so as to retain at the very least the power to promote his own forms.¹⁵

In her reading of Freud's theory of sexuality, Irigaray shows how this need to exclude the desires of women functions in his work. For Freud, female sexuality is an obscure and murky topic, a dark continent which theory cannot penetrate. By characterizing female sexuality as a 'dark continent', Freud recognizes that it is untheorizable from within his conceptual system. It is not staged according to the rules of his discourse. "What she 'suffers', what she 'lusts for,' even what she 'takes pleasure in,' all take place upon another stage, in relation to already codified representations."¹⁶

In the essay "Femininity" in New Lectures on Psychoanalysis, Freud sees the little girl as the same as the little boy with one important difference: she is lacking a penis. Irigaray raises the question which

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 135.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 140.

feminists have often focused on in their critiques of Freud, namely, why should we see the girl as lacking the penis, rather than as having a different genital arrangement? The way she poses this critique takes this point a few steps further than is normally done. In her discussion of Freud in the first chapter of Speculum, she writes,

This nothing [i.e., female genitalia], which actually cannot be well mastered in the twinkling of an eye, might equally well have acted as an inducement to perform castration upon an age-old oculo-centrism. It might have been interpreted as the intervention of a difference, of a deferent, as a challenge to an imaginary whose functions are often improperly regulated in terms of sight. Or yet as the 'symptom' of the 'signifier,' of the possibility of another libidinal economy.¹⁷

Irigaray argues that it is important for the whole structure of Western thinking that the female not be theorized as having a different structure, but rather, as either an inferior male or something radically other which cannot be spoken about. "Penis envy" is imputed to women in order to compensate for man's feeling of lack. Her envy props up the system of value which maintains the entire symbolic order. "Woman's fetishization of the male organ must indeed be an indispensable support of its price on

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 48.

the sexual market"¹⁸ Woman acts as the support for the masculine symbolic system by taking the phallus as the signifier of desire and value. She also does this through maintaining the subject-object polarity, by being the object of his desire, by being his other.

Now if this ego is to be valuable, some 'mirror' is needed to reassure it and re-insure it of its value. Woman will be the foundation for this specular duplication, giving man back 'his' image and repeating it as the 'same'.¹⁹

In the system of representation which valorizes the one, the true and the good, there is no place for women as different from men precisely because women support this system by being the other which simply mirrors the male. She is the non-reason by virtue of which there is reason.²⁰

Since the current systems of representation do not allow female desire to be linguistically coded, Irigaray argues that in speaking woman both participates in patriarchal structures and disrupts them. She participates in that much of her speaking is a mimicking of the masculine symbolic. She disrupts them to the extent that her speaking disrupts the dominant categories and brings

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 53.

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 54.

²⁰ See Genevieve Lloyd The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

what she wants to say, what had previously seemed incoherent, into language.

Given that, once again, the 'reasonable' words- to which in any case she has access only through mimicry- are powerless to translate all that pulses, clamors, and hangs hazily in the cryptic passages of suffering-latency. ThenTurn everything upside down, inside out, back to front. Rack it with radical convulsions, carry back, reimport, those crises that her 'body' suffers in her impotence to say what disturbs her. Insist also and deliberately upon those blanks in discourse which recall the places of her exclusion and which, by their silent plasticity, ensure the cohesion, the articulation, the coherent expansion of established forms.²¹

Section 2

The aspect of Irigaray's work which thematizes the bringing into language of female desire is often underestimated. One reason for this is that it is inconsistent with Lacan's theory of the relationship between gender and language, and most interpreters read Irigaray's work as being simply an extension of Lacan's. Both her critics and her supporters tend to miss the critical significance of her work by seeing her argument as closer to Lacan's than it actually is. For Lacan the symbolic is necessarily a masculine function. This means that whenever a woman speaks, Lacan sees her as mimicking masculine behavior. Irigaray shows how the symbolic is

²¹ Irigaray, p. 142.

only masculine under certain circumstances. She then theorizes the coming into language of female desire.

In order to come to terms with how it is that Irigaray distances herself from Lacan, it is important first to foray into the murky realm of Lacan's theory of subjectivity and investigate why he believes that women are necessarily unable to take up the subject position. According to Lacan, subjectivity is generated through a structure of relations entered into when the child enters into language. When the child is in the primary narcissistic relationship with the mother, there is a constant flow of libidinal energy through the relationship which continues until the circuit of need is broken by the child's inability to achieve the satisfaction of a need. The frustrations felt by the child in its inability to get its needs met motivate the child's entry into the mirror stage. Here, the child first develops an ego, that is, an image of itself as an autonomous whole, in order to compensate for the terror of the loss of the mother which is experienced when the circuit of libido is broken. There is some debate in the literature over whether or not the mirror of the mirror stage should be taken literally. Whether or not the child must actually look into a mirror to experience the transition, the point remains the same that after this stage, the child has a conception of

itself as whole, like the whole individuated body seen when looking into the mirror.

This separate entity acts as the locus of the ego, the sense of the 'I' which was not experienced before, when the child could not distinguish self and other. With this step, the 'imaginary' order is set up in which perception of things as things, i.e. as individuated entities, is made possible. Concrete immediacy of experience is alienated and replaced by a conceptual order in which notions of repeatability, predictability and persistence over time offer a sense of security.

The next major developmental phase is encountered with the castration complex. Here, the child is further cut off from the mother through the intervention of the paternal law. The child sees that the mother's attentions are taken away by the father and symbolizes the interest that the mother has in the father as her desire for the phallus. With this, the phallus becomes the universal symbol for the object of desire. The reality of the lack of self sufficiency of the individual is symbolized as castration. Following on this, Lacan claims that every one, both male and female, is castrated. The phallus is what promises to fill the empty space which the lack that we all experience opens up. But in accepting the phallus as the object of desire, the child must accept the whole symbolic system in which the phallus has meaning.

There is a great deal of ambiguity about the effects of sexual differences in Lacan's theories of desire and the castration complex. While he claims that we are all castrated, since none of us is a self sufficient individual, what initiates the dialectic of desire is the child's attempt to posit itself as the desired Other of the mother, a possibility, according to Lacan, only open to the boy. Once the boy accepts the law of the father, or entry into the symbolic, he enters into subjectivity. His libidinal resources are cut off from their physiological sources and are co-opted by the symbolic network.²² Need is replaced by an economy of desire. According to Anika Lemaire,

Without access to this order, the child will not in fact acquire his or her individuality or the status of a member of society, but, on the other hand, entry into the symbolic establishes a distance with regard to the lived real and organizes the web of the unconscious in everyone.²³

According to Lacan, the male child is offered the possibility of taking up the subject position in language at the price of his sensuous relationship to the real. The real, the most elusive of Lacan's categories, is the other of the symbolic, it is that which must lie outside of the

²² Kaya Silverman The Subject of Semeiotics (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) p. 178.

²³ Anika Lemaire Jaques Lacan, trans. David Macey (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977) p. 55.

symbolic, but is absolutely ungraspable from within it. As Kaya Silverman puts it, "...during his entry into the symbolic order he gains access to those privileges which constitute the phallus, but forfeits direct access to his own sexuality."²⁴ By, so to speak, mortgaging his penis for the symbolic phallus, the male child is given the right to take up a subject position. The female child, on the other hand, has nothing to offer up to the symbolic. Since she has no hope of having the phallus, which the mother desires, she can never be the desired other of the mother. Hence, she cannot be a subject. Her use of the symbolic will always be based on an inauthentic appropriation of a necessarily masculine standpoint.

Since most interpreters of Irigaray see her work as appropriating this Lacanian theory of subjectivity, and the way gender functions in it, they see Irigaray's own work as an attempt to theorize the position of exteriority to language which is taken to be women's lot. Since all symbols refer back to the One which institutes desire, the phallus, any use of language is a perpetuation of the law of the father, or the privileges of men. In Speculum and This Sex Which is Not One, Irigaray argues that the system set up by this patriarchal law values one truth, and must reduce all plurality to the law of the same. Woman is then constituted as that which is different, and therefore as

²⁴ Silverman p. 185.

that which is Other, in the radical sense of being un-symbolizable except as that which is lacking, which is the other of language.

Lacan makes much of the alterity of feminine libido in his theory of feminine sexuality. In his "God and the jouissance of the Woman", he argues that since woman's libido is not mortgaged for entry into the system of desire played out in the symbolic, she remains closer to the real, and in a peculiar way, closer to 'god.'²⁵ He argues that woman does not exist as a universal, that there is no describable essence which women can be said to be instances of (hence the line through the 'the 'in the title). This is because "[t]here is woman only as excluded by the nature of things which is the nature of words..."²⁶ Her essence is to be non-essence and to be outside of symbolization. Since she is excluded from the 'phallic function', she has a closer relation to 'jouissance,' a kind of non-teleological sexual pleasure, than man has. "There is a jouissance proper to her, to this 'her' which does not exist and which signifies nothing. There is a jouissance proper to her and of which she herself may know

²⁵ Jacques Lacan "God and the Jouissance of The Woman" in Feminine Sexuality trans. Jacqueline Rose, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985) Jacques Lacan in Feminine Sexuality pp. 138-148.

²⁶ Ibid. p. 144.

nothing, except that she experiences it."²⁷ For Lacan, this supplement to the symbolic, that which is on the border line of experiencability, just beyond expressability, is precisely what has up to now been called God.

Might not this jouissance which one experiences and knows nothing of, be that which puts us on the path of ex-istence? And why not interpret one face of the Other, the God face, as supported by feminine jouissance?²⁸

For Lacan, then, being a woman has its advantages. Sex and love are just charades, since in the economy of desire, satisfaction is deferred infinitely through the symbolic system. Men exercise power and control, they have the illusion that they can say what they mean; women, on the other hand are able to experience pleasure.

Those who see Irigaray as accepting this theory of the position of women in culture have trouble coming to terms with what it is that her work accomplishes. If we see the task of her work as theorizing this untheorizable other, we have left her with an obviously contradictory task. This has lead several commentators to criticize Irigaray for falling into the inevitable traps of this position, yet they offer no insight into how one could avoid them without discarding the entire framework, a move which some

²⁷ Ibid. p. 145.

²⁸ Ibid. p. 147.

of them do not want to make. Thus, Rachel Bowlby argues that for Irigaray women are absolutely excluded from subjectivity.²⁹ She claims that Irigaray accepts the description of woman as a dark continent, and attempts to reverse the system of values which ascribes this status as negative. This strategy cannot be effective, she argues, since it retains a patriarchal frame of reference, namely woman as the other of language, which must be subverted.³⁰ In a similar vein, Shoshona Felman reads Irigaray as valorizing the madness which is said to be woman's lot. Felman argues that one must go beyond this and invent a language which does not incorporate a masculine reason.³¹ Andrea Nye argues that Irigaray accepts Lacan's schema of sexual difference and attempts to articulate the real of the female in it.

...she attempts to answer Freud's and Lacan's unanswered question (What do women want?), and to make articulate that feminine "jouissance" which escapes masculine logic. She supplies Lacan's "Woman", the *pas-toute* (not all there) with a specific presence. Women's sexuality will no longer be the simple negative, or lack of masculine phallic presence; nor will it be the ineffable ecstasy-beyond-words of Lacan's appropriation of Bernini's Saint Therese. Instead, it will be an alternative kind of pleasure-describable, recoverable and connected

²⁹ Bowlby, p. 63.

³⁰ Ibid. p. 65.

³¹ Shoshona Felman "Woman and Madness: the Critical Phallacy" in Diacritics (Winter 1975) pp. 2-10.

with a women's different "self-touching"
sexual economy.³²

Each of these authors acknowledges that what Irigaray has to say is different from what Lacan says. Lacan's attempt to describe the specifically feminine stops at his pointing to Bernini's Saint Therese,

...you only have to go and look at Bernini's statue in Rome to understand immediately that she's coming, there's no doubt about it. And what is her jouissance, her coming from? It is clear that the essential testimony of the mystics is that they are experiencing it but know nothing about it.³³

Irigaray, on the other hand, rather than merely pointing to an inexpressible experience, (as she mockingly says " "In Rome? So far away? At a statue? Of a saint? Sculpted by a man?"³⁴) attempts to give this experience a voice ("For where the pleasure of the Saint Theresa in question is concerned, her own writings are perhaps more telling"³⁵). Much of her work, especially the essays included in This Sex Which is not One, attempts to remythologize the feminine. She counterposes a mythology of feminine desire to the dominant masculine one in order

³² Andrea Nye "The Hidden Host: Irigaray and Diotima at Plato's Symposium" in Hypatia #3, vol. 3 (Winter 1989) pp. 45-61.

³³ Lacan, p. 147.

³⁴ Irigaray, This Sex Which is Not One p. 91.

