

‘Critical’ Feminism and ‘Misogyny’ in Philosophy

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Abstract

The Greek term *misogyny* (*μισογύνης*) is translatable as “*woman hatred*,” and generally concretized by feminists in terms of androcentric value determinations and language dominance. Generally tied by feminists to Western metaphysics and socio-political philosophy, and to Western philosophic writing as a genre, some feminists have strongly condemned the ‘misogyny’ of several major canonical figures—Plato, Aristotle especially, and Descartes’s rationalist approach to ontology. A core theme has been the Aristotelian androcentric infatuation with a metaphysically geometrized causal theory and hierarchic *dualism*—a masculine rational *telos* or “final cause” as opposed to a feminine inclination toward *emotion*, for the hylomorphic superimposition of male seminal *form* over female catamenial “material cause”—in effect, for a “male and female [who] differ in their essence.” Most feminists have strongly promoted an unforgiving rejection of Aristotle’s “*metaphysical biology*” at the expense of his more gender-generous socio-political writing. In all dualisms, the secondary terms, concretized as diminished capacities, are ontologically negative: e.g., emotion, defined as a subjective agitation that marks an *absence* of reason, provides a limited transactional capacity for those who are governed by it, while reason and language are seen as open to universal transactional possibilities. ‘Critical’ Feminism will need to avoid the restrictive metaphysical “*spatializations*” of dualist philosophies (of *mind vs. body*) in order to avoid geometrized value *antecedence*, *priority*, and *social discontinuities*.

As Richard Rorty suggests, feminists need to move beyond the male-female dualism and produce “a better set of social [rather than merely gender] constructs than the ones presently available, and thus [create] a new and better human being” (Rorty, 35). Rorty entreats feminists “to consider the possibility of dropping *realism* and *universalism*, dropping the notion that the subordination of women is *intrinsically* abominable, dropping the claim that there is something called “right” or “justice” or “humanity” which has always been on their side, making their claims true. I think they might profit from thinking with the pragmatists” (*ibid.*), While Pragmatism promoted “reconstruction in philosophy” as an attempt to bypass Classical metaphysics, Tom Sorell’s “reconstructive” attempt to determine whether Descartes is “innocent” of the feminist charge of ‘misogyny’ might be used to salvage Plato and Aristotle; to determine whether Plato and Aristotle were also possibly “innocent” of the charge.

The objectivist (‘rationalist’) side of dualism that emerged with the Classical geometrization of Being, historically formulated as philosophic realism and universalism, was bound up with the complex Greek *Logos*; however, with Plato, the need for a dynamic-developmental component brought *Eros* into a dialectical confrontation with

Logos. In one sense, ‘misogyny’ has simply been the apparent victory of *Logos* over *Eros*; or as Herbert Marcuse characterized Freud’s “metapsychology,”

When philosophy conceives the essence of being as *Logos*, it is already the *Logos* of domination—commanding, mastering, directing reason, to which man and nature are to be subjected. Freud’s interpretation of being in terms of *Eros* recaptures the early stage of Plato’s philosophy, which conceived of culture not as the repressive sublimation but as the free self-development of *Eros*. (Marcuse, 114.)

However, as Marcuse points out, Western history (a history in which women were openly victimized) is one in which

Eros is being absorbed into *Logos*, and *Logos* is reason which subdues the instincts. .The insights contained in the metaphysical notion of *Eros* were driven underground. They survived, in eschatological distortion, in many heretic movements, in the hedonistic philosophy” (*ibid*).

In essence, the “notion of *Eros*...driven underground” was the effect of the identification of the *ecstatic* with the distracting and intellectually/morally limited *consummatory sexual experience*. The ‘aporetic’ Dialogues of Plato were one response to the seductive *Eros*. The Christian transformation of *Eros* into *Agape*—into a non-sexual love, and the deification of the *Logos* by St. John (Ev ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος....καὶ Θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος) were other alternatives to this dialectical confrontation. The identification of *Eros* with sexuality, one in which ‘woman’ is reduced to mere ‘body,’ is a reduction that feminists identify with misogyny in Greek philosophy, a reduction, however, that Plato ultimately attempted to avoid; in any case, a reduction that is not equivalent to “hatred.”

Following Sorell’s lead, can Classical philosophic positions labeled ‘misogynistic’ be reconstructed, thus rendering them “innocent” of the charge? Furthermore, is there a questionable premise built into feminist theory, namely, that philosophies can, and do, formally or practically *legislate* for any or possibly all human conditions and practices? And could a feminist adoption of this premise result in its partial or wholesale contempt for Western philosophy. E. Victoria Spelman provides one of the more chasmal specimens of the feminist negation of Western philosophy as it pertains to women:

What philosophers [throughout history] have had to say about women typically has been nasty, brutish, and short. A page or two of quotations from those considered among the great philosophers (Aristotle, Hume, and Nietzsche, for example) constitutes a veritable litany of contempt. Because philosophers have not said much about women it is tempting to regard their expressed views about women as asystemic; their remarks on women are unofficial asides which are unrelated to the heart of their philosophical doctrines [concerning] the nature of knowledge, truth, reality, freedom. (Spelman, 32.)

If this feminist charge suggests that Western philosophers have entertained ‘misogyny’ casually, simply as a *bias*, without any effort to make their views dialectically

understandable and defensible, then does this turn reactionary feminist writing into philosophic hoopla?

Prologue: ‘Misogyny’ as a Philosophic Issue:

There is one view of the cause of misogyny that has no philosophic merit and bypasses feminist intellectual/philosophical concerns completely; a rather crude view, it remains on the sensory level of experience and never reaches a level of abstraction: William Miller’s (1987) treatment of it in his book, *The Anatomy of Disgust*, is elaborated in Martha Nussbaum’s (2001) *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*. Briefly: “The woman becomes disgusting and slimy because she is the vehicle of the man’s semen. She becomes, by projection, the bearer of all those animal characteristics from which the male would like to dissociate himself” (Nussbaum, 221). It’s ironic that in Aristotle’s *On the Generation of Animals* (Book I), the one historic source that is the object of most intense feminist attacks, “man’s semen” is identified as the human ‘form’ that serves the material fluids woman provides. Woman’s “catamenia” (menses) are mentioned, but not derided.

