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Source: *Hypatia*, Vol. 12, No. 3, Third Wave Feminisms (Summer, 1997), pp. 100-115

Published by: Wiley on behalf of Hypatia, Inc.

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3810224>

Accessed: 04-12-2017 01:16 UTC

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Rethinking Philosophy in the Third Wave of Feminism

DAVID GOLUMBIA

The influence of feminist theory on philosophy has been less pervasive than it might have been. This is due in part to inherent tensions between feminist critique and the university as an institution, and to philosophy's place in the academy. These tensions, if explored rather than resisted, can result in a revitalized, more explicitly feminist conception of philosophy itself, wherein philosophy is seen as an attempt to rethink the deepest aspects of experience and culture.

A revolution in thought and ethics is needed if the work of sexual difference is to take place. We need to reinterpret everything concerning the relations between the subject and discourse, the subject and the world, the subject and the cosmic, the microcosmic and the macrocosmic.
(Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 1984)

Deconstruction teaches me that the politics of teaching we know in the academy is a bad politics—a politics of refuting, following your master, etc. It is more interesting to enter into texts so that the moments of bafflement can become useful.

(Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak,
"Interview with *Radical Philosophy*," 1990)

It is in large part due to the work of feminists that there exists today in the United States, at least in nascent form, a revitalized conception of philosophy.¹ Along with thinkers and theorists from a variety of other-than-altogether-orthodox disciplines (deconstructionists, cultural, psychoanalytic, postcolonial, queer and critical race theorists, Marxists, and others), feminists have helped us, even forced us, to think again about what human activities, what

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intellectual, political, and interpersonal pursuits are or ought to be or might be named by the somewhat ossified term “philosophy.”²

This philosophical rethinking has, I shall suggest, only just begun. Yet some aspects of what we can loosely call the “third wave of feminism,” along with other, allied “waves,” today pose real challenges to the ongoing health of the process.³ These challenges arise not from feminism itself but instead from the social structures and institutions within and through which recent feminism has subsisted, and in some ways flourished. Nonetheless, I will suggest that the problems threaten some of the most potentially liberatory and revolutionary aspects of feminist practice and theory. In at least one sense, the furthering of feminist theory and philosophy finds itself in conflict with feminism’s own institutional success—however partial that success has been.

What is of particular interest to me in this essay is the role of feminist theory and feminist philosophy in the contemporary academy. As with almost every radical academic movement in recent political and intellectual history (Marxism, cultural studies, postcolonial and queer theory, etc.), academic feminism speaks with at least two voices. It rests on a firm and elaborate critique of existing institutions; but it is also often enmeshed in one of our longest-standing institutions, the university. Feminism challenges traditional notions of power relationships, hierarchy, and respect for tradition, yet feminist students are often expected to conduct apparently “traditional” relationships with established feminist scholars and to the institutional aspects of feminism itself—to say nothing of the complex obeisances that must be paid to, and accommodations made for, nonfeminist wielders of academic power. What is most striking is that whereas feminists in previous “waves” defined themselves partly through opposition to a wide range of traditional institutions and social structures, third wave feminists generally develop within structures that look very much like the traditional ones. (This is not to insist that they are the same structures.)

I want to suggest in what follows that we need to think of the feminist theoretical project (or projects) outside of, or better perhaps in addition to, the academy. That context brings with it a host of entrenched problems that by dint of feminism’s own (relative, limited) success in the academy threaten, perhaps even in the short term, to foreclose feminism’s radical potentials. This is not meant to be a specific statement about feminism, though. Feminist theory and feminist philosophy have opened a gap in the Western philosophical edifice that we urgently need to widen; a continuing, exclusive reliance on (our existing) academic institutions makes that prospect far dimmer than it needs to be.⁴ This is not by any means to suggest that productive feminist work cannot continue in the academy, or that feminist work as it is currently practiced is ineffective; far from it. It is instead to suggest a growing need to confront the institutional realities in which many of us continue to do effective work.

INSTITUTIONS OF THEORY

“Second wave” feminists—like their counterparts in a number of oppositional discourses and practices—today find themselves in a world they could not have expected, perhaps could not even have imagined. While it is clear that privileged white men still hold numerical sway over many aspects of academic life, women, feminist women in particular, do hold many positions of importance in today’s universities.⁵ Feminist work commands a great deal of intellectual and academic prestige. Indeed, in today’s university system, it is often difficult to succeed without having at least a measure of feminism in one’s theoretical pot.