³⁵ Ibid.

to motivate the possibility of feminine difference, excluded by masculine discourses. Thus in This Sex Which Is Not One she writes,

How can I speak to you? You remain in flux, never congealing or solidifying. What will make that current flow into words? It is multiple, devoid of causes, meanings, simple qualities.³⁶

Here she does not claim that female desire is essentially fluid and multiple, rather, she wants to begin the process of the representation of this desire in language by giving it a description, for which she makes no metaphysical claims. In the section entitled, "When our Lips Speak Together" she posits that there is a feminine pleasure which does not require the intervention of subject/object relations, as male pleasure does. "There is no need for an outside; the other already affects you. It is inseparable from you."³⁷ She claims that through the self touching of the vaginal lips, women are always already in a sensual relationship, which does not require mediation or intervention.

But doesn't it follow from the Lacanian theory of language that this new mythology must also be phallogentric the moment it is brought into the symbolic, i.e. the moment it is described? If we were to accept the view that Irigaray attempts to thematize the Lacanian

³⁶ Ibid. p. 215.

³⁷ Ibid. p. 211.

Other, then her remythologizing must necessarily share the problems of the old mythologies. Even if Irigaray avoids making essentialist truth claims by seeing her work as mythmaking, she still uses language to communicate the myth. If language is essentially alienating, then wouldn't extending its reach further into female experience be an invitation to a deeper colonization of the female body? Wouldn't it be a call to give up the one advantage women have, namely a direct relationship to jouissance? Wouldn't any saying be co-optation? And wouldn't therefore, any critique which uses language be necessarily an exercise in masculine hegemony? If she uncritically accepts the Lacanian paradigm, then there is no way for Irigaray to avoid having her writing fall into these traps.

What is necessary for a feminist appropriation of Lacan which wants to avoid the impossible position implied by these questions, and what Irigaray does, is to part ways with Lacan over the claim that the symbolic is necessarily a phallic and dominating function. To the extent that Irigaray leaves open the possibility of feminine desire being expressed in language, she is not trapped by the implications of these questions.

Nowhere does Irigaray state that she agrees with Lacan that the symbolic order is a necessarily masculine one. Rather, she speaks of the problems of conceptualizing female needs within the current system of representation,

thus implying that another system of conceptualization which did allow its expression might be possible. In an interview in Ideology and Consciousness, she claims that Lacan's appropriation of structuralism was too uncritical. Lacan erred in not questioning the claims to universality of the model of language that he uses. Thus, she argues,

"The unconscious is structured like a language" he claims repeatedly. Obviously, but which? And if language is unique, and always the same- for men and women- Lacan can only lead back to a traditional position concerning the feminine.³⁸

In order to have a different position concerning the feminine, the possibility of women's articulating their desires in language must be opened up. While Irigaray both uses and rejects many of his concepts, she never engages in a sustained critique of the master. This is at least part of the reason why there is little clarity in the literature on how her views differ from Lacan's. Since Irigaray does not share Lacan's view that language is necessarily masculine, in looking for where they part ways, it is perhaps best to focus on why he does think that it is.

In attempting to explain this aspect of Lacan's work, Kaja Silverman argues that this notion comes from a confusion in Lacan's work about the relationship between the phallus and the penis. Lacan argues that the phallus

³⁸ Luce Irigaray "Woman's Exile" trans. Couze Venn, in Ideology and Consciousness #1 (1977) p. 69.

is a purely symbolic function, that it is not motivated by anatomical reality. If there were no relationship between the penis and the phallus however, Lacan could not use this scheme to explain the different access that men and women have to the symbolic order. Silverman argues that Lacan's position that the mother is seen by the child as abandoning it for the phallus assumes that the mother is in a primordial position of lack. Silverman argues that this structure of lack should be seen as the result of a particular social form, rather than as a human universal.

If we are to benefit from Lacan's discovery that the phallus is not the penis but a signifier we must remember the conditions under which it can function as such. Like any other signifier it can be activated only within discourse, and like any other signifier it is defined by those terms with which it is paradigmatically connected, whether through similarity or opposition. The discourse of the family serves constantly to activate the paternal signifier, and one of the most important ways it does so is through the evocation of its binary complement "lack." In short, the paternal signifier finds its support in what might be called the "maternal" signifier. It is only through the mother's desire that the cultural primacy of the phallus can be established and maintained, and that the discourse of the patriarchal family can be perpetuated.³⁹

If this is correct, then Lacan's argument for why it is that language is masculine would have to be relativized to a specific social form. From this it would follow that

³⁹ Silverman, p. 189.

language has a tendency toward having a patriarchal structure within a patriarchal society, but that this patriarchal element cannot be taken as an invariant characteristic of all languages. If we accept this view, then we can accept the Lacanian analysis of the depth of patriarchal structures in language without accepting the view that to be authentically female, one must renounce language as a corrupt realm.

Section 3

If Irigaray is seen as holding this sort of critical acceptance of Lacanian doctrine, then we have taken the first step toward investigating just how it is that she thinks feminine desire can be brought into language. Section 1 examined how it is that the dominant discourses of rationality are built upon an exclusion of female desire. Section 2 showed how even though Irigaray operates with a Lacanian theory of subjectivity, she is not forced to accept the pessimism about a feminine appropriation of language that a straight Lacanian would have to. If we reject the idea that the exclusion of feminine desire from language is a necessary characteristic of the symbolic, then in order to combat it, we need to look at how this exclusion functions.

Irigaray's notion of how masculine discourse excludes the feminine and of how that could be changed is most

clearly seen in her theory of the imaginary. According to most readings of him, for Lacan, the imaginary order is entered into before the symbolic, and therefore, before the onset of the ideology of gender divisions. Thus, in her book Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis, Ellie Ragland-Sullivan argues that sexual identity occurs after the advent of the mirror stage. Only when the child takes up a position in the symbolic is it forced into one side or the other of the gender divide.⁴⁰ In the imaginary, both male and female children posit an ego ideal of the self as a unified and independent whole.

As Silverman argues in her criticism of this view, from the fact that in the imaginary an ideal image of the self is produced, it follows that cultural ideals are already operating in it.

Careful scrutiny of the account given to us of the mirror stage reveals undeniable traces of cultural intervention, most notably in the term 'ideal' by means of which Lacan qualifies the pronoun 'I.' 'Ideal' is a term which has meaning only within a system of values.⁴¹

If we accept this criticism of Lacan, then it does not make sense to claim that the imaginary is free from the ideological structures of valuation and the question of

⁴⁰ Ellie Ragland-Sullivan Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986) p. 276.

⁴¹ Silverman, p. 160, see also Silverman, p. 273.

gender ideology having a presence in the imaginary is raised. Margaret Whitford claims that for Irigaray the imaginary is gendered.

The imaginary is sexed; it is either a male imaginary bearing the morphological marks of the male body whose cultural products are characterized by unity, teleology, linearity self-identity etc., or it is a female imaginary marked by the morphology of the female body, and characterized by plurality, non-linearity, fluid identity etc.⁴²

This way of reading Irigaray does not necessarily imply a biological reductionism, as many of Irigaray's critics would claim.⁴³ Although the male sex is, as Irigaray points out, characterized in our society as unitary, there is no necessary reason that the male body must be thus symbolized.⁴⁴ The point is that because in the oedipal relation the boy is forced to renounce his relation to the mother, his ego ideal is founded upon a vision of the self as unitary. The girl is not forced to give up this relationship, and thus retains an identification to the mother which allows for a more fluid ego. According to

⁴² Margaret Whitford "Luce Irigaray and the Female Imaginary: Speaking as a Woman" in Radical Philosophy vol.43, (1986) p. 4.

⁴³ See especially Plaza, Ibid. and Janet Sayers Sexual Contradictions (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) p. 42.

⁴⁴ Nye, p. 66.

this view, gender differences are internal to the structure of the imaginary. This contrasts with the view that the imaginary is entered into before the onset of the symbolic since it would imply that gender based ideology is already functioning at the level of the imaginary, that the imaginary contains retroactive effects of the symbolic.

In her book Jacques Lacan, Anika Lemaire argues that the symbolic and the imaginary should not be seen as temporal stages, but as interpenetrating poles of consciousness.

...the process of symbolization, in the sense of engendering, unfolds between two poles, the first of which- the minimum threshold of opening- is the imaginary, and the second of which- the threshold of accomplishment- is the social relation recognized in discourse [or the symbolic].⁴⁵

The imaginary is the register of those things brought to the edge of consciousness but not yet into language. And yet, she argues, the imaginary is always in a sense present in the symbolic.

The imaginary is the psychoanalytic register par excellence, but psychoanalysis has taught us to find traces of it in language, where words overlap with symbols multiplied a hundredfold, and where organization ultimately depends upon such a slender thread that it is not aberrant to wonder whether language really is the agent of interhuman dialogue. At the same time, the

⁴⁵ Lemaire, p. 56.

imaginary is pertinently reflected in socio-cultural symbolism, as much by the multiplicity of thoughts it implies as by the number of thoughts it neglects.⁴⁶

While Lemaire does not believe that the imaginary is gendered, her view that the imaginary and the symbolic are poles of consciousness, rather than temporal stages, opens the way to seeing a reciprocal effect between the two. So, while Lemaire raises the idea that the imaginary is already in a sense present in the symbolic, she does not touch on the question of whether or not the female imaginary is also present there. Given her reading of the slips which necessarily allow imaginary material to slip into the symbolic, it seems consistent with her view, if she were to accept the notion of a gendered imaginary, to argue that the female imaginary already does come into language, but that it is continually censored from being thematized in our concepts of the functioning of language and reason. The exclusion of feminine desire from language thus operates at the level of thematization rather than at the level of expression.

In a discussion of Freud in "Any theory of the subject..." Irigaray argues that because of his own psychic needs to repress his desire for his own mother, Freud was forced to ignore the effects of the feminine in language,

⁴⁶ Lemaire, p. 61.

[Freud] might have been able to interpret what the overdetermination of language (its effects of deferred action, its subterranean dreams and fantasies, its convulsive quakes, its paradoxes and contradictions) owed to the repression (which may yet return) of maternal power.... we shall in fact receive only confirmation of the discourse of the same....⁴⁷

According to Irigaray, it is necessary for the specific rationality functioning in our society that the relationship to the mother/body be repressed. Since the female imaginary is constituted socially, as based on this connection, its thematization would be disruptive of our entire system of representation. The perpetuation of this system of representation requires that the female imaginary be seen as not able to be brought into language, that its effects be repressed before they are thematized in our conceptual systems. And yet, the psychoanalytic theory of the relationship between language and the unconscious would seem to imply that it already reaches language through slips, associations, jokes etc..

Though the feminine imaginary reaches language in a repressed form, its presence remains unacknowledged. Anglo-American theories of language, which see language as reducible to the truth claims implicit in a given utterance encourage us to look at language in a way that misses the presence of things not thematizable according

⁴⁷ Irigaray, Speculum of the Other Woman p. 141.

to the dominant cultural categories of meaning and sense. While Lacan's structuralism allows him to include in his understanding of language those things only reachable through chains of associations, his belief that these chains are limited by the law of the father, that other imaginary contents are completely censored from being present in language, leads him also to see language as only able to presence those things which accord with the dominant system of representation. Philosophy participates in this by reinforcing the laws of legitimate discourse, which is why Irigaray focuses so much attention on the critique of philosophical writings. "[I]t is philosophical discourse that we have to challenge, and disrupt, inasmuch as this discourse sets forth the law for all others, inasmuch as it constitutes the discourse on discourses."⁴⁸

Irigaray shows how the dominant system of representation keeps the content of feminine imaginaries from being thematized, but does not argue that this content is completely unable find expression. The censorship occurs even more at the meta-level, at the level of thematization- in our concepts of language and of reason- than at the level of language itself. This would imply that the mechanism of exclusion does not just operate on an individual psychological level, but also on

⁴⁸ Irigaray, This Sex Which is not One p. 74.

a social level. The rules for comprehensibility which are fought out in a variety of types of interaction, from interpersonal dialogue to the level of philosophical discourse, reinforce the hegemonic structures which prevent the comprehension of the desires of women.

One cause of confusion in answering the question whether or not Irigaray believes that the female imaginary can be brought into language, is that on her characterization, the female imaginary is characterized by fluidity. This might lead us to then see it as constitutionally incapable of finding expression in language which requires reification, or the reduction of the multiplicity of experience to words which reduce experience to generic concepts. In Speculum, Irigaray makes it clear, however, that the difference between the male and the female imaginary is not one of reification versus total fluidity. Any expression requires some reification, the point is how this reification is carried forth. While the female imaginary is constructed as fluid, it also requires form, or reification, in its representation. The difference is that the form which operates in the feminine imaginary has no pretensions to absolute, Platonic stability.