The term “bias” appears in Nancy Tuana’s (1993) *The Less Noble Sex*, though Tuana makes no reference to ‘misogyny.’ She claims that Aristotle’s biology was “the first fully developed and systematic system of the science.” Nevertheless, those of his metaphoric characterizations of women cited by Tuana seem perhaps just a little less appalling than William Miller’s. Aristotle, however, was not offering a “science” based on “biases”; he was primarily a Greek philosopher whose “observations” of nature were always governed by a *spatialized, hierarchic-geometric structure*—a “metaphysical biology” that was superimposed on *differences*. A *bias* against women is not equivalent to an ontobiological space/place positioning of ‘woman’ in a geometrized social or natural setting: the defense of ‘misogyny’ would not sit well, as Plato sensed, in a society whose philosophic objective was the creation of a “just state.” As Aristotle moved the biological sphere away from metaphysics and more in the direction of political philosophy, he came ever closer to Plato’s gender-generosity. In any event, positioning women ontobiologically is not equivalent to the promotion of *hatred*.

Tuana’s treatment of Descartes’s ‘rationalism’ is equally negative: “The man of reason,” Tuana notes, “is not gender neutral. Should a woman wish to pursue the rational life,” according to Descartes, “she would have to deny all that is seen as female—attachment to individuals, private interests, and maternal feelings. She would have to learn to be cool....” (*Ibid.*) The serious question, however, is not whether these canonical figures neglected ‘woman’ or had biases that displeased feminists; rather, it is whether they were promoting ‘misogyny’ philosophically. Thus Tom Sorell’s inquiry into an “unreconstructed” Descartes was given this ironic title: “Cartesian Misogyny?”

When mere hyperbole is avoided, *hatred* is precisely a *cognitive emotion* most often driven by divisive, ideological fanaticisms. Some modern philosophies have sought to

fend off the divisive provocations of philosophic dualisms, but these dualisms were not attempts to fanatically throw out *differences*; rather, attempts were made to philosophically open the question of the possibility of *mediating* differences, especially when the latter raised larger epistemological issues linked to a *bifurcation of nature*. As A.O. Lovejoy noted: “The cave-man was perhaps the only thorough-going non-bifurcationist until our own generation—if indeed there are any such in our own generation” (Lovejoy, 35). The implication is profound: feminism—in its prizing of gender ‘Alterity’ and ‘Otherness’—tends to defensively hinge on a general theory of bifurcated nature, as if philosophers (Aristotle’s metaphysical biology notwithstanding) have somehow failed to take seriously the fact that *gender difference* is as much a part of the business of ontology as are other differences—a matter given serious consideration in the 20th century by Jacques Derrida.

Traditionally governed by a geometrized logic of concept deployment, transforming the concept of *difference* into metaphysical *bifurcations* gave rise both to axiological conflicts as well as ontological resolutions in the form of philosophic systems of “realism” and “universalism.” Dualistic views of *differences* involved the juxtaposition of some objectivized substance or process and its negation: of reason and emotion; of reality and mere appearances; of what is good and what diminishes it; of theory and practice. This transformation of *differences* into a *bifurcated nature* did intensify the plight of ‘woman’: While it made ‘dualism’ the underground philosophic irritant reflected on by feminists, it paradoxically made the reactive, dualistic concept of woman’s ‘Otherness’ or ‘Alterity’ one of feminism’s most productive intellectual stimuli.

Joanna Russ’s (1995) *What Can a Heroine Do? or Why Women Can’t Write* is a feminist exploration of the possibility of an ontological solution to androcentric dualism; the question is whether she has a productive, non-paradoxical response.

One thing I think we must know—that our traditional gender roles will not be part of the future, as long as the future is not a second Stone Age. Our traditions, our books, our morals, our manners, our films, our speech, our economic organization, everything we have inherited, tell us that to be a Man one must bend Nature to one’s will—or other men. This means ecological catastrophe in the first instance and war in the second. To be a woman, one must be first and foremost a mother and after that a server of Men; this means overpopulation and the perpetuation of the first two disasters. The roles are deadly. The myths that serve them are fatal. Women cannot write—using the old myths. But using new ones—?
(Russ, Chap. 7, p.93)

“New myths”? Will this mark the end of ‘philosophy’ for women?

Russ makes androcentric *objectivism* the essential target of her feminist critique. Her complaint is the quintessential feminist complaint: Women are tethered to the most powerful enculturation process possible--androcentric axiological objectivism. Rorty’s version, ‘universalism,’ transforms ‘woman’ into an epiphenomenon not of gender equivalence, but of the lesser relation of degraded enslavement. Both figuratively and

literally, ‘woman’ appears as *vacuous*. In essence, Russ finds that most characterizations of ‘woman’ lack the space-time, developmental denotations attributable to men:

The Other has no mind at all. No man in his senses ever says to himself to *himself*: I acted nobly because I am a Noble Savage. His reasons are far more prosaic: I did what I did because I was afraid ambitious felt lonely...[etc.]. Look for reasons like that to explain the conduct of the Bitch Goddess and you will not find them; there is no explanation in terms of human motivation or the woman’s own inner life; she simply behaves the way she does because she is a bitch. Q.E.D....[T]he Other contains a mysterious *essence*, which causes it to behave as it does; in fact “it” is not a person at all, but a projected wish or fear. (*Ibid.*, 82.)

The real fight for ‘Critical’ feminism, since “new myths” might subtly re-invent old dualist ontologies (the defensive paradox implicit in ‘Otherness’ and ‘Alterity’), is to find a way out of those ontological dualisms that have resisted change—as Rorty suggests. But this search for a way out has been explored for more than a century: feminism itself might never have emerged as a theoretical and political voice had not Darwin and Charcot, as well as Dewey’s *Human Nature and Conduct*, among others, psychologically and epistemologically challenged such dualisms as reason vs. emotion, objectivity vs. subjectivity, etc. The radical notion that emotion is manifestly linked to cognition is itself a contribution to the defeat of the dualist concept of the “second [emotion-governed] sex.”