The feminists who “hold power” today, however, were raised and educated in worlds radically different from our world today. In 1960 it was virtually impossible in the United States to write an academic essay of a feminist stripe and have it published anywhere, let alone in a journal that would bring academic standing and prestige.⁶ Today, in many disciplines, it is virtually impossible to find prestigious academic publications that are not associated with feminism or other oppositional theories. In the humanities generally, virtually all of the most prestigious journals explicitly embrace at least some aspects of feminist theory. (Among these, today one would have to list journals such as *Critical Inquiry*, *Signs*, *Representations*, *Cultural Critique*, *differences*, *Diacritics*, and *October*.) Where once it would have been difficult to earn tenure by writing such articles, today it is difficult to secure a first-rank academic job without them. (The situation in philosophy, in some crucial respects different from those in other humanities disciplines, is discussed in the final two sections of this paper.)

Similarly, if one wanted to pursue studies in feminism or a related field in the academy of two generations ago, one had to turn to the occasional iconoclast, or to oneself, or leave the academy altogether. Students who took up feminism (construed broadly) typically did so against the general wishes of the institution in which they worked, surely without the institution’s approbation, and very often against the institution’s very structure.

It must be very hard for those on either side of this divide truly to appreciate each other’s experiences. What must it have been like to know the effects of patriarchy, white supremacy, and class oppression and to feel that in order to affirm and extend that knowledge, one must in a fundamental and very practical way oppose the very institution that was holding out one’s hope of a life and career? On the other hand, what does it mean to receive a doctorate in, essentially, feminism?⁷ Is that not in some limited but crucial way a contradiction in terms—something like an atheist priesthood or a pacifist military?

Those examples are too glib: it would be wrong suggest that the university is the avatar of patriarchy in the same way that the military can be seen as the

avatar of warmongering. But the comparison is less invidious than it looks. Surely one central tenet of feminism is that patriarchy has operated largely through the ways it has structured, formed and sanctioned the very operations and transmissions of thought and knowledge; and what institution is more directly connected with those functions than the university? Another central tenet of feminist theory is that interpersonal relationships are determined in nearly every way through the social structuring operations that sustain patriarchy, and that many social relationships are incontestably formed through these operations. Among the classic examples are boss-worker, commanding officer-soldier, and teacher-student, as well as their Hegelian master-slave archetype. In theory, and often in practice, much of feminism implies a thorough questioning, even dismantling, of the traditional forms of these relationships.

It is therefore a problem that feminist theory today is almost exclusively available within the contemporary academy and in a broad range of teacher/student relationships that any single teacher has very little power to dismantle (even though some extremely dedicated feminist teachers do find ways to call into question their own versions of this relationship). The relationship itself is, arguably, inherently problematic. Further, it is arguable that the very idea of a “professor”—an authoritative “teacher”—of feminism, in a limited, but crucial, sense, violates feminism itself. But such an authoritative figure is precisely what the academy requires.

These comments might be misconstrued as an attack on the individuals who are feminists and on an apparent “hypocrisy” in their practice and theory. Nothing could be further from my goal. For what I mean to expose here is the way in which the university, as an institution of patriarchal (white supremacist, capitalist, homophobic, etc.) society, has worked to contain and even to structure the feminist challenge so as to put feminists in difficult, even impossible, positions—positions in which every exercise of feminist power forces us to subvert our own authority and security.⁸ If a “feminist professor” is an oxymoron, the term to which pressure should be applied is “professor.” Feminists fall into a trap if they imagine that feminist theory can advance exclusively in such institutions.