This self-touching gives woman a form that is in(de)finitely transformed without closing over her appropriation. Metamorphoses occur in which there is no complete set, where no set theory of the One is established. Transmutations occur,

always unexpectedly, since they do not conspire to accomplish any telos. That, after all, would rest on the assumption that one figure takes up- sublates- the previous one and dictates the next one, that there is one specified form, that becomes another. But this happens only in the imaginary of the (male) subject, who projects onto all others the reason for the capture of his desire: his language, which claims to designate him perfectly.⁴⁹

While the male imaginary operates through generating myths of stability and requires notions of form which have some sort of ultimate sensibility, the female imaginary is able to accept its formal reifications as temporary, shifting and perhaps even arbitrary. What women need to do to have their desires articulated in language is not to completely break the reification which language requires, but to break through the specific hegemonic structures which have become reified in the concepts which are taken as meaningful.

What needs to be done instead, of course, if she is to begin to speak and be understood, and understand and express herself, is to suspend and melt down all systems of credit. In every sense. The credit, the credibility, that sustains all the current forms of credibility, that sustains all the current forms of monopoly, needs to be questioned. Otherwise, why speak about 'her,' since she has no currency, and only supports the currency in her/with silence.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 233.

⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 234 (translation modified. French p. 290).

Section 4

According to Irigaray, for both men and women there is an experience of connectedness, of fluid relations to the body, to the mother and to others which is a primary target of repression in the dominant system of representation. In women this connectedness structures the imaginary, but is repressed in language. In men it is more deeply repressed and not allowed as the structuring principle of the imaginary. The dominant ways of conceptualizing language and reason operating in our society are grounded in this repression.⁵¹

According to most theories of language, the meaning of language can be reduced to a set of truth claims implicit in any statement. This ignores the contents of language which are excluded by systems of hegemony. Although all speaking requires the intervention of a mediating principle into experience, and therefore a sort of

⁵¹ It is not clear from her texts if Irigaray thinks that men and women each have a different gendered imaginary, or if she believes that every person has access to both types of imaginary structure. The second of these possibilities, even if it is not Irigaray's view, leads to some interesting implications. It might be helpful to see the very real option that women have of being successful at using the dominant discursive systems as an exercise of their male imaginaries. In his discussion of Kierkegaard in "God and the Jouissance of The Woman", Lacan claims that through his relationship to Regine, Kierkegaard was able to reach the mystical realm which usually excludes men. This seems to imply that men are at least theoretically capable of having access to a female imaginary. [Lacan p. 148]

reification of experience, we do not need to completely reject all forms of reification as problematic. What Irigaray shows in her work is that the way meaning is structured in our current system creates a hegemony which does not allow feminine desire to be thematized and that the narrowness of current conceptions of rationality acts as an ideological filter on what can be received as meaningful. This means that we need to look at what perspectives get encoded in speech and how the hegemonizing functions. What is needed then, is for the desires of women to be able to be expressed and thematized in language. We do not need to attempt the impossible task of making language non-reifying.

Irigaray shows that dominant concepts of rationality are based on masculine psychic needs to repress the relationship to the body and to materiality. By showing there to be an internal connection between a concept of reason and a particular set of psychic needs, Irigaray undermines the notion that reason is an autonomous faculty. What we call rational is nothing but the most accepted discourse of legitimation in our conceptual system. And the politics of what is to be accepted and where questioning is appropriate is related to the desires of those able to impose their rationality on others. Rationality is always a sedimentation of desire and of power.

Once Irigaray has succeeded in showing that rationality cannot be found through pure reflection and that it is an operation of desire and power, it no longer makes sense to look at rationality as a metaphysical principle that can be accepted or rejected. We can reject what has gained acceptance as the content of reason in dominant Western philosophical discourses. But, if we believe that language always requires conceptual reifications and with them discourses of legitimation, then we cannot escape the space of the rational. If we accept the view that rationality is nothing but a discourse of legitimation, then we cannot reject rationality as long as we use language.

Irigaray does not directly argue for the need for a new less patriarchal form of rationality. From some of her statements one can get the impression that she wants to reject rationality- and language- as necessarily patriarchal. If as Lacan claims, all linguistic expression is reenactment of the law of the father, then the proper place for feminists is outside of language. I have already pointed out the paradoxes of a feminist adoption of this position, and argued that it is not the position that Irigaray holds. Irigaray shows how linguistic systems work to elevate certain contents and repress others, and thereby act to exclude the contents of the imaginaries of women. Philosophical concepts of Rationality can be seen

as the highest articulation of a certain repressive discourse, and as Irigaray writes, those that become the law of acceptability governing all discourses. Only when the exclusionary systems set up by this law are challenged will the hegemonic control of discourses of the rational begin to be undermined.

CHAPTER 4

Reason and Universalism: A Critique of Habermas' Universalist Discourse Ethics

The present hegemony of the West is assumed, that is, the outcome is determined, the 'diagnosis' is complete. The task remains to account for why this outcome occurred. In short, the question is, "Why did the West rise to hegemony?" Past historical events are integrated selectively to answer this question.¹

Rationality is always an operation of discourses of desire and power. Discourses of rationality act to set up exclusionary practices by marking some positions as legitimate and others as illegitimate. As I have shown in the previous chapter, Western philosophical notions of rationality have been especially efficient at excluding the contents of the imaginaries of women. But if we accept the view, articulated in Chapter 1 that all uses of language set up evaluative systems, and hence discourses of legitimation, then rationality, as the space holder for our discourses of legitimation cannot be avoided.

Once we have accepted the view that any discourse of rationality is a temporary reification of the views of

¹ Janet Abu-Lughod, "On the Remaking of History: How to Reinvent the Past," in Barbara Kruger and Phil Mariani eds. Remaking History (Seattle: Bay Press, 1989) pp.111-130, p. 114.

what counts as legitimate thinking at a given time, we are faced with the question of how we should judge the legitimacy of different views. Theories, statements, expressions and critiques will still be brought to courts of appeal, even after we have begun to question the authority of the judges.

Since we can neither escape from engaging in legitimating practices nor ground these practices in any complete way, what we are left with is the view of rationality as a space holder for what counts as rational at a given time. Following from this view, discourses that attempt to legitimize principles or ideas by naming them as rational need to focus on determinate negations of existing discourses of rationality as they appear problematic. The difference between what I am claiming here and the traditional view of rationality as being based in processes of argumentation is a subtle one but central for the current project. We can engage in argumentative practices to settle questions of dispute, but we cannot assume that there is a rationality that governs these practices before we begin to engage in them. What I am arguing for here is a Negative Dialectic through which validity claims are raised as views come to seem problematic. While this bears a strong resemblance to traditional Enlightenment views, it contains an essential

difference: I am not starting from the assumption that there are any a priori limits on what is to be accepted as rational. This caveat is important for distinguishing critical from hegemonic epistemological practices.

The moment of openness to exploration and critique is something we should keep from the Enlightenment tradition. The content of the notion of rationality which has grown out of this tradition, however, must be rejected. As Trinh T. Minh-ha puts it:

By attempting to exclude one (darkness) for the sake of the other (light), the modernist project of building universal knowledge has indulged itself in such self gratifying oppositions as civilization/primitivism, progress/backwardness, evolution/stagnation. With the decline of the colonial idea of advancement in rationality and liberty, what becomes more obvious in the necessity to reactivate that very part of the modernist project at its nascent stage: the radical calling into question, in every undertaking, of everything that one tends to take for granted- which is a (pre- and post-modernist) stage that should remain constant.²

But how are we to characterize the notion of rationality we want to hold on to if we are to keep from giving it any content? It has become common in contemporary philosophical circles to reject the view of reason as embodying a certain content or being a specific

² Trinh T. Minh-ha, Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989) p. 40.

sort of rule to apply ready made to the world.

Contemporary rationalists tend to be much more modest in their claims than the likes of Kant, Locke or Descartes. What we are more likely to encounter now is the view that what is rational is what follows from good argumentation. Thus, someone is said to be rational to the extent that they are willing to defend their views through arguments and respond to the force of the arguments of the partner in argumentation. From this it would follow that we could engage in arguments to settle disputes, and could use this method to undermine the abuses we have uncovered in current discourses of rationality, while still engaging in legitimizing practices.

This view of argumentation as the basis for rationality is at the heart of Habermas' consensus theory of truth. In The Theory of Communicative Action, Habermas claims that a rational discourse is one in which the result is based on the uncoerced consensus of the participants in the discussion. Habermas' project is useful for our discussion since it bears a certain surface level resemblance to what is being claimed here, and yet the differences are very telling. Habermas claims to derive the universal component of his theory of rationality from the notion of the force of the better argument and from a theory of human evolution- in which we develop as we come increasingly to

accept argumentation as the court of appeals for all judgments.

Our goal in this chapter will be to show the impossibility of grounding the notion of the 'force of the better argument' and through this to reveal both the hegemonic operations of Habermas' universalism and the necessary openness of any non-hegemonic operation of reason.

Section 1

Habermas' approach to epistemology has been described as an attempt to move beyond the dualism of objectivism and relativism.³ Habermas is critical of objectivist or transcendental approaches to epistemology, arguing that they ignore the inherent linguisticity of truth relations. In spite of his skepticism about the possibilities of a priori grounding for truth claims, he wants to preserve some form of universalism in order to preserve the possibility of making critical judgments. As a way out of the dilemma of universalism and relativism he proposes grounding judgments in the universal requirements of the use of language. The project of 'universal pragmatics' then is to reveal these universal structures and the normative implications they carry with them.

³ Alessandro Ferrara, "A Critique of Habermas's Consensus Theory of Truth," Philosophy and Social Criticism N1, V13, pp 39-68, p. 40.

The problem with Habermas' project lie precisely at the point at which he attempts to make his theory universal.⁴ Here he engages in exclusionary practices which have hegemonic implications. In the following I will argue that despite the helpfulness of looking at rationality as an empirical practice which is grounded through intersubjective practices, Habermas still ends up repeating the most misogynist and Eurocentric mistakes of the Enlightenment tradition. Habermas' view of what count as rational rules for discussion presupposes some of the very standards of rationality which I would like to challenge.

Any discussion of Habermas has the difficult task of reconstructing the logic of his project which exhibits a structure so baroque as to defy comprehensibility. In this discussion I will focus only on the thread of argumentation that goes into forming his theory of rationality. The problem of rationality is at the basis of Habermas' whole project, yet it is not until his Theory of Communicative Action that we get a systematic treatment of the question of what is to count as rational. Before this, in the essay "Wahrheitstheorien," Habermas gives a critique of traditional approaches to epistemology and

⁴ For a different approach to the problem of Habermas' reification of the concept of rationality see: Rudolph Gasche, "Postmodernism and Rationality" in The Journal of Philosophy, V85, October, 1988, pp. 528-533.

offers his consensus theory of truth as an alternative. In this essay, which is Habermas' clearest enunciation of his own epistemology, Habermas attempts to ground his theory of truth in the rules of good argumentation. The relationships between argumentation and rationality on the one hand and rationality and progress on the other are left to be developed in the Theory of Communicative Action.

In "Wahrheitstheorien," Habermas claims that sentences can have different meanings depending on the context in which they are uttered, he further claims that these differences of meaning effect the truth content of sentences. Because of this we need to look at truth claims as arising out of propositions, or speech acts, rather than out of sentences. For every assertion there is a corresponding truth claim. "In the fact that I assert something, I raise the claim that the assertion is true."⁵ When we make assertions we raise claims to the validity of that which is asserted and these validity claims are open for justification, or what Habermas calls redemption [einlösen].

Habermas argues that validity claims can only be redeemed discursively, that is, through argumentation. To ground a truth claim we must resort to argumentation

⁵ Jürgen Habermas, "Wahrheitstheorien," in Vorstudien und Ergänzungen zur Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984) p. 129.

rather than to the evidence of experience. A statement such as "this ball is red" refers to the experience of perception of the redness of the ball, and yet its truth is a matter of the validity of the speech act of the proposition 'this ball is red.' Habermas argues that although "experiences appear with claims to objectivity; but this is not identical with the truth of the relevant proposition."⁶ This is because, according to Habermas, the truth relation we are investigating is not in the correspondence of the statement with reality, but in the truth of the proposition. Thomas McCarthy expresses Habermas' line of argument in this way:

Correspondence theories of truth are not only unable to supply a criterion of truth (which statements correspond to reality?) independent of critical discussion: they are incapable of giving a coherent account either of the 'ready-in-itself' to which true statements are said to correspond or of the relation of 'correspondence' that is said to obtain....The conclusion to be drawn from this line of argument is that ultimately there can be no separation of the criteria of truth from the criteria for the argumentative settlement of truth claims.⁷

In place of a correspondence theory of truth Habermas argues for a consensus theory of truth. Against the charge that what he is speaking about here is not truth, but a

⁶ Ibid. p. 153.