Unreconstructed ‘Aristotelianism’ in the Modern World

The ontological/moral basis for objectivist (universalist) ontology is characterized by Rorty as follows:

The typical universalist is a moral realist, someone who thinks that the true moral judgments are *made* true by something out there in the world. Universalists typically take this truth maker to be the intrinsic feature of human beings *qua* human. They think you can sort out the real from the illusory abominations by figuring out which those intrinsic features are, and then all that is required to figure this out is hard, clear, thought. (Rorty, 6)

Rorty’s implicit (and at times explicit) advice to feminists is that they must move beyond the principles of *antecedence*, *priority*, and *discontinuity* embedded in objectivist ontology, principles especially challenged by Historicism and Pragmatism. Rorty uses Stout’s ‘critique of antecedence’ to cleanse rhetoric of its realist fundamentalism:

Suppose we define a moral abomination, with Jeffrey Stout, as something which goes against our sense of “the seams of our moral universe,” one which crosses the line between, as he puts it, “the categories of our cosmology and our social structure”....Then the choice between a realist and a pragmatist rhetoric is the choice between saying that moral progress gradually aligns these seams with the *real* seams, and saying that it is a matter of simultaneously reweaving and enlarging a fabric *which is not*

intended to be congruent with an antecedent reality. (Rorty, 11n, italics added.)

Without empirically examining the process of enculturation, notable androcentric objectivists in higher education have bought into a wholesale version of unreconstructed Aristotelianism: On January 17, 2005, the *Boston Globe* reported that the President of Harvard University, Lawrence Summers, created an uproar when he proclaimed what seemed like a serious observation concerning gender difference, a difference consisting of a lack of the most important component required for academic success, *viz.*, rational objectivity. Summers publically declared that “innate differences between men and women might be one reason fewer women succeed in science and math careers.” He seriously “questioned how much of a role discrimination [actually] plays in the dearth of female professors in science and engineering.” At play in the field of “metaphysical biology,” Summers inferred that, notwithstanding what women *are* capable of doing, their intellectual limitations are by *nature* fixed or predetermined.

This metaphysical denigration of women has been a pervasive force throughout Western history. Notwithstanding the ‘softening’ of *hatred* in psychoanalytic theory—for example in Ian D. Suttie’s notion that “Hatred...is just a standing reproach to the hated person, and owes all its meaning to a demand for love”—when driven by a metaphysically governed ‘observation,’ *hatred* is the most powerful and virulent of all *cognitive emotions*—especially when support is provided by a *dichotomous* metaphysics of *rigid, inflexible space-place differences*. Often identified by feminists as an attack against the (nebulous) *Alterity* or *Otherness* of ‘woman’s’ metaphysical *place*, and then generalized through a practice of xenophobic *alienation*, the result is the ‘globalization’ of the hated object. Sexism and Racism become the most common examples of projected *spatial ‘globalizations’*—‘reality’ enclosures that tend to becloud the *extensive space-time denotations* that serve to individuate the members of a group. A feminist play on the label “Bitch Goddess” illustrates the point: the *ambiguity* embedded in this ‘misogynic’ label, as a ‘*global*’ *non-explicative connotation* of ‘woman’s’ identity, overrides any and all of the *space-time extensive denotations* that might conceivably serve to individuate each evolving member of the female gender.

The feminist question is whether there is any pathway out—since even ‘method’ (contrasted with feminine ‘intuition’) is a suspected androcentric term. Is it possible to neutralize the geometric space/place dualism so as to avoid the socio-cultural ambiguity implicit in the alienated *Other*; and by ‘deconstructing’ the dualisms of traditional metaphysics, as Derrida tried to do, to determine whether feminists can then “open a space favorable to the coming of the other”? (Carole Dely, 2008.) For such feminists as Joanna Russ, it would take a complete revamping of the traditional space/place male ‘myths’ to move ‘woman’ “To write like a woman,” rather than those simple-minded Love Stories, stories that reveal and broadcast ‘woman’s’ gift to man: a stereotypical, quick-time sublimation of the ecstatic *consummatory erotic experience*. Russ finally turns

to time-inventive, spatially reconstructive science fiction to move in a more productive direction. Whether this, finally, is a move beyond androcentric philosophy, or a competitive extension of it, is moot. Rorty, as well as Carole Dely, fear that feminism might end up with no clear connection to recognizable philosophic enquiry.

Given his concentration on the concept of “difference,” Carole Dely will probably concur that Jacques Derrida’s deconstructionist response to ‘woman’s’ *otherness* is, more than any other philosopher’s, sensitive to the issues raised here. However, in her study of Derrida’s “deconstruction of phallogocentrism,” Dely states: “If that [i.e., ‘woman’] which was excluded is reintroduced within what excluded it [i.e., philosophy], what happens then? Will there be “philosophy” (“metaphysics”), *the same one*? In its name, Jacques Derrida doubtless cannot answer. . . . The woman must answer for herself. . . . By appealing to *the voice of the other*, he [Derrida] thus engages the *perchance* of a reorientation of discourse, history, and the tradition.” (Dely, *loc. cit.*)

In effect, from Derrida’s deconstructionist position, the best that male philosophers can do is break through the fixed *identity centers* that lie at the heart of traditional *philosophic dualisms*, especially those that support geometric gender hierarchies.