BEING IN THE WORLD

These conundrums account for a number of personality styles that occur with some frequency in universities today. Some feminist or generally leftist professors have learned to deal with the contradictions of their status by adopting what might be called an “exteriorizing” strategy. The farther they get from their own social, personal, and professional context, the more radical and intense their opposition to institutional authority becomes. Thus they have few problems laying out in detail the patriarchal implications of Shakespeare,

Montaigne, Descartes, or, for that matter, the Christian Coalition or the House Republicans. It is intensely problematic, however, for these professors to apply feminist (and Marxist and other) thinking to their own teacher-student (and in some cases, boss-employee) relationships, or to the economic conditions of the institutions in which they work, especially with regard to those teacher-student and boss-employee relationships. This is offered as an unsupported assertion, applicable only to a minority of professors, borne out only through anecdotal reports; but this pattern recurs often enough to have more than incidental relevance.⁹

Just as disturbing is a personality style seen in some students, male and female, who arrive at college (often the college of a university with extensive, high-profile cultural theorists, feminists, and other oppositional theorists on the faculty) fresh out of high school, knowing exactly what career they wish to pursue (or who arrive at graduate school with high-powered undergraduate training).¹⁰ The career they have set their sights on is, broadly speaking, feminism. The affect, aggression, and general personal tone of such students strongly resemble nothing less than those of the most aggressive MBA students.¹¹ Because of the general prominence of feminism in some parts of the academy, however, students who have only their own careers in mind can too easily adapt that careerist strategy to feminism. And because of the ever-proliferating number of positions, topics and authors associated with feminist theory, these students can go quite far by searching out the latest position, the latest theory, the latest “hot” author and presenting themselves in undergraduate and graduate school as the very brightest and most brilliant of feminist scholars. But are these students motivated by anything like the impulses that “second wave” feminists recognized as the springboards of feminism—an awareness of and deep condemnation of patriarchy and a commitment to fighting its power in every way and with all the means available—even, potentially, at substantial personal expense and hardship?¹²

It would seem not, if for no other reason than that if a career is what a student desires most strongly, a change in academic trends might very well cause the student to give up what looked like deep commitments to follow the deeper one of personal success. And this is just what one sees, with a certain regularity today. This pattern represents a profound yet subtle way that patriarchal society works to disempower feminism at its core: by repeatedly making offers that feminism cannot very easily refuse. Indeed, as a result of all the forces described here, a strong but still somewhat covert “pulling back” from the most disruptive of feminist convictions can be detected on the part of some professors and some students. Such a pullback seems in some ways inevitable, given the institutional context in which feminism today is lodged.

If feminism and the academy (as it is currently constituted) truly are in some fundamental way opposed, and if the academy purposely dulls feminism’s revolutionary and disruptive potentials (even though the academy does

sharpen and support feminism in some relatively clear ways that I have not addressed here) the question for the third wave (maybe more strongly for the fourth wave) remains, How can we extend and expand the goals and progress of feminism, including its most revolutionary and radical goals, given the creeping stalemate brought on by feminism's attachment to the (current) academy?

"PHILOSOPHY" AND THE THIRD WAVE

Before addressing this question, it is worth returning briefly to the putative subject of this essay, namely feminist philosophy. It may be that feminism has had a more profound influence on other fields in the academy than it has had on philosophy. It may even be the case that feminist philosophy may be more easily characterized as a reaction to its "mainstream" discipline (philosophy) than can other areas of feminist theory. This observation is not meant as a criticism of feminist philosophy; rather, this situation strikes me as a consequence of the discursive work that disciplinary philosophy carries out in the modern academy, and so in the world at large (though only at a great remove, and even this quite purposely).¹³ To summarize this diagnosis, again, requires first carving out a radical distinction between *Philosophy*—the name for the thing which is taught and passed on in academic philosophy departments—and *philosophy* ("with a small *p*," as Putnam 1990, 1992 or Rorty 1979 might have it), which will be used here as the name for every sort of human activity or human thinking that might usefully be thought of as philosophical. On the Derridean account I favor, the name "philosophy" in the Western context attaches precisely to the very deepest sort of thinking of which we are capable (Derrida 1984, 1990, 1995).

Everyone knows how hard it is to explain to nonacademics what (analytic) philosophers today do. Nonacademics ask whether analytic philosophers write about "deep questions," "truth, love, the good life, morals," and so forth; and we blush as we try to explain that we write about the firings of C-fibers, disquotation, possible worlds, and inverted spectra. This is not to suggest that these problems are not truly philosophical. But there is clearly a gap between what the concept "philosophy" points to tout court, and what most philosophers, especially before the advent of feminist philosophy and other countertraditional discourses, have practiced. Nor is it meant to suggest that philosophers studiously avoid these deep problems; but they do have a way of framing and bracketing these problems so as to make them largely unintelligible to most people.