⁷ Thomas McCarthy, The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982) pp. 302-3.

method for ascertaining truth, Habermas claims that the method for redeeming truth claims is not external to the meaning of truth. Following Dewey, he defines truth as 'warranted assertability.' The truth of a statements lies in the warrantedness of what is asserted. Whether or not an assertion is warranted is not just found through argumentation, its warrantedness consists in the basis for its acceptance.⁸

Since the truth of a proposition is judged through the settlement of differences through argumentation, the best basis for saying that a certain proposition is true is that it was arrived at through good argumentation and that all those participating in the discussion agree to its truth. Yet clearly, if consensus is to count as the mark of a true proposition, there must be some way to distinguish valid from invalid forms of consensus. If one participant in the discussion wields a sanction of death over other participants if they disagree, it would be hard to imagine why we should accept the agreed upon proposition as true. A rationally motivated consensus (and therefore a consensus which yields truth- or 'warranted assertability') is one in which what determines the

⁸ For an interesting criticisms of this view as confusing the meaning of 'truth' with a criterion for truth see: Alessandro Ferrara, "A critique of Habermas' Consensus Theory of Truth," in Philosophy and Social Criticism, #1, V13, pp. 39-68; "Critical Theory and its Discontents: On Wellmer's Critique of Habermas," in Praxis International, #3, V9, Oct. 1989, pp. 305-320.

outcome of the argument is nothing but the unforced force of the better argument (der zwanglosen Zwang des besseren Arguments). In order to be sure that this is that case, the participants must allow for a stepwise radicalization in which increasingly deep questions as to the context of the discussion can be raised.

The first step is the passage from problematized assertions, which themselves represent actions, to assertions whose controversial validity claims will be made into the object of discourse (the entry into discourse). The second step consists in the theoretical clarification of the problematized assertions, that is, in the statement (at least) of an argument within a chosen speech system (theoretical discourse). The third step is the passage to a modification of the chosen speech system to a weighing of the appropriateness of alternative speech systems (metatheoretical discourse). The last step consists in a further radicalization in the passage to a reflection on the systematic changes in the ground language.⁹

The participants in the discourse must be able to move back and forth between these levels of thematization until a consensus is reached. Habermas claims that the ideal speech situation is neither an empirical phenomenon nor a pure construct: it is an unavoidable presupposition of all discourse. In "Wahrheitstheorien" Habermas claims that although all discussions take place in a context of space and time constraints and are limited by the real psychological constraints of the participants, its

⁹ Habermas pp. 174-5.

fulfillment is not an a priori impossibility.¹⁰ It is an effective fiction which we must always assume in discussion.

There is a certain circularity in Habermas' explanation of why we must accept the ideal speech situation as the legitimizing ground of any discourse. He claims that we must be able to distinguish rational discourse from apparent discourse that is based on coercion. Once we have given up on transcendental ways of grounding the rationality of a discourse, what we are left with is the notion of the force of the better argument. But why should we accept the view that we can distinguish between truth bearing and coerced forms of consensus? Habermas claims that "It belongs to the presuppositions of argumentation that in performing speech acts we counterfactually act as if the ideal speech situation were not just fictive, but real..."¹¹ In "Wahrheitstheorien" Habermas does not attempt to ground this assertion. In an earlier work, Communication and the Evolution of Society, Habermas had first raised this issue. In the first part of that book "What is Universal Pragmatics," he defines his task as developing the thesis that "anyone acting communicatively must, in performing speech action, raise validity claims

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 179.

¹¹ Ibid. p. 181.

and suppose that they can be vindicated [or redeemed: einloesen]." ¹²

Following reconstructive methods of Piaget and Chomsky, he attempts to blend empirical with formal methods of analysis.

The paradigms introduced by Chomsky and Piaget have led to a type of research determined by a peculiar connection of formal and empirical analysis, rather than their classical separation. The expression transcendental, with which we associate a contrast to empirical science, is thus unsuited to characterizing, without misunderstanding, a line of research such as universal pragmatics. ¹³

He claims that there is an underlying structure of language such that in all speaking, the speaker raises claims to the truth, validity, normative rightness and veracity of her/his statements.

Just as Chomskian linguistics "starts from the assumption that every adult speaker possesses an implicit, reconstructible knowledge, in which is expressed his linguistic rule competence," in universal pragmatics there is a "corresponding communicative competence." Habermas claims that as with linguistic competence, communicative competence has a universal core.

A general theory of speech actions would thus describe exactly that fundamental

¹² Jurgen Habermas, Communication and the Evolution of Society trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979) p. 2.

¹³ Ibid. p. 25.

system of rules that adult subjects master to the extent that they can fulfill the condition for the happy employment of sentences in utterances...¹⁴

Habermas does not just claim that this is true by definition, i.e. that what we mean by instances of communicative interaction are only those speech act that raise these validity claims. Rather, he sees these validity claims as immanent to all interactive uses of language. "In the interactive use of language, the speaker proffers a speech-act-immanent obligation to provide justification."¹⁵ That is, an obligation to provide backing for the validity claims that are raised.

One objection to this approach to language is that there are clearly many times when the users of language do not act according to this obligation. Speakers routinely lie, attempt to derail the discussion by raising points they know to be irrelevant, violate their own moral principles, or show a lack of understanding as to their own motivations. To answer this objection, Habermas moves from the formal to the empirical side of his theory. He grounds the notion of the presupposition of the ideal speech situation in his evolutionary proposition that as society develops there is an increasing thematization of validity claims such that more aspects of the society come

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 26.

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 64.

to be ruled by the force of the better argument. Thus, his claim is not that in all speaking we attempt to live up to these validity claims, but rather, that it is in the nature of human society that as society develops there is an increasing tendency to thematize them.

In Communication and the Evolution of Society, although he states that he will defend the thesis that in all speaking we raise validity claims under the assumption that they can be discursively redeemed, he never gets beyond stating it as an assumption. In various of his later works, he claims that this tendency is proven in the advances of scientific culture.¹⁶ This is where Habermas, following the methodological approaches of Piaget and Chomsky, moves from an analytic perspective to a quasi-empirical one. Just as Piaget derives his theory of moral development from observation of the differences in the moral judgments of younger and older children, Habermas derives his theory of the development of universal pragmatics, or legitimizing language use, from observing the differences between the uses of language in more and less scientifically developed cultures. The argument is that we know there is something like a development of truth through the raising and redeeming of validity claims since this is what happens in a scientific culture, and we

¹⁶ See especially Der Philosophische Diskurs der Moderne (Frankfurt: Surkamp, 1986).

can see by the advances of science that science implies progress.

In the Theory of Communicative Action, Habermas pursues two different lines of argumentation to ground his theory of rationality. In the first part of Chapter 1 of volume 1, he argues for why it is that we should accept the force of the better argument as the foundation for the rationality of truth claims. In sections 2-4 of the same chapter he argues that there is a difference in the rational potential of modern and mythical ways of understanding the world. He does not make it especially clear what he sees as the relationship between these two lines of argument, but following on the method of rational reconstruction described above we can infer his intention. In section one we are given the transcendental part of the equation, in the following sections, the empirical. The force of the better argument is the ground for the rationality of a statement and we know this because this is the principle underlying the social forms we know to be the most developed. We know that scientific cultures are the most developed because they exhibit the quality of decenteredness which we know to be the mark of development.

In discussing Habermas' arguments in this text, I would like to pursue these two lines of argumentation separately. There is a tendency in the literature to

understand Habermas' argument to be that rationality is grounded in the concept of the force of the better argument, and yet a careful reading of the first section of the Theory of Communicative Action shows that Habermas is aware of the fundamental openness of what can be taken to be a satisfactory argument. This is why he must resort to the second part of the argument, the empirical evidence of progress.

It is especially important to focus on Habermas' discussion of the notion of the force of the better argument since this is commonly taken to be the what distinguishes rational from irrational discourse. Thus, if someone is unwilling to submit to the force of a good argument, or to engage in argumentative practices, they are said to be irrational, regardless of the beliefs they hold, and regardless of the skepticism of the person making the charge to any notion of an a priori reason. One advantage to looking at Habermas' discussion, then, is that he shows us why we should not accept this view. In his discussion of the force of the better argument Habermas' shows the indeterminacy that is inherent in the notion of the force of an argument in a way that is helpful for undermining the notion that rationality can be grounded a priori.

It is because of this indeterminacy that Habermas must resort to the second, and much more problematic part of

the argument, that there is an evolutionary tendency to human society and that modern Western societies are at the most advanced state yet achieved. Several commentators have pointed to the Ethnocentrism of this position.¹⁷ Yet in pointing this out it is also important to notice the role this argument has in grounding Habermas' system. This position is not merely an unfortunate prejudice that can be written out of the system, rather, it is the foundation of last resort. Once we accept the openness of the concept of the force of the better argument, all we have left to ground the concept that there is something like rationality operating in the world is this evolutionary part of the argument.¹⁸

Section 2

Habermas begins his discussion of the notion of "the force of the better argument" in the essay "Wahrheitstheorien". There he argues that what

¹⁷ See: David Rasmussen, "Communicative Action and Philosophy: Reflections on Habermas' Theorie des Kommunikativen Handelns," in Philosophy and Social Criticism, #1, V9, pp. 1-28; Thomas McCarthy, "Rationality and Relativism," in John B. Thompson and David Held eds. Habermas: Critical Debates (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982), pp.57-78.

¹⁸ This point is very significant for Habermas' critique of the likes of Adorno and Horkheimer and Foucault. His critique of them is based on the position that there is a content to the notion of 'the force of the better argument.' He claims that these thinkers fall into relativism because they fail to recognize this fact.

distinguishes a true from a false consensus is that the former is grounded in nothing but the uncoerced force of the better argument.¹⁹ In this essay he is mostly concerned to argue for the superiority of the consensus theory of truth over coherence approaches. His discussion of the force of the better argument focuses on the point that the truth of a proposition consists not in the correspondence to the evidence of the senses nor in the logical necessity of its elements, but rather, in the validity of the argumentative process through which it is redeemed.

I have already argued that Habermas believes that correspondence to the evidence of the senses cannot be what grounds the truth of a speech act, since speech acts cannot be stripped of their linguisticity. Habermas uses the work of Stephen Toulmin to support the view that it also cannot be grounded in the logic of the proposition. In Human Understanding and The Uses of Argument, Toulmin argues that there is an unavoidable gulf between formal logic and the truth of most propositions. Logic helps us to sort out the relations between elements of an argument. But, Toulmin claims, in real argumentation the relations argued about almost never amount to relations reducible to logic.

¹⁹ Habermas, "Wahrheitstheorien" p. 165.

In many situations, the propositions we put forward as known are of one logical type, but the data and warrant-backing which we produce in their support are of other types. We make assertions about the future, and back them by reference to data about the present and past; we make assertions about the remote past and, and back them by data about the present and recent past; we make general assertions about nature, and back them by the results of particular observations and experiments..... We often find ourselves in the sorts of situation of which these are samples, and already the central difficulty should be apparent. For, if we are going to accept claims to knowledge as 'justifiable' only where data and backing between them can entail the proposition claimed as known, it is open to question whether any of these sample claims to knowledge are going to prove 'justifiable.'²⁰

Toulmin uses this to argue that logic can at most be a help in settling arguments, but that it is a mistake to suppose that we can ground the validity of arguments logic. Toulmin's argument is that arguments consist of a heterogeneous conglomeration of different elements. His sketch of the way arguments unfold helps us to see this heterogeneity and to see the non-logical character of most of what goes into making an argument that is taken to be valid.

For Habermas, truth is a quality of speech acts that cannot be ascertained through direct evidence of the senses nor through logic. It can only be redeemed through

²⁰ Stephen Edelson Toulmin, The Uses of Argument (Cambridge: University Press, 1969) p. 219.

the rules of good argumentation. For Habermas rationality is intimately related to argumentation.

Rationality is understood to be a disposition of speaking and acting subjects that is expressed in modes of behavior for which there are good reasons or grounds. This means that rational expressions admit of objective evaluation. This is true of all symbolic expressions that are, at least implicitly, connected with validity claims (or with claims that stand in internal relation to a criticizable validity claim). Any explicit examination of controversial validity claims requires an exacting form of communication satisfying the conditions of argumentation.²¹

Habermas follows Toulmin in separating the rules for good argumentation from the rules of formal logic. Thus he writes,

To the extent that arguments are conclusive in the sense of logical inference, they do not bring anything new to light; and to the extent that they have any substantive content at all, they rest on insights and needs that can be variously interpreted in terms of changing frameworks or 'languages,' and that, therefore, do not provide any ultimate foundations.²²

What is needed then to ground judgments is a way to access the validity of arguments. As an alternative to the over reliance on logic, Toulmin offers a schematic of the elements of argumentation. An argument consists of four

²¹ Jürgen Habermas The Theory of Communicative Action. Volume 1: Reason and the Rationalization of Society trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984) p. 22.