Discovering ‘innocence’ in Plato’s ontology

That scholars like Gregory Vlastos and Elizabeth Spelman (cf. Tuana, *loc. cit.*) insist on using the term “misogyny” to characterize Aristotle’s work indicates a limited attention to his larger work on gender differences. It is also curious to read their squabble over whether Plato was a “feminist” philosopher—and then, conversely, whether Plato was “somatophobic.” Plato’s interpretation of *differences*, whether racial or gender has to be understood in terms of the different transactional *competency* requirements of the ideal State. The ‘Just State’ is a geometric, spatial configuration in which different levels of membership are treated justly when they are provided with the resources and opportunities for exercising their innate capacities. Without a justifiable division of labor, no ‘just’ society, feminist or otherwise, can exist. For Plato—

Both genders will supply citizens who perform functions across class lines. Citizens’ shares of goods in the ideal city are unequal not because of differences in merit, but when different shares are required by their work (thus philosophers and military auxiliaries may not own private property, although farmers and householders may....) In principle, the lower classes of the ideal city are given no less than the ruling class—they are all given what makes them as happy as possible. (Kamtekar, 10, italics added.)

Furthermore, to attack Plato’s position on ‘woman’ as “somatophobic” is to “Neoplatonize” Plato—an interpretation challenged by Kamtekar:

there is no conceptual impossibility in Plato’s having views about race, [since] he considers moral distinctions between people more significant than ethnic ones—although the two might be related. But while Plato’s

views about a possible relationship between virtue and race are underdetermined, his criteria of moral superiority undermine, rather than legitimate, existing inequalities, and his principle of justice rules out the meritocratic institutions that are the basis of modern racism. (*Ibid.*)

Before condemning Plato for his “somatophobic” misogyny, ‘Critical’ feminists must carefully read his work and then filter out those post-Hellenistic interpretations. Referring to his concepts of form/matter, mind/body, and the *Idea*, a celebrated Plato scholar reminds the reader that “to suspect an intentional *mystification* on Plato’s part would be a misunderstanding. *Plato is not a Neoplatonist.*” (Friedländer, 64, italics added.)

Arguably, then, while the metaphysical superimposition of a pyramidal ‘*spatialized structure*’ was the Classical Greek medium, it was *not* its intention to incentivize xenophobic hatred of the *Other*: as a *cognitive* emotion, *hatred* would have categorically exploded the *protreptic* (Socratic, moral) underpinning of philosophy as an *extended, forward-looking* process of rational inquiry—one driven by a special sense of *Eros*. Greek philosophers understood that the danger of virulent emotion was its drive toward the premature, abortive cloture of the *maieutic* (midwifery) teaching process and its dialectical birthing of philosophic ideas. The Greek concentration on the establishment of political and social harmony could not, without ridiculous contradiction, alienate half the population of the State. Ultimately, in his political writing, Aristotle concurred.

Plato raised this issue in the *Republic* in an effort to identify the contribution of women to the creation of a generation of Statesmen. This creative process, broadly identified with *Eros*, was the erotic passion that drove philosophic inquiry; it was the consummatory power that drove artistic inventiveness. So-called ‘misogyny’ was not the driving force of ‘androcentric’ Greek philosophy; the ostensive driving force was the discovery of the productive consummatory experience in which women played a role. Against the full power of *Eros*—of the metaphysical drive of the erotic—was the explosive power of inter-gender sexuality, the compelling revelation of the creative power of the consummatory experience. Classical Greece discovered that, in the drive toward *ekstasis* (Freud’s “pleasure principle”), philosophy and art were simply manifest processes for prolonging, expanding, and selectively propagating the *consummatory* in all experiential human endeavors. This meant the integration and reintegration of form and matter—an *ekstasis*-producing power that is grossly *time-contaminated* and intellectually limiting in inter-gender sexual experiences. But how can one geometrize/spatialize this time-infected drive toward *ekstasis*—the transporting consummatory experience? Aporetic dialogical philosophy was one response. Pederasty was another.

References to ‘woman’ as *matter* were not intended to convey misogynistic sentiments: the inter-gender consummatory experience was perfectly suggestive, but limited from the standpoint of productive work required for a Just State or just person and a philosophic apprehension of truth. Pederasty need not be read as a negation of ‘woman’ by male philosophers; its function was much more complex, from the standpoint of

achieving insight through Eros. James Davidson, as we shall soon see, has put this matter into a more productive interpretation of Classical Greek philosophy—into a form that might help to provide a Socratic/Platonic/Aristotelian plea of “*innocence*” to the charge of ‘misogyny.’

Eros and the Consummatory Experience

Since Plato’s *Republic* is his blueprint for the development of a Just State, Book V makes a strong case for the social importance of women, *both mind and body*. In the earlier Dialogues, the possibility of *knowledge* is the prevailing issue. There, the *love* of wisdom moves mankind in the dialectical/dialogical direction of a consummatory *intellectual* experience; this ‘protreptic’ pathway (where, morality is inherent in the continuing *process* rather than the *outcome*) is time-consuming and arduous—indeed, in the ‘aporetic’ Dialogues of Plato, though consummatory conclusions are vigorously pursued, the Dialogues are generally inconclusive. However, the consummatory experience that came through inter-gender sexual activity was both competitively powerful and less time-consuming, hence more an ecstatic distraction than the intellectual/dialectical pursuit of knowledge. The *pederastic* relationship, as James Davidson has noted, is less threatening and more broadly productive than inter-gender sexual interactions:

A boy’s beauty gets you carried away because it ‘rings a bell’, a distant memory that you cannot quite put your finger on, a memory of a true vision of true beauty. This is how these three recurring figures, the man in love, the man possessed or abducted, and the seeker after the truth of things (the lover of wisdom), are identified as one and the same. (Davidson, 217.)

“Socrates *erotikos*, the amatory philosopher”

Starting with Plato, Spelman (1992) points out that women have become entangled in the traditional philosophic ‘mind-body’ dualism, one in which women emerge more as ‘body’ than ‘mind’. Though Spelman seems to sense that a paradox might be buried in what she has called Plato’s “somatophobic” view of women, she complains that “One of [Plato’s] favorite devices for bringing [his mind/body distinction] to a high luster is holding up, for our contempt and ridicule, the lives of women.” This is one of the ways he tries to make clear that “it makes no small difference whether you lead a *soul-directed* or a *bodily-directed* life.” (Italics added.) This is a philosophically critical comment, since its meaning might point to a more subtle understanding of Plato’s position on gender differences. (In a related discussion, it seems paradoxical for Spelman to claim both that Aristotle’s “negative characterization of women tarnishes his philosophic theories” and yet also claim that his references to women are merely tangential.)