On my view, some items out of the class of these "deep questions" (by which I mean only to indicate an extremely vague set of questions about identity, reality, truth, morality, and so on, which may take on a wide variety of forms depending on one's cultural and political background) are critically important

to every person in every culture. This is not to say that the same questions occur in each culture and for each person; the similarity is in the practice itself of asking, whether in “scientific” or “religious” or “philosophical” or even “political” terms—what Derrida calls “keeping the question open” (1995).

Although I can express it as no more than a prejudice, I see the discursive “work” of a great deal of analytic philosophy, at least in the United States and England, as precisely to bracket off and stop this process of questioning by anyone other than professional philosophers. When nonphilosophers look at contemporary philosophy, it is supposed to look too difficult to comprehend; it is supposed to direct them to “straight” readings of historical, dead (white, male) figures like Plato or Aristotle, in which philosophical activity becomes largely receptive and thus irrelevant.¹⁴ It is supposed to turn them away from an intense, present-time, immediate questioning of existence, politics and culture. It is precisely the ideological task of analytic philosophy to stop this questioning (to “close the question”), within the general political-ideological discourse, at all costs. Surely it has other jobs too; but this one is rarely if ever remarked on, while, paradoxically perhaps—especially to those of us with at least one foot outside the prevailing academic context—it might be seen as analytic philosophy’s clearest defining feature.

Thinking back to the development of the term “philosophy,” the parts of human cultural existence it addresses, and the profundity and necessity of those parts of existence, it can seem more than a little frightening to think that the United States, as a culture, has entrusted this whole project to the group of scholars who call themselves analytic philosophers. Do these philosophers (it seems more than fair to ask) help this culture to put its deepest questions to itself, to learn how these questions influence and structure many aspects of its ongoing existence? It also seems fair to note how frequently the concerns even of major philosophers (especially Hilary Putnam, but others as well) become marginalized; these philosophers are thought of as “off the deep end” or “past their prime” or “no longer interested in philosophy” in institutional corridors just as they turn their attention to the “deep questions” that might be considered the heart of (our) philosophy.

On my view, these questions are implicated at every level of our culture, in not only its intellectual life but especially its political life. It seems to me that Philosophy occupies a special place in our ideological state apparatuses (so to speak). Unlike literary criticism or art history or even history (though each of these also plays special roles), Philosophy has a specific ideological job to do; and it has done the job well.¹⁵

This success accounts for some of the ways in which feminist philosophy has developed in the academy. Whereas “feminist literary criticism” has evolved alongside “literary criticism” to such a degree that the leading edge of what we practice today, cultural studies, makes the phrase “feminist cultural studies”

sound almost redundant, “feminist philosophy” exists almost wholly distinct from “analytic philosophy,” and “analytic feminism” is still an extremely problematic term. Every issue of *PMLA*, *Critical Inquiry*, and *Representations* (three of the leading literary-critical journals) features articles that, at the very least, routinely cite overtly feminist work; and most feature a number of feminist essays. Few issues of the *Journal of Philosophy*, *Mind*, *Nous*, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* or the *American Philosophical Quarterly* feature feminist articles, and when they do, these clearly stand out from the main run of analytic articles. (Recently, feminist articles have appeared with some frequency in clusters or in special-topic issues—for example in *Metaphilosophy* and *Synthese*—but only rarely in general issues of these journals.)

Precisely because of its important political task, and unlike literary criticism, for example, analytic philosophy could not cede its central subjects to feminist inquiry as this practice developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Thus, while questions about the nature of knowledge today are undoubtedly directed to feminist philosophers, questions about language or mind are much more rarely directed to them. (Oddly, casting the net wider and embracing all the work done in the humanities in the past three decades, a great deal of feminist work can be found that does touch on issues of language and mind.)¹⁶ Lately, at least, the philosophy of science has been opening up to a certain extent, such that some writers now routinely refer to both feminist and nonfeminist work, and some feminist writers (e.g., Longino 1990; Nelson 1990, 1995; Harding 1986, 1991) refer to both sorts of work. The same is true in the history of philosophy, although this field shares the problem of not being “where the action is”—our culture’s main repository for deep, “true” thinking.