²² Ibid. p. 24.

elements: Data (D), Conclusion (C), Warrant (W) and Backing (B).²³

D-----> So C

Since W

On Account of B

As an example :

Harry was born in Bermuda -----> So: Harry is a British subject

Since:

A man born in Bermuda will be a British subject

Because:

The following legal statutes and other legal provisions

One of Toulmin's goals in schematizing the structure of argumentation is to show the relations between terms and to point out where it is open to different sources of validity.²⁴ He thus shows us where in the course of a typical argument what sorts of questions tend to be asked. One important thing to notice for our discussion of Habermas is that there can be an infinite chain of backings to any warrant. A backing only counts as sufficient when it has reached a point where the person being argued with has been convinced. There is no logically necessary endpoint. In fact, Toulmin shows that

²³ Toulmin p. 94 ff.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 95.

while logic can help us in sorting out these relations in argument, it has nothing to do with the satisfactoriness of a backing. This is because of the heterogeneous nature of the terms involved.

Habermas uses Toulmin's work to show the particular structure of validity claims raised in speech acts. Toulmin had attempted in his work to caution against a misleading conflation of the validity of an argument with the rules of formal logic. Toulmin does not see his position as implying relativism. He argues that in different practical domains, or what Habermas refers to as institutional frameworks, there are different standards of rationality which operate. In The Uses of Argument Toulmin writes:

We must study the ways of arguing which have established themselves in any sphere, accepting them as historical facts; knowing that they may be superseded, but only as the revolutionary advance in our methods of thought. In some cases these methods will not be further justifiable—at any rate by argument: the fact that they have established themselves in practice may have to be enough for us.²⁵

Toulmin is content to accept the seeming advances of science, the seeming legitimacy of law and the seeming sensibleness of historical accounts as the basis of our accepting them as legitimate. He can be content with this level of acceptance of the given since he does not set out

²⁵ Ibid. p. 257.

to be a critical theorist, but merely to encourage us to look at argument in a new way.

For Habermas, Toulmin's answers to the questions of the validity of arguments is unsatisfactory. He claims that Toulmin's position relies on our acceptance of "preexisting notions of rationality."²⁶ It cannot give us the basis for distinguishing valid from invalid consensually achieved decisions. For this, Habermas claims, we must be able to distinguish conventional, context dependent claims from universal validity claims.²⁷ Habermas claims that while universal validity claims raised in a statement are only recognized with reference to the context in which they are raised, their validity is not constituted by their context.²⁸ All statements contain universal, context independent validity claims.

Habermas cuts off his discussion before explaining wherein the universality of validity claims consists, but we know from "Wahrheitstheorien" that he sees it as growing out of the ideal speech situation. When all participants in the discussion are able to raise questions at all of the various entry points in Toulmin's schematic of argumentation, then we can be assured that the conclusion reached is warranted, or true. When Habermas

²⁶ Habermas p. 34.

²⁷ Habermas p. 36.

²⁸ Habermas p. 38.

claims that in the ideal speech situation the force of the better argument is what determines the outcome of the discussion, he means that all extraneous constraints have been removed.

In accessing Habermas' claim it is important to note here that he has not explicitly told us what it is that gives an argument 'force.' We know that it cannot be formal logic, since any argument contains a manifold of relations and claims that cannot be reduced to formal logic. Toulmin is content with categorizing the different types of claims that go into making up a good argument to give us clarity as to what we do in arguing. The operative concept of force for Toulmin is that which we have left after people stop raising questions, that is, when the participants find the warrants, backing, data, etc. to be acceptable. On this view, the force of an argument is a discursive space, free of power relations and occupied by what it is that the discoursing subjects find themselves to be comfortable with.

The problem with conceiving the force of an argument this way, for Habermas, is that he needs the concept to do more than this. I will argue in the next chapter that there is something appealing about the notion of the ideal speech situation which can be used counterfactually to criticize power laden structures of discourse, but Habermas wants to do much more than this with it. He uses

the possibility of arguments being redeemed through the force of the better argument as the ground for his claim that the Enlightenment brought with it a form of progress embodied in its rationality.

He can not derive this progressivist doctrine from the ideal speech situation alone. If we rest content with the view that rationality is nothing but a discourse taken to be legitimate on the basis of our ability to say what it is that we want to say, there is nothing left to distinguish the rationalities of different cultures or social groups. The problem with using the ideal speech situation alone as the ground of our concept of rationality is that according to it, no consensus is valid. The ideal speech situation functions only as a negative critical tool. We can use it to continually raise objections to statements being made, but it gives no positive basis for claiming the validity of assertions. The members of two different cultural groups could find satisfaction in two completely different conclusions, on the basis of differences in their existential needs, cultural beliefs and values. On the basis of the ideal speech situation there is no reason to believe that different social groups would accept the same outcomes as warranted. Yet Habermas is clear that truly rational decisions would have universal validity. He uses his theory of the ideal speech situation and the force of the

better argument to ground the view that there is something special about modern Western rationality. In his discussion of the work of Wolfgang Klein, Habermas argues that we must be able to distinguish power from validity. "The logic of argumentation requires a conceptual framework that permits us to take into account the phenomenon of the peculiarly constraint-free force of the better argument."²⁹ This is required so that we can distinguish a priori valid from invalid forms of consensus. In criticizing Klein's view that we cannot make this distinction a priori, Habermas writes, "There is lacking [in Klein's work] a concept of rationality that would make it possible to establish internal relations between what is valid 'for them' and what is valid 'for us.'"³⁰ This is a repetition of the argument found throughout The Philosophical Discourse of the Modern. Adorno and Horkheimer, Foucault, Nietzsche and many others fail because they are not able to recognize the "peculiarly constraint free force of the better argument."

Habermas insists that the Ideal Speech Situation is more than a counterfactual- it is an unavoidable presupposition of all communicative speech. In using language we assume that the truth of our statements will

²⁹ Habermas p. 28.

³⁰ Habermas p. 30.

be redeemed through the force of the better argument. We must assume that there is a truth giving property that exists outside of the power relations that de facto often determine the outcomes of arguments. But what is this property if it is not logic?

Since Habermas wants the force of the better argument to be more than the empty space opened up by the lack of power relations in discourse, he must find a source for its content. Rather than offering us this, Habermas changes the subject. There must be such a thing as the force of arguments since we know that we are able to distinguish good from bad arguments. We know that we have this ability because we can see that while holding this belief, our scientific culture has been able to make advances. If we weren't able to tell rationality from irrationality, then how could we explain the advances of science? Since science is grounded in the rational and we have science, then we must have access to the rational.

Section 3

It is here that Habermas shifts from the transcendental to the empirical side of his argument. He seems to be at least partially aware of the problem of giving meaning to the concept of the force of an argument. While he often refers to the need to believe in such a thing, he never gives an adequate explanation of the source of this

mystical force. The fact that he uses Toulmin, and criticizes his relativist conclusions, shows that he is aware of the depth of the problem, since Toulmin gives an excellent critique of the conventional understanding that the force of an argument rests in its logical validity. It is his inability to satisfactorily account for the source of the force of arguments that leads him to switch to the next line of attack in his argument. The progress of science shows that something like the force of the better argument must be operating.

In switching from the transcendental to the empirical side of his argument, Habermas must now switch from saying wherein consists the rationality of a specific discussion to wherein consists the rationality of a culture. Habermas acknowledges that something more than the force of the better argument is needed to ground his theory of rationality, thus, he writes:

Even when we are judging the rationality of individual persons, it is not sufficient to resort to this or that expression. The question is rather, whether A or B or a group of individuals behaves rationally in general; whether one may systematically expect that they have good reasons for their expressions.... When there appears a systematic effect in these respects, across various domains of interaction and over long periods (perhaps even over the space of a lifetime), we also speak of the rationality of a lifeworld shared not only by individuals but by collectives as well.³¹

³¹ Habermas, Theory of Communicative Action p. 43.

Habermas then goes on to ask what lifeworld structures go into making rational action orientations of individuals possible. He pursues the answer to this question through an engagement with the various essays collected in the volume Rationality.³² These essays, written mainly by Anthropologists and Sociologists, deal with the question of whether or not it is possible to talk about rationality cross-culturally.

In this section, Habermas attempts to make clear what it is that distinguishes the modern from mythical world views. For him, mythical world views are characterized by their totalizing power. "The deeper one penetrates into the network of a mythical interpretation of the world, the more strongly the totalizing power of the savage mind stands out."³³ All information is processed through a single interpretive framework. One consequence of this is that people with mythical worldviews are not able to make the distinctions we moderns take to be fundamental. In particular, they do not permit a clear differentiation between nature and culture. "We can understand this phenomenon to begin with as a mixing of two object

³² Bryan R. Wilson ed. Rationality (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970).

³³ Habermas p. 45. It is interesting to note that McCarthy adds scare quotes around "wilden Denkens" that are not in the original.

domains, physical nature and sociocultural environment."³⁴

One of the problems with a mythical worldview according to Habermas is that from within its parameters judgments can only be dogmatically asserted. This he argues is because,

...mythical worldviews prevent us from categorically uncoupling nature and culture, not only through conceptually mixing the objective and social worlds but also through reifying the linguistic worldview. As a result the concept of the world is dogmatically invested with a specific content that is withdrawn from rational discussion and thus from criticism.³⁵

This dogmatic conflation of the subjective and objective worlds protects the culture from being able to raise validity claims that require the ability to step back from the culture and view it externally. Thus, Habermas argues that what distinguishes mythical from modern world views is their differing degrees of openness. A closed world view is characterized by an "insufficient differentiation among fundamental attitudes to the objective, social, and subjective worlds; and the lack of reflexivity in worldviews that cannot be identified as worldviews, as cultural traditions."³⁶

³⁴ Ibid. p. 48.

³⁵ Ibid. p. 51.

³⁶ Ibid. p. 52.

At the end of this section, Habermas makes clear that with this distinction between closed and open world views he still has not grounded the rationality of open world views.

Of course this does not yet prove that the supposed rationality expressed in our understanding of the world is more than a reflection of the particular features of a culture stamped by science, that it may rightfully raise a claim to universality.³⁷

This necessitates the next step to the argument, an answer to the question as to why we should take the 'openness' of a worldview as indication of its rationality.

Central for this part of Habermas' argument is his engagement with the work of Peter Winch. Basing his approach to epistemology in the work of the late Wittgenstein, Winch argues that there is no perspective from which we could ground the universality or superiority of our own world view. Winch claims that since each language has its own notions of reality and truth, there is no neutral perspective from which we could say that science registers them correctly.³⁸ Winch is critical of anthropological approaches that claim the peoples they study are irrational because of the logical contradictions that could be found in the statements they make. This claim is based on a category mistake, the beliefs of

³⁷ Ibid. p. 53.

³⁸ Ibid. p. 57.

members of the studied culture are not scientific theories at all, and thus should not be seen as bad scientific theories. Where we might see logical contradictions, we may be missing something like shifts in level of meaning.

After raising these issues from Winch, Habermas answers by using Robin Horton's Popperian idea that open worldviews promote learning and hence promote species development. He uses this as a defense against Winch's relativism. According to Habermas and Horton, Winch may be right that we cannot judge the rationality of a worldview on the basis of its sharing with us views we take to be scientifically grounded, nor on the basis of our being able to find what look to us like logical contradictions in their utterances about the world. According to Habermas, Horton,

accepts Winch's view that the structures of worldviews are expressed in forms of life, but insists on the possibility of evaluating worldviews, if not by their degree of cognitive adequacy, then by the degree to which they hinder or promote cognitive learning processes.³⁹

Habermas quotes from Horton's essay:

In other words, absence of any awareness of alternatives makes for an absolute acceptance of the established theoretical tenets, and removes any possibility of questioning them. In these circumstances, the established tenets invest the believer with a compelling force.⁴⁰

³⁹ Ibid. p. 61.

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 61.

Habermas claims that the distinction closed versus open provides a context independent standard for judging the rationality of worldviews.⁴¹

Habermas raises the point that in a scientific culture there are many beliefs held as sacred, that is, as not open to criticism. But, he argues that this means that our culture is not as completely open as it could be. One such position is our hypostatization of cognitive-instrumental rationality as the only legitimate form of rationality. Habermas attempts to slip his own conclusions into the discussion in his usual deceptive style. Why this counts as an example of the closedness of our worldview and a position such as that there is such a thing as a universal rationality does not, is never explained.

Habermas believes that an open worldview must 'be able to' distinguish between the different types of rational action spheres: cognitive, moral and expressive. In order to be able to do this, they must 'be able to' make a clear distinction between nature and culture. The reason that this is required is that Habermas argues that it is only when we have made these distinctions that we are able to see how the various validity claims that are inevitably raised in language use can be redeemed.