In Plato’s *Republic*, in the interchange between Socrates and Glaucon concerning ‘good breeding,’ the purpose of which is to create a class of political Guardians, Socrates gives selective recognition to the role of women in the procreation of good minds:

Socrates: It follows from our previous agreements, first, that the *best men* must have sex with the *best women* as frequently as possible, while the opposite is true of the most inferior men and women, and second, that if our herd is to be of the highest possible quality, the former's offspring must be reared but not the latter's. And this must all be brought about without being noticed by anyone except the ruler, so that our herd of guardians remains as free from dissension as possible. Then there'll have to be some sophisticated lotteries introduced, so that at each marriage the inferior people we mentioned will blame luck rather than the rulers when they aren't chosen. (*Republic*, Book V, 459. Italics added.)

The feminist claim that Plato was “somatophobic” is irrelevant in this ancient discussion of eugenics, since, for Plato, the “best women” are an ontobiological reality and, as such, are better (formally and materially) than a majority of ordinary (“most inferior”) men. To neutralize Spelman’s critique, and qualify her discussion of Plato’s “somatophobia,” one must consider Francisco Gonzalez’s claim that Plato’s work should not be confused with a narrow mind/body dualism that has historically come down as “Platonism.” It is this manipulated work of Plato that is the historic object of derision by “the logical positivists and the pragmatists, the deconstructionists and the existentialists” (Gonzalez, 15)—and very likely by feminists who complain about Plato’s “somatophobia.” Notwithstanding James Davidson’s attempt to neutralize the gender issue in the Greek concept of love (*Eros*), he tends to confirm the objectivist-universalist concept of truth that Rorty (among others mentioned by Gonzalez) condemns:

the man in love is really one possessed by a god, Eros, and....this is the best kind of divine inspiration, not really irrational, but a man making a mental leap toward what is beyond reach, stretchingup for that dimly remembered vision of true beauty, perceived with true understanding , that the enamoured experienced when s/he was a soul soaring above the universe in the train of one of the gods, the truth which is out there.

(Davidson, *loc cit.*, 216.)

But while what follows in Davidson’s discussion might seem contradictory to this notion of a “truth which is out there,” this much is clear: To identify *eros (erotikos)* with ‘woman as body’ is a corruption of Plato’s view. If it were a correct characterization of his position, it would drop his work into a sea of paradoxes. There was nothing in the *nature* of women that precluded their capacity for intellectual work. Not all women could do this work, but that restriction applied equally to men. Since Plato’s Socrates, the “*erotikos* philosopher,” pinned *eros* to the dialogical pursuit of knowledge, he had to simply bracket the erotic relationship to women. Davidson, once again:

This embedding of love in knowledge is the reason why the lover and beloved who ‘go all the way’ are ‘without philosophy’, and why those who do not are properly philosophical, inasmuch as they are constantly reaching upward, trying to shrink the distance between themselves, between themselves and the outer limits, without quite closing it. This is why Socrates, the Socrates in Plato’s

dialogues, never seems to consummate *eros*—he doesn’t find a lover, or enjoy a full-on sexual relationship—because since *eros* is his philosophy, once the gap has been bridged, his enterprise, which is quintessentially the activity of seeking knowledge, is at an end, and there is dogma and fundamentalism. (*Ibid.*, 216f.)

Is there noticeable evidence that supports this viewpoint? Does inter-gender ‘love’ generally end as “dogma”—as something lifeless and terminal, something held together by lifeless beliefs?

Misogyny is not the issue here, nor is it the issue wherever and whenever the creative mind is in pursuit of the magnificent, seemingly endless *consummations* of art or philosophy. The woman is not despised when bracketed by the “upward-bound” male, but is safely *immortalized* in the poem, the song, and the creative invention—in the magnificent, gender-generous Greek theogony. The consummatory experience of sexuality, given the limited life span of humans, is sublimated for the sake of time-consuming creativity. Art through sublimation emerged as an important issue throughout Western history—certainly in the “iconoclastic controversy” of the 2nd Council of Nicaea (787 A.D.), as well as in Freud-inspired 20th century sublimational aesthetics.

Beethoven erotikos, the amatory composer

The Socratic ‘upward-reaching’ *eros* had far-reaching historic significance: The greater, the more prolific the creator, the more the “Immortal Beloved” became the “Distant Beloved”—so Beethoven struggled with it through a compositional dialectic, while Socrates struggled dialogically/pederastically with the consummatory *eros*. In his chapter entitled “*An die ferne Geliebte*” (Beethoven’s song, “On the distant beloved”), the musicologist Joseph Kerman cites an extensive remark by Martin Cooper, a Beethoven biographer, who dealt directly with the concept of the ‘consummatory experience’ in life and art:

[Beethoven’s] attitude to women was always ambiguous, as is shown by the conflicting accounts of his contemporaries and his abortive relationships with a series of generally aristocratic girls... The attraction that he felt towards his aristocratic pupils...often seems to have thrived in proportion as it was unrealizable in fact and the letters to the Immortal Beloved, even if they were ever sent and were not simply a literary effusion, show him retreating behind vague excuses and finding reasons in advance why his passion could never be consummated. (Kerman, 179.)

There is no evidence of misogyny here: “The figure of a Distant Beloved, adored from afar, is not exactly rare in lyric poetry. Still it turns up in what would appear to be more than a statistically fair share of Beethoven’s song poems.”