At the same time, this situation belies the impressive institutional force of academic philosophy. When students today, women or men, decide to try to become philosophers, the institutional rewards for practicing feminist philosophy are either small or negative. I certainly know male philosophers of mind who think that Naomi Scheman’s arguments in her justly famous essay “Individualism and the Objects of Psychology” (1993c), one of the very few overtly feminist essays published during the last thirty years to address directly the “core” analytic topics of language and mind, deserve careful attention and elaboration. But they cannot pay that attention in their dissertations, or in articles submitted in their tenure applications, and they cannot encourage their students to do so either, because it “does not count” as the “right sort” of disciplinary work.

This means that today’s third wave has at least two different kinds of women students and beginning professors who might very broadly be called feminists. The first have decided to become full-fledged feminist philosophers, hoping that the one spot (rarely but occasionally more) that some departments maintain for such a person might be open as they conduct a job search. They must maintain a fairly rigorous control of their subject matter and concerns,

standpoint epistemology, ethics, and the history of philosophy being the commonly sanctioned fields.

This choice seems less insidious than the one made by the second group of students, which is to remain a “feminist at heart” but to become a woman analytic philosopher. In my largely anecdotal knowledge, this second choice seems the more likely to lead to speedy career success. It is especially comfortable for departments seeking to meet affirmative action goals to hire women philosophers whose views do not at heart challenge the profession’s orthodoxies. But notice how many of the most vocal opponents of non-Philosophical “deep discourses” (cultural studies, deconstruction, and so on) are precisely such philosophers; and how often discussions with such women philosophers require granting as a stipulation that no method of philosophy is inherently “conservative” or “liberal.”¹⁷ One can be an analytic philosopher and still be a feminist, this camp so often declares—and the odd thing, of course, is that this is quite true. But it is also true that one can be an analytic philosopher and be a deeply committed, cosmopolitan New York socialist or Democrat (or Democratic Socialist). Should we construe that conjunction as an expression of, or a reaction to, or independent of one’s philosophical practice? And given that one’s philosophical practice is expressly and repeatedly dedicated to the disabling of “history” and “social context” as reasonable sources for meaning and explanation, to the “autonomy” of political belief in relation to philosophical method, how seriously is a feminist analytic philosopher likely to consider the consequences of such a proposition?

Not that feminist philosophers themselves have ignored these problems. To the contrary; they have been at issue in feminism and feminist philosophy since the beginning. For example, Ann Ferguson writes, “feminist theory and feminist philosophy is presently at a crossroads: in order to continue to be effective both must break out of the theoretical impasse into which academization has placed them” (1994, 199). She goes on to suggest that the goal of feminist theory, and thus feminist philosophy, is to develop a “global analytic . . . to understand and challenge the interlocking nature of social domination systems of gender, race, capitalism, imperialism, and heterosexism” (208).

In a similar vein, Kathryn Pyne Addelson quotes a 1973 feminist manifesto: “academic feminists . . . depend on the movement’s existence but cool it down and get rewarded for doing so. They peddle conservative platitudes as movement analyses. They use the movement’s momentum to advance their own goals. There is a word for such behavior: opportunism” (1994a, 223). While Addelson believes that

the author’s accusations were uncomfortably true in the 1970s, the passage of time has changed their import. The vibrant ideas of the women’s movement weren’t simply appropriated by acā-

demic feminists. They were preserved by academic feminists, once the women's movement faded away, leaving only national interest group organizations and interest group issues. The danger in the preservation, of course, is that the ideas will be entombed in the ivory tower, and the once living ideas will shrivel to dry, dead mummies. That is why I believe the accusations made in 1973 are crucial for us to struggle with today. (1994a, 224)

As much as I cannot conceal my admiration and, at times, love for its mechanisms and methods, I would maintain just as strongly that analytic philosophy is not detachable from an extremely deep ideological agenda—one that might be changed only through the most clear-eyed and focused of efforts, as well as immense practical power (much the same is true of the university itself). Such efforts are not seen today, for the most part. What does this bode for the continuing vitality and efficacy of the feminist project?