The problem with Habermas' view here, is that it seems as though the elements of our own world view which we must

⁴¹ Ibid. p. 62.

hold as sacred are precisely those required for Habermas' own conclusions. An open worldview must distinguish between nature and culture because otherwise how could we ground our theory of communicative action? And we need some way to ground the rationality of at least some aspects of our modern worldview because without this we fall into relativism, which is (take your pick) 1- a self-undermining position or 2- does not account for the progress we know to be exhibited by modern Western culture.

Section 4

In his attempts to give positive content to his theory of rationality Habermas runs into problems finding the sources for his grounding. It is also here that the hegemonic side of his position comes into play. In his casual discussion of what we should take in actual discussions as the force of the better argument, we can see that he appeals to dominant conceptions of common sense. In his discussions of what counts as an open worldview we can see his valorization of categories which are functional for Eurocentric and patriarchal worldviews. While a sympathetic reader of Habermas could argue that these are accidental slips in his work that should be criticized and eliminated, they are also foundational for grounding the notion that there is such a thing as

rationality that can be found in the discursive practices of the modern West.

When Habermas wants us to understand what he means by the force of the better argument, he uses Toulmin's schema of argumentation to show the different points at which further argumentation can be asked for. He then claims that when we are able to raise all of the claims we want to at these various points, nothing but the force of the better argument will coerce our agreement. But when he characterizes the rational person, it is clear that, in the absence of the realization of the ideal speech situation, the rational person is the one who agrees with the expectations grounded in existing value systems.

In contexts of communicative action, we call someone rational not only if he [sic] is able to put forward an assertion and, when criticized, to provide grounds for it by pointing to appropriate evidence, but also if he is following an established norm and is able, when criticized, to justify his action by explicating the given situation in light of legitimate expectations. We even call someone rational if he makes known a desire or an intention, expresses a feeling or a mood, shares a secret, confesses a deed, etc., and is then able to reassure critics in regard to the revealed experience by drawing practical consequences from it and behaving consistently thereafter.⁴²

But what should the person do if the evidence she gave were not considered 'appropriate,' the expectations referred to not accepted as 'legitimate' or the critics so

⁴² Habermas p. 15.

threatened by the proposition as to not be able to be 'reassured'? While on the most open reading of the ideal speech situation, we could criticize the dogmatism of the critics who do not accept a proposition because they are threatened by it, it is not clear how we could ever know when this is the case and when it is the case that the person making the threatening proposition was simply being hysterical. The notion of the force of the better argument must always rely on the interpretive framework out of which a person is operating and there is no way to bridge the gap separating different positions using nothing but argumentation.

In discussing the rationality of preferences, Habermas claims that some idiosyncratic preferences are rational, in that they can be justified "in such a way that other members of their lifeworlds can recognize in these descriptions their own reactions to similar situations." But, he goes on, if the others cannot so recognize themselves, the preference is to be deemed irrational. Some idiosyncratic preferences are innovative in an aesthetic sense, most however,

follow rigid patterns; their semantic content is not set free by the power of poetic speech or creative construction and thus has a merely privatistic character. The spectrum ranges from harmless whims, such as a special liking for the smell of rotten apples, to clinically noteworthy symptoms, such as a horrified reaction to open spaces. Someone who explains his libidinous reaction to rotten apples by

referring to the 'infatuating,'
'unfathomable,' 'vertiginous' smell, or
who explains his panicked reaction to open
spaces by their 'crippling,' 'leaden,'
'sucking' emptiness, will scarcely meet
with understanding in the everyday
contexts of most cultures.... Anyone who
is so privatistic in his attitudes and
evaluations that they cannot be rendered
plausible by appeal to standards of
evaluation is not behaving rationally.⁴³

Given his understanding that the ideal speech situation is a counter-factual, it is hard to see why Habermas believes that we should judge someone irrational whose views are incomprehensible to others. In real life, those who win arguments are most likely to be those whose views accord with dominant preconceptions. This is because such a view can be supported with a minimum of validity claims raised. It can rely on a whole range of background assumptions not available to a more unusual position. Thus, part of the power of the force of an argument comes from the inertia of preconceived ideas.

A defender of Habermas might want to argue here that any argument that relies on the weight of preconceived ideas is not a valid one. The point I am making here, however, is that given the fact that arguments tend to work this way, Habermas has given us no principle by which to distinguish valid real empirical arguments from invalid ones. If he gives up on this and limits the ideal speech situation to a counterfactual, then he cannot use it to

⁴³ Ibid. p. 17.

judge anyone to be irrational, including those who refuse to engage in arguments because they see the discursive terrain as weighted against them.

In Habermas' argument about the differences between open and closed worldviews we run into another set of problems. On the methodological level there is a problem with how we could ever judge a worldview as embodying progress, since notions of progress are always already embedded in worldviews. Habermas attempts to get out of this paradox through a metaphorical use of Piaget. Leaving aside the enormous problems with hidden assumptions in Piaget's work, it is questionable if this paradigm can be appropriately used, as Habermas does, to judge entire world views.⁴⁴ Piaget used what he took to be empirical facts about how children change as they grow older to be the foundation for a theory of progress in moral development. His theory has some plausibility when limited to the moral development of those children he watched develop. The ideal type Piaget develops is grounded in the evidence of his experiments.

This cannot be the case for Habermas' use of the method of empirical reconstruction. He begins with Piaget's view

⁴⁴ For a discussion of cultural bias in Piaget see: Susan Buck-Morss, "Socio-Economic Bias in Piaget's Theory and its Implications for Cross-cultural Studies," in Human Development, #18, 1970, pp. 40-1; Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

that as children develop they tend increasingly to separate their subjective worlds from the objective world. Habermas extrapolates from this to argue that a decentering of the ego is the sign of a developed worldview. But, given that fact that Piaget worked with middle class Swiss boys, isn't it possible that what he observed was their progressive taking on of the conceptual framework needed to function in their own society?⁴⁵ It is not clear why we should interpret the fact that people in the so called modern world have more of a tendency to separate themselves off from the world than members of some other cultures as a sign of progress, rather than as a sign of how our own culture organizes experience.

As with the ideal speech situation, the moment that Habermas moves from positing an abstract concept to filling it out, the truly problematic aspects of his theory come to view. At the end of section I.4, in which he explains the difference between modern and mythical worldviews, Habermas tells us what some of the necessary characteristics of a decentered worldview are. In order for a culture to permit rational action orientations it must exhibit the following characteristics:

⁴⁵ For a discussion of some problems in Habermas' use of Piaget see: Thomas McCarthy, "Rationality and Relativism," in John B. Thompson and David Held eds. Habermas Critical Debates (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982), pp. 57-78.

a) The cultural tradition must make available formal concepts for the objective, social, and subjective worlds....b) The cultural tradition must permit a reflexive relation to itself; it must be so far stripped of its dogmatism as to permit in principle that interpretations stored in tradition be placed in question and subjected to critical revision.... c) In its cognitive, moral, and evaluative components the cultural tradition must permit a feedback connection with specialized forms of argumentation to such an extent that the corresponding learning processes can be socially institutionalized.... d) Finally, the cultural tradition must interpret the lifeworld in such a way that action oriented to success can be freed from the imperatives of an understanding that is to be communicatively renewed over and over again and can be at least partially uncoupled from action oriented to reaching understanding.⁴⁶

Note here that these elements do not grow out of decentering itself, rather they are characteristics of a worldview that is taken to be decentered. Habermas does not explain why it is that a worldview must have these characteristics.⁴⁷ The way that our society separates nature from culture is a precondition for the entire edifice, and yet feminists and theorists of racism have pointed out in a number of different ways just how this

⁴⁶ Habermas pp. 71-72.

⁴⁷ Fred Dallmayr argues that Habermas cannot make the distinction he does between modern and mythical worldviews on the basis of the concepts of rationality he valorizes. See: "Habermas and Rationality" in Political Theory, Vol. 16, #4, November, 1988 pp. 553-579.

distinction has been used hegemonically.⁴⁸ If this separation is something that must be accepted for a rational world orientation, then we have violated precondition b) by holding a principle as above question and we have biased our conception of rationality in favor of those who share the dominant conceptions.

Section 5

Having rejected transcendental, correspondence and coherence notions of rationality and truth, Habermas wants to still defend some notion of universal truth. Habermas believes that we must hold on to some notion of universal truth if we are to engage in linguistic practices, since in speaking we always implicitly assert the truth of what is asserted. But does all speaking imply the specific politics of truth that Habermas has in mind? I argued earlier that in all speaking there is an unavoidable discourse of legitimacy, that critical judgments are always present in language. But from this does it follow

⁴⁸ See: Luce Irigaray, Speculum of the Other Woman, trans. Gillian Gill (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1985), Sandra Harding; The Science Question in Feminism (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1986); Franz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1964); Franz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967); Patrick Brantlinger, "Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent," in Henry Louis Gates, Jr. ed. "Race," Writing and Difference (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 185-222.

that there is an unavoidable reference to truth as a universal? It is in making the transition from asserting that language implies legitimating practices to the claim that these legitimating practices have universal implications that Habermas' position runs into problems. Habermas' universalism is never satisfactorily grounded in his system and it is through the assumptions of universalism that Habermas' most politically questionable claims get raised.

We can accept the view that truth is immanent to linguistic practices and the claim that all linguistic practices imply a politics of truth, without making the further claim that there is a single most appropriate politics of truth.

CHAPTER 5
Conclusion: Reason, Hegemony and Desire

On the one hand, each society has its own politics of truth; on the other hand, being truthful means being in the in-between of all regimes of truth.¹

The process of dominance keeps spewing undigested scraps of subjugated nature.²

According to Habermas, a universalistic politics of truth is necessary if we are to avoid the relativism that leads to the inability to make critical judgments. As a son of the Enlightenment, he argues that if we reject universal discourses of rationality we will undermine our ability to ground any critical judgments. He uses the notion of the force of the better argument to point to the space where the judgments we know to be correct come from. But if the notion of force of the better argument remains ungrounded, as I argued in the previous chapter, then do we have any option but to give up on all of the critical discourses which have seemed so helpful in motivating, orienting and organizing liberation movements? If we give

¹ Trinh T. Minh-ha, Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989) p. 121.

² Theodor W. Adorno, Negative Dialectics, trans. E.B. Ashton, (New York: Continuum, 1983) p. 347.

up on the universalism that a stable concept of rationality seems to offer us, then how can we speak about social issues across different discourses- from the points of view of different oppression dynamics, from radically different epistemological perspectives, cross culturally?

The belief that we are operating from within a universally valid epistemological perspective has of course given those using it a sense of security in making their judgments. But the arrogance that goes along with this belief has also caused enormous problems. And these problems are not just related to abuses of power or extreme cases. Whenever a certain group sets the agenda for liberation, there will be a tendency for the notion of liberation that it comes up with to reflect the particular social positions of the members of that group- no matter how good their intentions may be. As I tried to show in the case of Habermas, in spite of his intentions that the ideal speech situation be a principle of liberation that works to express the interests of all people, his particular universal principles get him caught up in privileging the interests of the already powerful.

Section 1:

Habermas' fear of the neo-conservatism of all possible critics of the Enlightenment can be read as a defensive reaction to fear of having his own privileges undermined.

Habermas is right that many followers of post-modernism use their undermining of ethical universalism to justify a status-quo politics, but a valorization of the status quo does not necessarily follow from a critique of the Enlightenment. The conclusion from a critique of universalism to an acceptance of the status quo only follows if we have an impoverished concept of action and responsibility. The skeptic who sits in her room writing pessimistic philosophy is acting and judging as much as the political activist sure of the justice of his position. The decision to go along with the status quo requires as much justification as the decision to rebel. It only makes sense to say that rejection of universalism leads to acquiescence if we assume that acquiescence is not itself a form of action, no less in need of justification than any other form of action.²

In rejecting the universal validity of Western discourses of liberation, we are not arguing that they do not often play a positive role. The problem lies not in the content of these principles, but in their supposed status. Discourses of liberation are ways that critical issues have been organized through a complex of forces. They are not universal measures found through a perfect form of reflection known as universal reason. They are

² This does not mean that acquiescence is a priori unjustifiable, merely that it requires justification.

determinant negations of particular things found problematic by real people in one context, that have often found resonance in other cultural contexts. The claim to equality of all people, for example, does not derive its validity from universal reason, rather, it is a principle that has worked to organize the demands of many people in many different circumstances.³

The conclusion from the view that these concepts of liberation are culturally specific to the conclusion that they must be rejected rests on a false dichotomy. As I argued in Chapter 1, this dichotomy is reflected in Habermas' argument for universal values and Lyotard's equally absolutist argument for dissensus. I argued in Chapter 4 that Habermas is wrong in claiming that these sorts of concepts are universally destined to play themselves out in history. But Lyotard is also wrong to claim that their achieving a universal status would necessarily be problematic. Dissensus, or the agreement to

³ Similarly, the notion of human rights works as an organizing tool for articulating demands for human dignity. The demand does not need to have metaphysical validity to be politically effective. For John Locke, our natural rights derive from the fact that we are all the property of God, and since God's property rights should be respected, as God's property, we each have natural rights to life, liberty and property. We all can know this fact through our use of reason. The effectiveness of human rights talk as a political tool has nothing to do with the validity of Locke's argument. Human rights functions as a political call for people who do not believe in God, natural rights or reason as well as for people who do.

disagree, may be positive when people really do disagree. But Lyotard never explains why disagreement should be universal.