Aristotle's "innocent" heuristic hylomorphism:

Nancy Tuana's exclusive attention to Aristotle's biological work, *On The Generation of Animals*, takes literally a series of negative phrases: 'Woman' is "the misbegotten man," or "Woman [is] a Natural Monstrosity," or "The female is, as it were, a mutilated male," *et al.* Though Tuana cites Michael Boylan's reference to Aristotle's "method of critical empiricism, a careful blend of observation and theory," and though she fails to consider these Aristotelian metaphors as heuristic, she notes that "there are times when Aristotle deviated from his method of critical empiricism, times when he relied upon *a priori* predilections and biases rather than careful observations" (Tuana, *op. cit.*, 19ff). It is vital to keep in mind that Aristotle was a prolific writer and an itinerant philosopher; his views were subject to significant developmental change. A careful examination, however, of Aristotle's *On the Generation of Animals* will reveal that his biological explorations, especially in Books I and II, are served by several *metaphysical* concepts: form and matter, essence and *telos*, potency and actuality, and Aristotle's complex theory of causation. In fact, this early work referred to by Tuana, and discussed below, has been identified as a "metaphysical biology."

Biologically, the complex "work of generation" requires the interplay of more than one medium (form and matter) and more than one cause: "the first efficient cause" and the "still further remote" final cause (cf. Book II, #1). Thus the task in Book I is to resolve the controversial issue whether semen, the "efficient cause" of generation, is solely a male's contribution, and whether the woman provides the "material cause," a fluid somewhat different from semen. There is a subtle sense, then, that without the intrinsic interdependence of form and matter, causal interplay would not be possible. Aristotle's "innocence" might be achieved when it is determined that the sharp division of form and matter would have to be heuristic, for otherwise the *causes* of generation would not be organically interdependent. The feminist charge of 'misogyny' requires a sharp dualistic division between these factors, a division overstated in Aristotle's early work.

Book II #1 of *On The Generation of Animals* is the source of much feminist contention. Aristotle states:

Again, as the first efficient or moving cause, to which belong the definition and the form, is better and more divine in its nature than the material on which it works, it is better that the superior principle should be separated from the inferior. Therefore, wherever it is possible and so far as it is possible, the male is separated from the female. For the first principle of the movement, or efficient cause, whereby that which comes into being is male, is better and more divine than the material whereby it is female. The male, however, comes together and mingles with the female for the work of generation, because this is common to both. (Book II #1, paragraph 2.)

Aristotle's philosophy of *difference* is constructed as a geometric metaphysics in which differences are hierarchically separated in terms of their essences, and these are revealed through their inherent competencies or capacities for interaction; his reference to the "divine" character of male "form" does muddy the water and brings attention to his possible 'misogyny'—if read literally.

The semen implanted by the male provides the *form*—the soul; but the female also contributes a secretion that "has all the arts in it *potentially* though none of them *actually*." Does the male have this form even when he fails to actualize what is potential in the female? It is here that one of Tuana's condemned terms appears: "For the female is, *as it were, a mutilated male*, and the catamenia [menses] are semen, only not pure; for there is only one thing they have not in them, the principle of soul." It is only when the semen of the male (soul or form) is introduced "to the secretion of the female it becomes an embryo." (*Ibid.*, #3, paragraph 7, italics added.) But if this embryo is a female or "mutilated male," does it have a soul? (One is reminded of the later, Medieval controversy as to whether animals have souls, for if they do, then carnivorous human practices would be forbidden.) The process is befuddling. With respect to Aristotle's metaphysical biology, feminist complaints call for a serious response.

Since the generation of males requires the help of women, how could misogyny be Aristotle's intention? If an 'unreconstructed' Aristotle could call women "incomplete men," could a reconstructed version proclaim that men are "incomplete women"—or perhaps in a more daring brief for genetic continuity, that hermaphrodites are the only "complete women" and "complete men." Two approaches are suggested: one involves radical surgery, the other a broad reconstructive approach.

In his provocative revival of Aristotle's ethical theory for contemporary use, one constructed with Aristotle's concepts of "virtue" and "telos" in mind, Alasdair MacIntyre attempts to recast Aristotle's position so that his "innocence" can be secured. And, of course, there is one radical thing he must do:

But in at least three areas questions arise which, unless they can be answered satisfactorily, endanger the whole Aristotelian structure. The first of these concerns the way in which Aristotle's teleology presupposes his metaphysical biology. *If we reject that biology, as we must, is there any way in which the teleology can be preserved?* (MacIntyre, 162, italics added.)

MacIntyre's reply is positive, since Aristotle's concept of the "virtues" and "vices" can be rationally evaluated: they are "those qualities necessary to promote [human] flourishing and well-being." Here, women can actually play an important role, as Aristotle will note in his criticism of the Spartan treatment of women.

In still another direction, one can argue that Aristotle gradually moved away from his "metaphysical biology" as he moved closer to Plato's interest in politics, and here, especially, one can plead "innocent" to any charge of hylomorphically-rooted 'misogyny.' Aristotle's connection to Plato is most noticeable in Book 2 of his *Politics*,

where, with the negative treatment of women in Sparta in mind, and the typical 50/50 gender division of most city-states, he could argue that, with the mistreatment of women, only half of the population would be governed by law; only half would experience happiness. It makes little philosophic sense to simply, literally, reduce Aristotle's 'woman' to mindless matter, in effect to Spelman's radically isolated "body." Arguably, in the quest for an Aristotelian "innocence," it is possible to find in Aristotle's heuristic 'hylomorphism' a metaphysical resolution to the exaggerated claim that "'woman' is body." If hylomorphism were a metaphysical necessity, different *causal-functional* requirements and directions in Nature would demand a version that serves to *integrate differences* rather than reductively disintegrate them. What follows is a reconstructed hylomorphism, one that might serve this quest for an "innocent" version of Aristotle's position.

In a drive toward "innocence," the Aristotelian critique of Plato's early *abstractionism*'—of a radically dualistic hylomorphism extended to gender differences, or differences in general—would require a metaphysics in which *form is matter*, and *matter is form*. These can be separated for heuristic purposes, but isolating them and constructing a "metaphysical biology" based on this isolation is precisely the source of all the confusion created by Aristotle's *On The Generation of Animals*. In reality, one cannot construe the *form* without *materializing* it; *materialization*, then, is a process of *formalizing difference* through material concretion. For both genders, then, as Aristotle recognized, ***matter is the principle of individuation***—the individuation of what might otherwise be a mere symbolic representation of a thing, those Platonic 'forms' that Aristotle rejected. Indeed, one might speculate that Aristotle's *On The Generation of Animals* belonged to that period in his life when he was still enamoured with Plato's early work.