RETHINKING PHILOSOPHY

As I said at the outset of this essay, I understand the reclaiming of philosophy inside and outside of its present institutional housing as a crucial, if often unremarked, component of feminist theory. I also take feminist theory as a crucial component of feminism: I remain profoundly uncomfortable with the theory/practice dichotomy, and unconvinced that pure “activism” will solve our political problems any more than “pure philosophy” ever will. Our situation demands the profoundest sort of conceptual change if we are to attain to the better world(s) we as feminist women and men sometimes imagine, and only philosophy—in that small-p sense—can accomplish this for us.

But that small-p philosophy cannot develop at all, or cannot develop exclusively, within the academy as it is currently constituted. It must in some way develop outside the academy. The philosophy that evolves in the academy, moreover, remains threatened as long as it lacks an extra-academic cohort, which is to say that feminism must also continue to press forward in attempting to reform academic institutions. One corollary of this proposition is that “philosophy” per se may be thought of as a feminist project. The radical rethinking of what philosophy is, given our culture and historical situation, necessitates careful analysis of the “interlocking nature of social domination systems of gender, race, capitalism, imperialism, and heterosexism” (Ferguson 1994, 208).

Part of the political or discursive “work” of analytic philosophy is to keep the task of asking deep questions confined, cut off from real-world engagement. One effect of analytic philosophy's success in this regard has been the recent proliferation of quasi-philosophic discourses in the public sphere, most of them

tinged with religion if they are not full-scale religious doctrines. (Of course, the “causes” of these phenomena extend far beyond Philosophy per se, but perhaps not so far as it might appear.) From Christian evangelicals to nonsectarian peace activists, from the most benign vegan New Age post-hippies to the most virulent and militant right-wing “Christian identity” racial separatists, all are searching, we are told, for “spirituality.”¹⁸ This search for spirituality, a theme recently favored in the popular press, no doubt contains at least a grain of truth, but expresses an ideological operation especially well.

It is far more accurate to say that people in the United States live in a world that tells them, over and over, that the answers to the profound problems of their existence lie in surface ignorance; that the questions themselves are not “rational”; that a nonsensical and largely incoherent religious sensibility can answer these questions, but only by instructing them that their questions are meaningless. Traditional Philosophy does even worse, for it is almost never raised as a possible solution; instead it is presented, cunningly, as a series of stale debates into which one must be inaugurated before they become even remotely interesting: free will versus determinism, mind versus body, realism versus nominalism, Platonism versus Aristotelianism. And once inaugurated, even we philosophers have some difficulty consistently relating these debates (and their more contemporary equivalents) to lived experience.

We have better luck, probably most often with women, with talk of feminist ethics and feminist epistemology (and perhaps occasionally with so-called practical topics like medical ethics and business ethics). At least some relation can be readily expressed between these topics and a person’s ongoing experience. But if we remain content with that level of engagement we miss a window of opportunity that has opened wider than we may have suspected.

Feminist philosophy proper, no less than feminist cultural studies and postcolonial theory and queer theory and so on—Claudia Card no less than Judith Butler—has completely revolutionized the practice of philosophy, often without saying as much. The “leakage” between writing in this area and the public sphere has notably increased. Yet internecine wars continue. One thing I hope to see is a recognition, more on the part of some proper feminist philosophers than of their counterparts in cultural studies, that all our projects are fundamentally linked. I also hope that those feminist philosophers who scoff at cultural studies as “unrigorous” will think carefully about the political history of a particular notion of “rigor” as it is implicated in the general political history of analytic philosophy, and will ask, with all the care they can muster, what political interests might be served by this reaction, regardless of their good intentions.

Thinking (especially in its deconstructive sense; see Derrida 1990, 1995) remains an activity that must not be restricted to any academy, let alone an academy as deeply implicated in ruling class and corporate interests as is ours. In this sense, the terms “thinking” and “philosophy” are nearly synonymous;

and both are becoming notably rare, especially outside of the academy. What the quasi-philosophical, quasi-religious, and thoroughly religious writings of the public sphere have in common is a lack of what we might call a rigor of their own methods (something neither feminist philosophy nor cultural studies, *pace* their opponents, lacks), a lack of determination to push through to the true difficulties entailed by their own presuppositions and assumptions, or to scrutinize the political and historical contexts of their procedures.