Lyotard reaches his position of valorizing dissensus through ontologizing language games. He seems to believe that society contains a plurality of language games that are ontologically distinct from one another. Each language game has its own rules and is immune from having its rules questioned from the perspective of those of another. Only when metanarratives are introduced do language games speak to one another. And when this occurs, Lyotard claims, differences are obliterated. The problem with this view is that it supposes that language games are and should remain distinct from one another.

This sort of ontology of dissensus can turn into what Trinh T. Minh-ha calls the apartheid of cultural difference.⁴ Difference becomes an apartheid principle when it is used to prevent a dialogue from taking place between people. If we assume that the differences between ourselves and someone we speak with are necessarily unbridgeable, then we are protected from changing through the interaction. We allow difference to act as a wall between us.

In situations of cross-cultural contact, or of multiculturalism, acceptance of difference as unbridgeable can

⁴ Trinh T. Minh-ha, p. 80.

lead to a liberal sort of toleration that protects the dominant from being effected by the subaltern.⁵ What needs to be looked at in these situations is how power dynamics operate to structure the interaction and how dynamics of hegemony enter in and make one group overly vulnerable to change by the other.

The problem with Habermas' valorization of consensus is not that agreement is impossible, but that by his assuming that it is necessary, he forces agreement on the terms of the most powerful. In the absence of agreement we need to respect difference. The other crucial point is that in the absence of interaction it is most likely that different groups will come to different conclusions about truth. Truth is not a universal waiting to be found. It is created through processes of real people answering questions that arise for them.

This complex of issues around the status of discourses of liberation from the West gets us to the heart of the epistemological puzzle we have been circling around this

⁵ Bell Hooks talks about how the feminist call to find our own voices has little relevance for those who are not listened to. Specifically she criticizes white feminists who urge African-American women to find their own ethnic voices but then exoticize them, thereby protecting themselves from what African-American women have to say. "In celebrating our coming to voice, Third World women, African-American women must work against speaking as 'other,' speaking to difference as it is constructed in the white supremacist imagination." [Bell Hooks, Talking Back (Boston: South End Press, 1989) p. 16.]

entire thesis. The puzzle is philosophically unsolvable. We cannot reject ethical universalism and replace it with a new universal principle. But I have also been claiming that relativism is existentially impossible. The position that I am arguing for then is an acknowledgment of the fact of our always already making judgments in the world and an openness to the fact that in making these judgments our positions are always limited and with respect to the perspectives of other people, and in a certain sense always wrong.

I introduced Chapter 4 by asking how we can distinguish hegemonic from counter-hegemonic discourses in the absence of there being a universal content to reason, or a universally valid discourse of legitimation. I argued that Habermas' attempt to do this by appealing to the universal concept of the force of the better argument failed. I also argued that once we reject this universalism, we can make no stronger claim for rationality than that it is what we have left when participants in a discussion stop wanting to raise objections to whatever is on the floor.⁶ If we are to

⁶ On a casual reading, this may sound like Habermas' position. But the critical difference is in his insistence that there are universal answers to questions- that the 'peculiarly constraint free constraint of the better argument' underlies all discursive interaction. Habermas clearly and vigorously rejects the openendedness and pluralism that the view stated here implies.

stick with this formulation we are left with a daunting problem: what are the feelings of satisfaction that mean that a discussion is really over? Presumably we have not arrived at this point when the discussants are so tired out by dealing with an intransigent discussant that they finally give up and say they have had enough. When we say that a conclusion is satisfying we want to say more than that the participants don't want to argue any more. Yet is it possible to come up with a criterion of what counts as satisfaction with a discussion?

Section 2:

In Chapter 3 I argued that reason is a discourse of desire and that reason operates hegemonically when people are not able to articulate what they want to articulate in discourses that are accepted as legitimate. To make this claim is to appeal implicitly to the view that legitimate discourses of legitimation come from the articulation of suppressed interests. The problem of course is that if we do not accept any sort of universal discourse of reason, then it is difficult to give any universal content to the idea of interest or of suppressed interest. This problem has a rich and complicated history going back at least as far as Hegel.⁷

⁷ Actually the idea goes back even further- at least to Rousseau. Though he did not articulate this program as clearly as Hegel, Rousseau at his most socialist can be

For Hegel, reason is the universalization of desire. The goal of human history is the harmonization of these two principles. What makes his work so interesting, and the debates that follow him so rich, is that neither reason nor desire is taken to be unproblematically or pre-dialectically given. Followers of Hegel have often undermined this tension by ontologizing either reason or desire.⁸ Thus, thinkers such as the right Hegelians tended to see reason as a given absolute, and took the goal of human development to be to bring desire into conformity with reason.

Hegelian Marxists, on the other hand, have been more suspicious of any given notion of reason. But by siding with desire they have often ended up ontologizing it. In Eros and Civilization, Marcuse argues that social domination functions through a repression of human instincts. He claims that any society needs to suppress some instincts in order to maintain a modicum of order. He

seen as arguing that reason develops out of human interaction and that the best reason is one that integrates the desires of all people in a society. In other places, however, he argues that desire needs to be socially controlled by a reason that is external to it. [Jean-Jacques Rousseau, The Social Contract, trans. Maurice Cranston, (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1968)].

⁸ One way to conceive of the split between the left and right Hegelians is on their ontologizing opposite sides of this divide. Though the history of Hegelianism is not a linear one: on this question orthodox Marxism has more in common with the right Hegelians than with Hegelian Marxists.

defines oppression as the suppression of instincts beyond the level needed for social functioning.

Although Marcuse claims that instincts are drives subject to historical modification, the range of modification is not particularly great.⁹ Marcuse follows the more dualistic side of Freud in seeing the human organism as having inborn desire which is at most socially organized in its orientation. The sheer mechanical energy of the instincts is a given. This fluid dynamic model works as the foundation for conceptualizing the liberation of desire. A society that is able to maintain social interaction with a minimum of repression against this fluid energy could be seen as the least oppressive. But what if this energy were not an ontological given?

In The History of Sexuality, Foucault has persuasively argued that this notion of a pre-given sexual energy has operated as a mechanism of social control by creating a 'true discourse' about the self. According to Foucault, social control does not just operate through the suppression of biologically given desire, but also through the construction of the notion of a true self. As the individual human being works to discover this true self, of true desire, she works to create herself according to its model.

⁹ Herbert Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974) p. 8.

Whether or not we want to accept Foucault's notion that all desire should be seen as socially constituted, we should at least take as problematic any view of desire that bases itself on a separation of nature and culture or mind and body. While the world in which we find ourselves in both found and made, both physical and mental, any articulation of this matrix brings us into an impossible knot of problems since the physical world as we experience it is always already socially mediated and the world of social creation has always already partaken of physical being. By ontologizing desire, Marcuse comes up with a critical principle at the expense of reifying the body.

While the body is not pre-socially given in its desires or interests, neither is it purely a social construct. It has become fashionable to argue that desire is a discursive construction, as if the body were nothing but a substrate for social construction. Jacques Lacan, the presiding master of this view, looks at desire as a lack, an empty space that prompts us to language which operates as an impossible attempt to fill this gap. In this story, desire functions to structure discourse, and its dynamics grow out of the needs and interests of discursive construction. Physical need is experienced by the child, but the inability for it to find satisfaction leads the child into the symbolic network. Once the child enters

into this network, need is replaced by desire, and desire is a purely discursive construction. The body disappears. When all impulses from outside of the discursive system are eliminated from discussion, it becomes very difficult to speak about resistance.

If we do not accept a strict mind/body dualism, then we cannot use desire as a simple yardstick for oppression. But neither can we simply ignore it. If we take a phenomenological view and look at desire as growing out of our being in the world, which is always a thinking physicality, then perhaps we can avoid the question of the source of legitimate desire all together. We find ourselves in the world with desires. The self we find ourselves being is the result of physical reality-biological processes, chemical processes etc.. It is also the result of social articulation and construction.¹⁰ We can say that the being I call myself has all of these elements and it finds itself having desires without needing to make any ontological claims about the source of my desires or the division between the sources.

Starting from this perspective we can see desire as the complex articulation of a variety of social and biological

¹⁰ My using these categories is clearly the result of the way our culture cuts up the world, rather than any necessary division. To make a claim that nature and culture structure desire is to accept a nature/culture dualism. What I am claiming here is that as long as we are speaking from within a structure that accepts these categories, we need to prioritize neither of them.

forces. Having said this we can then go on to look at desire as the expression of negation. We can then build critical discourses on the foundation of the negations expressed by unfulfilled desires. This is possible even if we acknowledge that desire is often constructed positively through social discourses. In Sexual Subversions Elizabeth Grosz claims that we have two very different concepts of desire each growing out of a different intellectual tradition and each with a different relation to negation.

In the first tradition, within which Plato, Hegel and Lacan can be located, desire is conceived as a fundamental lack in being, an incompleteness or absence within the subject which the subject experiences as a disquieting loss, and which prompts it into the activity of seeking an appropriate object to fill the lack and thus to satisfy itself.... This first tradition sees desire as negative. In a second tradition within which Spinoza, Nietzsche, Foucault and Deleuze are placed, desire is not a lack but a positive force of production. It is no longer identified with a purely psychical and signifying relation, but is a force or energy which creates links between objects, which makes things, forges alliances, produces connections.¹¹

Grosz's distinction between positive and negative conceptualizations of desire follows the distinction made by the contemporary thinkers identified as having a positive conception of desire: Foucault and Deleuze. Foucault sees desire as both constructive and constructed. It operates much like Nietzsche's concept of the will, where there is a positive force that articulates the world

¹¹ Elizabeth Grosz, Sexual Subversions (Sidney: Allen and Unwin, 1989) p. xv.

according to its needs. But what constitutes a need for the will or for positive desire? Lurking under this 'positive' notion of desire is a negative moment. Desire directs itself to that which it finds as in its way. Desire 'creates links' and 'forges alliances' but it does this where they appear to be missing. Thus the existence of a positive notion of desire does not undermine our ability to use desire as a sign of negation.

Both of the ways of looking at desire thematized by Grosz require negative and positive moments. On both schemes, desire ends up constructing the self. On both models, desire drives the activities of the individual and through the history of these activities a subject is created. And on both, the world as it is found is challenged by an energy created in and transformative of the world. The difference between these schemas is more one of emphasis than of radical opposition. Where the Hegelian tradition emphasizes the negative moment of desire, by focusing on the gaps that lead the subject on its path, the Nietzschean tradition focuses on the positive moment of the creation of the subject through this trajectory of negation.

Foucault's stressing of the positive side of desire grows at least in part out of a challenge to the Freudian tradition that sees power only as repressive. Much of the freshness of Foucault's work grows out of his pointing to

the constructive side of discourses of desire. Subjects are not just repressed in their given desire by discourses of power, they are constructed, inscribed with desire and repressed. This idea of course is not new in Foucault. The work on the culture industry by members of the Frankfurt school also makes this point. Following on the Marxist notion that needs are social creations and that individuals and social groups can be manipulated through the construction of needs and desires, they showed how in a capitalist society, subjects with infinite desires for consumption are created.

In Discipline and Punish Foucault describes how through such institutions as school and the military, individual bodies are trained in the routinization required for capitalism. Similarly, in One Dimensional Man Marcuse shows how capitalist society creates subjects whose most prevalent desires are for the kind of consumption that advanced capitalism requires. For both Foucault and Marcuse, the individual becomes an agent of capitalism by having interests that are consonant with it. An important difference between Foucault and the members of the Frankfurt school is that the latter were more likely to thematize the notion of negation than Foucault. Even with the post-holocaust pessimism of Marcuse, Horkheimer and Adorno, some attention is paid to the negative moment of the trajectory of desire.