The Greeks well knew that without materialization, the differences of different geometric configurations would simply disappear. Without materialization, the individual male would disappear. To reduce 'woman' to "body" is, therefore, metaphysically nonsensical. 'Man' is no less "body" than 'woman.' Gender differences are first and foremost *material differences*, differences that can be given different formal expressions—as in paintings. And, as Plato and Aristotle recognized, since some men are demonstrably less 'rational' than some women (*pace* Lawrence Summers), then 'misogyny' is no issue.

An *unreconstructed* Aristotelian notion of *difference* appears metaphysically divisive—a position condemned to the sort of irresolvable dualism implicit in the identification of 'woman' as 'Other' or as 'Alterity.' An *innocent* Aristotelian position reads differences in non-dualist terms, while in *unreconstructed* Aristotelianism, in literal rather than heuristic axiological language, form is superior to matter, males are *superior*, women *inferior*—biologically, morally, politically; males stand to women as masters stand to slaves; though women do have reason, they are governed more by appetite than

by reason, and therefore must conform to the authoritative demands that come from outside themselves—that is, from men. But to the extent that, for Aristotle, *matter is the principle of individuation*, the extreme dualist version of hylomorphism must be rejected. Aristotle and Plato could join hands metaphysically, largely through the ultimate importance of ‘woman’ on the political sphere. Gender interdependence is both a material and formal fact at one and the same time—a social, biological and metaphysical fact. In a broad theory of the natural causation of gender interdependence, it would simply be gratuitous to throw misogyny or ‘woman hatred’ into the mix—especially by The Philosopher, as the more gender-generous Christian’s referred to Aristotle.

It is important to note that though Aristotle’s philosophy strongly impacted on the work of such later philosophers as Thomas Aquinas, misogyny was not part of the inheritance. St. Thomas adopted Aristotle’s hylomorphism and developed a rather complex discussion of the difference between man and woman—a discussion too detailed to cite here (cf. Joseph Francis Hartel [1993], *Femina ut Imago Dei*: in the *Integral Feminism of St. Thomas Aquinas*). Thomas recognized biological differences, but no differences in ‘essence’ between the genders. Though Thomas adopted much of the “scientific grammar” of Aristotle, some of which has been considered negative with respect to women, in response Hartel cites Stephen R. L. Clark’s statement: “it is enough to note that Aristotle’s doctrines are not the product of unthinking prejudice, but a serious attempt to come to terms with the fact of male/female differences and dependence.” (cf. Stephen R.L. Clark, *Aristotle’s Man: Speculations upon Aristotelian Anthropology*, 211.) And notwithstanding Nancy Tuana’s inattention to St. Thomas in her “Not in God’s Image” (*op. cit.*, Chap. 3). Hartel notes that for St. Thomas,

...the *imago Dei* exists in woman’s nature. Woman’s entire being is shown to image God. It does so for three reasons: because of the nature of her mind, because of her intellectual powers, and because of a certain kind of *ipsum esse* she has acquired. (Hartel, 358.)

Conclusion: Sorell’s drive toward Philosophic “innocence”

The feminist chronicler, Charlotte Witt (2007, 2012), has attempted to reveal the ironies in the feminist complaint:

From the perspective of negative canon formation, the history of philosophy is a resource only in so far as it describes the theories and thinkers that were most deeply mistaken about women. Other feminist historians of philosophy have found important resources for feminism in canonical philosophers. *Indeed, they have found valuable concepts even in the worst offenders of the negative canon, like Aristotle and Descartes.* (Witt, Section 3. Italics added.)

As we examine Sorell’s attempt to distinguish the very different philosophic directions taken by Aristotle and Descartes, we need to ask how the “worst offenders” in misogynistic philosophic writing can possibly contribute “valuable concepts” for

feminism unless offenders are open to the possibility of “innocence”? In how many *different* philosophic contexts can ‘woman’ be the object of misogyny?

In his philosophic examination of Descartes, Tom Sorell compares Aristotle to a “reconstructed” Descartes, a reconstruction that renders Descartes philosophically “*innocent*” of the charge of misogyny. The core issue, troublesome to feminists, has been a long-standing androcentric effort to prioritize reason or rationality in a dualistic portrait of gender differences. Sorell, who accepts Descartes’ hope “to undo the influence of Aristotle by exposing all sense-based science as doubtful,” concurs that Aristotle’s position is “misogynistic.”

The presumption is that a (naïve) “sense-based science” which is governed by a “framework of everyday perception” would obviously discover that local Athenian women were inferior to men. A “reconstructed” Aristotle, however, would raise the question whether a “science” of any kind can be merely “sense-based,” since “science” would seem to presuppose the presence of some mode of *perception* defined as *observation*—that is, some way of *moving ‘critically’ beyond surface sensory stimuli*. In effect, “sensing” and “perceiving” are not equivalent; the latter requires the *cognitive* stance of an “observer.” Aristotle’s “framework” was a geometric/hierarchic design superimposed through innovative concepts of essences and causes. His division of the ‘sciences’ had a lasting impact, since it distinguished between ‘theoretical’ and ‘practical’, as well as ‘productive’ activities. On the ‘theoretical’ side, knowledge was a reflexive, cognitive activity; it was pursued for its own sake: he thus ranged well beyond the “framework of everyday [sense] perception.” Aristotle’s geometric/hierarchic approach to the functions of the soul (developed in the more advanced *De Anima*) placed sense-perception (typical text translation) just above the souls nutritive function, but below the initiation of motion and the use of intelligence. “Intelligible” objects do not fall into the domain of “sense-perception.” However, “seeing” for Aristotle, in his more advanced work, seems to come in two directions—sensory and cognitive/perceptual. In his annotated edition of the Greek text of Aristotle’s *De Anima (On the Soul)*, W.D. Ross shows that βλέπειν (‘blepein’, as physical sight, noted once in 8b22) is significantly different from ἔιδος (eidos, which occurs in a large number of interconnected versions, especially in 3b2); the latter term is joined with *logos*, *energeia*, and other terms which indicate a connection to “understanding.”