Philosophy and thinking, in their most general and therefore most radical sense, proffer just such determination. In so doing they often entail a radical questioning of the foundations, metaphysical no less than social, in which the thinker is enmeshed; it is hard to see how philosophy in the West can escape, for example, a certain measure of what I can only gesture at here as “deconstruction,” no less than feminism, no less than Marxian economic critique. This sort of philosophy is not about debate, taking either side of a well-defined thesis, as one learns in “proper” schools; it is not about Plato or Aristotle (beyond tracing the outlines of the historicity of thought; in addition to Derrida on this point, see Margolis 1995b). It is not about rising to a prominent career in a prestigious university, haggling forever over the narrowest points of terminology (however entertaining such an activity might be), targeting a particular scholar to shepherd one’s dissertation because of his or her connections, or making perfectly carved political statements for one’s peers whose sentiments one is in the habit of contradicting daily in private.

To the contrary: philosophy today, thanks in large part to feminists of many stripes, can be imagined as the practice of (collectively) thinking our society’s way toward a better world. If we define it as such, we do ourselves and the larger world a disservice if we do not find ways to distribute that activity widely throughout our society, even at the risk of losing our own disciplinary and institutional control over Philosophy’s subject and methods. As Naomi Scheman writes, philosophy can and must become a process of “undisciplining [our] mind[s]” (1993d, 244). It can and must become an activity that does not seek to lay down “rules” for “the good life,” but instead challenges and reforms the questions we have been handed, historically no less than “conceptually,” in the world we must learn to inhabit, meaningfully, together.

NOTES

Suzanne Daly, Jacquelyn N. Zita, and three anonymous readers and editors for *Hypatia* provided invaluable comments on earlier versions of this paper.

1. I focus on developments in U.S. academic philosophy in this paper because that is the area about which I have the largest amount of direct knowledge. That is most definitely not meant to imply that analogous changes are not occurring in many other countries and institutions.

2. Although some discussions in this paper are restricted to feminism (and some of these are limited to feminist philosophy), others attempt to address issues confronting a wide range of allied oppositional discourses such as those mentioned here. To avoid continually appending this list to each instance of the term “feminism,” where context makes the reference clear, “feminism” sometimes stands for the longer list. At other points, again made clear by context, “feminism” means just that. For more on the project of rethinking philosophy in the Western context, see Golumbia b.

3. I take the “wave” metaphor, as used by this issue’s editors, as a generic means for referring to the successive generations—not necessarily indicating age and chronological priority—of feminist and other oppositional movements and thinkers. I would be equally comfortable with other, more literal descriptors.

4. This essay does not focus on the prospects for reforming our existing academic institutions. I believe that is not only a salutary but a necessary goal for the advancement of feminism and feminist philosophy. But I am not sure it is possible without raising the kinds of questions I raise here; nor is it certain that a fully-reformed academy would have much in common with the colleges and universities we see today. Feminist practice in a “reformed” academy might very well resemble the *extra-academic* practice I discuss here.

5. The phrase “privileged white men” is used partly because some groups of white men—Jewish, Irish and Italian, and gay men, for example—have historically occupied a wide range of more and less privileged academic positions, sometimes because members of these groups were able or willing to “pass” as members of “mainstream” ethnic or social groups.

6. Some of this history is chronicled in Ferguson 1994, McAlister 1994, and Adelson 1994a.

7. Again, I mean here to include in “feminism” a wide range of critical discourses, and to suggest that what motivates some beginning scholars today is a desire to take up the current, “hot,” “theoretical” area of study, without a great deal of conviction about the material concerns on which many of these critical discourses are based. The phrase “doctorate in feminism” is meant to suggest the tension between traditional higher-educational pursuits and today’s new theoretical discourses as viable subjects for professional advancement. More broadly, it seems clear that many traditional disciplines—say, philology or classics—were erected in the name of preserving culture and institutions, while feminism, at least in some interpretations, insists on the critique and reconstruction of those institutions. Hence the tension: a degree today may mean that its bearer now has the institutional approbation for her professional opinion that the institution granting that approbation should, in all likelihood, be radically changed, perhaps even dismantled.

8. This is not meant to suggest that the university is only a patriarchal institution, or that all parts of every university are patriarchal—far from it, as the very presence of feminists in universities makes clear. Rather, it is to talk in a more general sense about the place and function of central institutions within a society whose dominant ideologies are patriarchal, capitalist, white supremacist, etc.