We can see Adorno's thematization of negation in his critique of Hegel in Negative Dialectics. Adorno argues that while Hegel posits as an ideal the perfect mediation of freedom and necessity, which is achieved through the movement of negation, Hegel ultimately subordinates negation to the logic of the system. Adorno points out that in his work, Hegel distinguishes the subject from the individual in such a way as to invalidate the interests of the real empirical individual. Adorno argues that the following passage from Hegel's Reason and History shows Hegel's lack of concern for the real individual. "As the state, the fatherland, makes out a community of existence, as man's subjective volition submits to the laws, the antithesis of freedom and necessity disappears."¹² Adorno draws our attention to the word 'submission' and points out that there cannot be a perfect union of freedom and necessity here. The signs of resistance are present here in the moment of reconciliation.

Adorno acknowledges that we cannot point to the desires or interests of the real empirical individual as always legitimate. This possibility is foreclosed by the realization that the individual finds itself with socially created interests and desires manipulated by such forces as the culture industry. But he insists that we cannot dismiss the negativity that comes from the individual. We

¹² Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p. 350.

cannot suppose that we have a union of freedom and necessity when the supposedly legitimate side of the individual submits to authority, while some other part resists. As long as there is resistance, there is a reason for critique.

This same notion of critique as resting in the negations posited by the real empirical individual can be found in the work of Foucault. But this moment is suppressed. It shows up in the tone of moral indignation one finds throughout his work. If there were no resistance or negativity, why would it matter to us that power constructs its agent into infinitely complex networks? The moral force of Foucault's work relies on the negativity of the individual who is not completely self-identical with the discursive constructions s/he finds his/her self in.

The work of Foucault and the members of the Frankfurt school show us that we cannot point unproblematically to the expressed desires of the individual as the source of a critical locus. We cannot authorize our judgments by simply pointing to unfulfilled desires whether they be desires to say something, to judge something as right or to call something irrational. But these thinkers also show that the real empirical individual cannot be ignored. Critical discourses always rely on the expressions of socially articulated individuals. These discourses are

always caught up in webs of power and hegemony. And yet, we have nowhere to go to find the interests of resistance than the expressions of people.

And if, as I have been arguing in this thesis, there is a strong tendency for the interests of the subaltern to appear on the ideological scene as illegitimate, then there are good reason for those concerned with liberation to listen with an especially open ear to the claims of members of suppressed groups, even when according to dominant conceptual schemes- even dominant conceptual schemes of liberation- these claims often do not at first make sense. In the absence of a universal standard of reason, an openness to the articulations of the desires of agents and groups opens up the possibility of a less dominating rational discourse.

Section 3:

A practical implication of this approach to epistemology can be seen in the discussion of feminism cross culturally. In feminist discussions there is often a fear that if we give up on the universal status of our discourses of liberation, we will no longer have any way to advocate for the interests of women in other cultures. Isn't the call for women's liberation the answer to a peculiarly Western, or white or middle class set of needs? The fear is that if we reject all universal views we will

be unable to take up a critical attitude toward anything. We will fall into a cultural relativism in which the practices of any society will have to be accepted as simply that society's way of organizing itself.

The problem with this view is that it supposes that societies or cultures are homogeneous. If an anthropologist goes to study a culture with a relativist perspective and attempts to make judgments on the basis of the rules of the society being studied, she will need to make choices about which rules and interpretations to accept. The picture that an anthropologist puts together of a culture is always a composite of material from a variety of sources and much of the work of interpretation is in the mediation of the differences in sources. This problem has been especially clear with feminist anthropologists who have shown how dissimilar different gendered experiences of the 'same culture' can be.

A predominant feature of society in highland New Guinea is the phenomenon of ritual pollution. At certain times, members of these societies are extremely careful not to come into contact with contaminating substances. In the anthropological literature these substances were identified as menstrual blood and blood lost in childbirth. What Elizabeth Faithorn found in her study of these same societies was that semen was also among the contaminating substances. Faithorn writes,

I was quite surprised when I stumbled on the belief that men can pollute, for it had not occurred to me to ask that question directly. Based on everything I read and heard about Highlands cultures, I had assumed that pollution was only associated with female sexuality and was expressed among the Kafe, as elsewhere, in terms of women threatening the health and vitality of men.¹³

The problem was that the previous studies done by men, had relied on predominantly male informants. Since Faithorn was able to spend time with the women of the society, she was able to get a women's perspective on the matter and to move beyond the anti-woman bias of previous studies.

Anthropologists writing from the male side of the very gender divided Arab world have characterized Arab women as passive, submissive and subservient. Female Anthropologists have pointed out that this behavior is only one part of the reality of these women's lives. Often, the public appearance covers a more complex reality. Soheir Morsy writes, "...I recalled that while adult women of my family projected a public image of submission to the 'world of the man of the house,' they were in fact the real power behind the scene."¹⁴

¹³ Elizabeth Faithorn, "Gender Bias and Sex Bias: Removing our Cultural Blinders in the Field," in Tony Larry Whitehead and Mary Ellen Conway eds. Self, Sex, and Gender in Cross-Cultural Fieldwork (Urbana and Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1986.) p. 286.

¹⁴ Soheir Morsy, "Toward the Demise of Anthropology's Distinctive-Other Hegemonic Tradition," in Soraya Altorki and Camilla Fawzi El-Solh eds. Arab Women in the Field:

If we do not accept the view that cultures are homogeneous, then we cannot suppose that a consistent relativist can ever simply accept the judgments of the society under study. The open minded anthropologist does not need to accept the misogyny of a different culture, especially if she finds that there is a spirit of resistance in that culture among women. Cultural relativists have often made the mistake of subordinating their own judgments to the dominant judgments of the culture under study.

Just as it does not follow from the idea that our discourses of liberation are not universal that we can reject all critical positions, neither does it follow that all of the grand concepts of liberation that we have relied on in the West need to be rejected. The discourses of liberation that have been exported from the West seem to have had a mixed history. If we look at the history of Marxism in Africa, Feminism in the Middle East and Christianity in Latin America, for example, we can see

Studying Your Own Society (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1988) p. 74.

that Western discourses of liberation have had complex histories of effecting liberation movements in a wide variety of very complex ways.¹⁵

There is always a danger in using our grand concepts of liberation in speaking cross-culturally that we will reinforce the notion that everything that has to do with positive social change has come from the West. The story often told about women's liberation is that it grew out of the ethical universalism of the Enlightenment. It somehow seems to follow from the call to fraternity, equality and liberty that all human beings, including women, should have these rights. Along with the evils of Western imperialism came the radical force of the Enlightenment. As peoples were oppressed they were also educated into the universal values required for human liberation. In Feminist discourses there is a surprising tendency among even the most anti-imperialist writers to suppose that Feminism is something that grew out of Western ethical

¹⁵ See: Nawal Sadawi, The Hidden Face of Eve, (London: Zed Press, 1980); Roger N. Lancaster, Thanks to God and the Revolution (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Julius Nyerere, Freedom and Socialism: Uhuru na Ujamaa (Dar es Salaam: Oxford University Press, 1968); Thomas Kono Ranuga Marxism and Black Nationalism in Southern Africa (Azania) (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1983). Of course if we do not begin from the position of accepting the concept of liberation embodied in any one of these discourses, it is hard to even judge whether they have been useful for 'liberation' or not. One of the reasons this question is so complicated is that none of the terms remains stable, including 'liberation.'

universalism and has been brought to liberate the colonized.¹⁶

While the feminism that has grown out of the Western tradition has been helpful in many ways to women in other parts of the world, it is clearly not the case that this is the sole source of women's resistance. Domination has engendered resistance throughout history, without the need for the philosophy of the Enlightenment. Ofelia Schutte points to sources of resistance to patriarchy in Latin America, long before the influence of the Western women's movements. She writes about Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz, a Mexican nun born in 1651 who challenged the patriarchal system she lived under.¹⁷ Similarly, Azizah al-Hibri writes of women in ancient Arab societies who fought in tribal wars alongside the men of their tribes. She also claims that there is a long tradition of stories of women resisting their exclusion from the battle field in the pre-islamic Arab world.¹⁸ When we look at the history of women's resistance to male domination throughout the non-

¹⁶ See Kumari Jayawardena, Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World, (London: Zed Books, 1986).

¹⁷ Ofelia Schutte, "Philosophy and Feminism in Latin America: Perspectives on Gender Identity and Culture," in Philosophical Forum, Vol. XX, No 1-2, Fall-Winter, 1988-89, pp. 62-84.

¹⁸ Azizah al-Hibri, "A study of Islamic herstory: or how did we ever get into this mess?," in Women in Islam, ed. Azizah al-Hibri (New York: Pergamon Press, 1982), pp. 207-220.

Western world we can see that Western feminism has often been helpful for articulating an oppositional critique. But it has at times also brought with it elements of the dominant ideologies of the West and opened Women's movements up to the charge of advocating a foreign ideology.

The view that women's liberation is a product of Western ideology puts us in a very awkward epistemological position. This view implies that universal reason and universalistic ethical values of the West have some sort of real superiority. In the history of feminism this sort of view has contributed to the hegemony of the feminist agenda set by women in the core countries of the dominant world system. If we start from the view that women have universal interests as members of the same group, we will have a tendency to take up those issues that express what we take these universal needs to be.

If instead we understand that when women in other societies have taken up the banner of Feminism as articulated by Western feminists it is because they have found some resonances, then we should not be surprised when the agenda is changed as resonance turns to dissonance, or if there are women in some social groups who do not find any resonance in the entire project. Given the fact that all over the world women experience reality very differently, Feminists from dominant groups need to

be cautious in supposing that they can ever find universal interests as women.¹⁹

This issue is complicated by the fact that often Western feminists find themselves as having thought a problem through in ways that are found useful by members of other societies. Their discourses of liberation are often experienced as enlightening by other women. Many Western ideas have been used fruitfully by people in other cultures to organize political demands. This however should not be seen as the taking up of a universal principle of liberation, but rather as a healthy mixing of cultural information. This positive travelling of ideas can at any moment turn into its opposite. Ideas can travel in the opposite direction, from dominated to dominant cultures (though operations of hegemony make this sort of travelling more difficult). The women's health movement of the early seventies provides some examples of Western feminists learning from their Third World sisters. Non-western holistic approaches to medicine were adopted and the medical model of child-birth as a disease were

¹⁹ Given the powerful forces of hegemony, it seems to me that the dangers inherent in positing false universals is far greater than what is gained in solidarity by taking a universalist position.

challenged using cultural resources of women in the Third world.²⁰

For various historical reasons women in the West have been able to articulate their interests in fruitful ways not available in some other societies. This may have something to do with the extreme individualism of capitalist societies that has allowed the social positions of men and women to be brought up for question. Upon contact with the West, women of in the Westernized bourgeoisies of many colonized countries were put in some situations similar to those of Western bourgeois women. They were then able to take up some of the cultural possibilities opened up by Western feminism. One of the effects of this has been that in many colonized countries, feminism has been associated with the interests of bourgeois women rather than the interests of women as a whole. As Western feminists we often find ourselves in paradoxical situations of supporting the positions of relatively privileged women. This is partially because we have been more able to understand the interests of these women and to see our own concepts of liberation reflected in their struggles, and they have been more able to find resonances in the work of Western feminists.

²⁰ For a discussion of the concept of ideas 'travelling' see Edward. W. Said, The World, the Text and the Critic, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

The problem with this phenomenon is that it has often led to a conditional support of women in other cultures. We only support them as long as what they are doing is seen as women's liberation on our terms. The strategy of supporting the liberation struggles of other peoples when their interests do not resonate with our own puts us on shaky and uncomfortable grounds. But in order to support the liberation of women from other societies and social groups, women from dominant social groups need to listen to the self-articulation of the agendas of those they see themselves as supporting, even when this self articulation incorporates ideas or interests that we do not understand as part of our agendas for liberation.²¹

Section 4:

If we understand critical discourses to grow out of situated concerns of people in particular concrete situations, then we can continue to engage in critique long after we have given up on a universal epistemology.

²¹ An interesting example of this was recently experienced by a friend of mine who visited her in-laws in China. While middle class, white feminists have often seen the ability of women to breast feed their children as part of a feminist agenda, my friend's chinese sister-in-law saw her ability to use infant formula as liberating because it freed her to go to work and leave her husband at home with the baby. While we need to be critical of Nestle for pushing infant formula on women in underdeveloped countries who would be better off breast feeding, we cannot suppose that breast feeding is necessarily a feminist practice in developing countries.

Critical discourses that grow out of one situation are often taken up in others and experienced as enlightening. This 'travelling' of ideas does not imply the epistemological superiority of the system that first generated them. There are a variety of reasons for why a particular discourse grows up in a particular context.

Given what has been said thus far in this thesis about the way that discourses of legitimation have of universalizing themselves and importing a hegemonic power, I am taking the position that the best we can do is tentatively hold on to our own critical ideas, while always understanding that they are ours and that they may work very differently in other contexts and to listen with an open ear to the critical judgments of others. We need to understand the power of hegemony in prejudicing our concepts of liberation, and of forcing others to define their interests in our terms.

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