Descartes’ alternative, his prioritizing of pure reason, failed to fill the vacuum of a missing theory of perception, a problem that Thomas Reid and Kant, by bringing *cognition* ‘critically’ into play, attempted to resolve in the 18th century. A reconstruction of Aristotle allows him to produce ‘*observation-based knowledge*’ governed by a largely speculative framework, and a more advanced concept of perception—a task also pursued by later philosophers (cf. John Dewey’s, “The Ubiquity of the Knowledge Relation” in his *Essays in Experimental Logic*).

Given the somewhat ‘naïve empiricist’ characterization of Aristotle’s “observations” by several feminist writers, and Sorell’s comparison of Descartes and Aristotle, one is led to think that Aristotle transformed sensory stimuli into *immediate cognitions* of his subject matter. In his “reinvented” study of Descartes, Sorell brings attention to this matter: Descartes rejects the *direct, immediate* availability of ‘knowledge’ through sensory channels (as it is later in Kant’s “Critique”):

When he [Descartes] says that sensory ideas do not resemble what

they are ideas of; when he says that as human beings we are not naturally equipped for science but need a method of science and a capacity for doing science that is usually only dormant in us, his claims are diametrically opposed to Aristotle’s. For Aristotle *the human senses bring us into contact with the natures of things*: The *forms* that indicated the essences of natural kinds are actually part of what the *human senses take in* [sic!]. . . . The mind does not transform or correct sensory content. Instead, it allows properties common to observed things to register in the mind as a by-product of repeated presentation to the senses. . . . [For Aristotle] explanatory principles are always close [sic] to the observational surface [sic]. (Sorell, 5, italics added.)

This attempt on the part of Sorell to minimize the complexity of Aristotle’s “observational” capacities must be mistaken, since prior to Aristotle no one managed to organize fields of knowledge as he did—especially into hierarchies that were not simply sensory in nature. If Aristotle were merely a ‘surface-based’ misogynist, feminists would find Descartes’ engagement with pure reason to be a stronger threat to women. But if Sorell’s “reconstruction” of Descartes’ position works, Aristotle’s ‘misogyny’ might be approached in the same way.

[For Aristotle], the universe is centered on us humans and peculiarly open to our inspection. . . . [For Descartes] human beings are not necessarily the only intelligent creatures on Earth; there might be others elsewhere; there are certainly Intelligences greater than ours—the intelligences of angels and God, to name two. These elements of an intellectual humility are asserted against an Aristotelian physics and biology which had said outright that the best in human beings was male, and that helped to support a politics in which citizenship was not for women. One does not have to strain to find misogyny in Aristotle; but in Descartes the recognition of the mind or soul as the governing force in humanity is a way of getting beyond gender. (Sorell, 147.)

But it does not take any stretch of the philosophic imagination to re-compose Sorell’s last lines to read as follows: “. . . but in [Aristotle] the recognition of the mind or soul as the governing force in humanity is a way of getting beyond gender.” Ironically, it might be a lot easier to bring Aristotle to a position of “innocence” with respect to misogyny than Descartes, for after all is said, Sorell still needs to reconstruct Descartes’s “sexless soul,” as well as avoid the rationalist divorce of reason from desire. Sorell cites

Stanley Clarke's view "that Descartes's moral ideal—with its emphasis on self-sufficiency and indifference to what is outside one's control—is a recognizable male ideal." He also notes Clarke's admission "that, in general, Descartes's philosophy is without the resources to explain the social ingredients of dominant illusions about what is ideal in men and women." (*Ibid.*, 148.)

If Donald Davidson's concepts of "radical interpretation" and "principle of charity" can be applied to Sorell's concept of "innocent Cartesianism," we would ask that the same consideration be given to Aristotle. From a developmental/evolutionary standpoint, dualism is irrelevant. Here, Davidson would argue that any view that proclaims the "irrationality of 'woman'" cannot account for a woman's use of language and logical discourse. Evnine notes:

No other philosophical approach comes as close to accounting for the importance that rationality has for rational creatures such as we are. Davidson has placed in center stage the crucial insight that rationality, consistency, coherence and logic are not 'optional extras' for creatures that have content-bearing mental states and use language. They lie right at the heart of these capacities.... Whatever difficulties Davidson's work on rationality faces, the insight that without reason there is no thought is so valuable that I believe it should be bought at almost any price. (Evnine, 179.)

However, and most important, while Davidson's utopianism can acknowledge and welcome the voices of the 'Other' gender, of 'Alterity' embedded in poetry, androcentric 'reason' does not exhaust human communication. In his *Tragic Thoughts at the End of Philosophy* (1999), Gerald Bruns notes, as he expands Davidson's portrait, that

[Davidson's] is a picture of free speech, linguistic energy converted into social contact rather than into the production of concepts, meanings, propositions, schemes of thought and other portable and more or less reusable structures of mediation. Notice that it is not so much a picture of a world absolutely without concepts, meanings, and so on, as it is a picture of communication that does not need these things in order to happen...The intelligibility of poetry is closer to the intelligibility of everyday life when two people encounter one another in passing and, well, make up a passing theory. As if poetry were "the cry of its occasion" after all. Let every passing theory find a poem. (Bruns, 56.)

'Critical' Feminism's contribution to philosophy will come when women see androcentric philosophies as "passing theories"—when drastic accusations are set aside—"when two people encounter one another in passing and, well, make up a passing theory." This warns us not to expect philosophy to *legislate* in matters of human conduct (nor in science, as Paul Feyerabend has noted). Philosophy is the process of turning Nature into a human Art—as Kant recognized; a moment when the "Bitch Goddess" is

framed in gold and celebrated as the “Mona Lisa,” or given Wings in Samothrace to celebrate Victory.

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