9. It should be emphasized that this applies only to a certain segment of the professoriate. Indeed, at the other end of the spectrum, and perhaps even more frightening, one sees committed feminist scholars and professors who become marginalized in their institutions, who find it difficult to secure tenure and institutional power, or, even with tenure, find their power and position increasingly frustrated. At worst, some feminists have clearly been pigeonholed as “the radical feminists” in their

departments, with views that are predicted, and predictably dismissed, by their non-feminist colleagues.

10. It has been suggested to me that the language of “personality styles” as I use it here implies that character is unchangeable and puts a psychologizing cast on issues that are largely political. The point is well taken. No doubt the forces that produce and maintain the other institutional phenomena discussed in this essay are no less responsible for personality. In the same way, the political work (of philosophy) I advocate here might also productively be directed at these “personality styles.”

11. By aggression I steadfastly do not mean assertiveness; I mean, for example, a willingness to damage a colleague’s career in the interest of furthering one’s own.

12. This is not to suggest that the final questions of this paragraph have clear and obvious, negative answers. But it is to suggest that one does not hear the questions raised very often inside the academy.

13. See however Margolis 1995a, 1995b; Golumbia Forthcoming-a, Forthcoming-b, Forthcoming-c; many of the essays in Scheman 1993b; and, to a somewhat lesser degree, Putnam 1990, 1992, 1994 and Deleuze and Guattari 1994 for related remarks. For those with a tolerance for deconstruction, Derrida 1984, 1990, 1995 constitute a sustained reflection on the institutions of philosophy.

14. I mean this as a diagnosis of a covert assumption of orthodoxy, not as the “correct” view, even with respect to the careful interpretation of canonical philosophical work—as Derrida’s repeated turning to such work demonstrates.

15. Phrases like “Philosophy’s ideological job” are meant to suggest an explicitly Marxist, post-Hegelian perspective on the ways in which discourses and social formations work to contain and condition oppositional energies in society at large. The literature detailing this perspective is vast, but good grounding for it can be found in Althusser 1971 and Foucault 1972, 1977.

16. I refer here to the works of feminist and lesbian cultural theorists (Spivak, Fuss, Flax, Sedgwick, Silverman, Rose, et. al.), as well as work that engages with Continental philosophy and Continental feminism (Irigaray, Cixous, Wittig, Delphy, Clément, et. al.)—both of which are also complex, and largely marginal, in U.S. Philosophy. Nevertheless, encouraging signs of cross-pollination can be noted. See, e.g., Scheman 1993b; Bartky 1990; Grosz 1993, 1994; and Brennan 1993. This seems as well a favorable juncture at which to mention the name of Judith Butler, whose work explicitly addresses a wide range of topics that feminist philosophy proper both does and does not cover. See especially Butler 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993. Although Butler, unlike most cultural theorists, was actually trained as a philosopher, she has been decisively rejected by the many in the philosophical community. Her position nevertheless neatly reflects some of the disciplinary and institutional vicissitudes of recent work in feminist theory and philosophy.

17. Some of these arguments carry over to the literature: marks of them can be seen in Antony and Witt 1993—and they occur repeatedly in the SWIP-L archives, among many other places. How many philosophers in this group are aware that one of the first sites to demand (at least implicitly) this sort of hair-splitting, Christina Hoff Sommers’s vicious *Who Stole Feminism?* (1994), was itself deliberately commissioned and supported by the right-wing Olin Foundation? What is reasonable to take from this is that the right wing very much wants to use this sort of half-defense of “traditional” methods as a way of destabilizing more challenging and heterodox procedures in the academy—which raises very disturbing questions about the “method doesn’t matter in principle” perspective so visible in recent discussions. Of course, this is by no means the only discursive

site in contemporary U.S. society where conservatives advance their agenda by developing a corrupt notion of "equality" that works precisely by erasing any sort of historical understanding. Another is found in their recent, often successful attacks on affirmative action programs for women and, more decisively (because they are less represented in the groups attacking the programs), for racial minorities.

18. My use of this term is not meant to downplay the importance of spiritual concerns in general, especially where their ideological contexts are properly foregrounded: e.g., in African-American churches, in feminist work on religion and spirituality, and in Native American cultures. It is meant, though, to suggest that even these practices should not be above continual questioning and analysis.

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