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The Blackwell Guide to Feminist Philosophy

Edited by
Linda Martín Alcoff and Eva Feder Kittay
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July 2006
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Introduction

Defining Feminist Philosophy

Linda Martín Alcoff and Eva Feder Kittay

[The] project of philosophy and that of feminist thinking have a fundamental structure in common, an art of fighting fire with fire and looks with looks, of objectifying and analyzing surrounding thought, of regarding beliefs as objects that must be scrutinized, when the supposedly normal attitude is to submit to what social life erects as doctrine. Nothing goes without saying, including what people think about the roles which have come down to men and women.

(Michele Le Doeuff 1989: 29)1

Over the past thirty years, philosophy has become a vital arena for feminists. They have scrutinized social beliefs about gender, human nature, familial duties, sexual ethics, epistemic credibility, and even rationality. Philosophy has provided vital means, such as methods of conceptual analysis and traditions of critique that have allowed feminist scholars to subject cultural traditions and dogma about gender identity and gender relations to objective, fair, but uncompromising examination. In pursuing this work, feminist philosophers have also developed new methods of analysis and critique, defined new lines of inquiry, and reinvigorated some of the central areas of philosophy.

The growth and interest in feminist philosophy have been dramatic. At the end of the 1970s one could count the volumes in print on women and philosophy on two hands: there was the monumental Second Sex, by Simone de Beauvoir,2 a few books on women and philosophical topics written by women in previous centuries, a few works questioning the tradition of political philosophy, and five collections of essays specifically devoted to feminism and philosophy. Today, the volumes written by contemporary authors are too many to enumerate and rival those produced in other areas of philosophy. In a matter of a few decades, feminist philosophy has emerged as a distinctive field, with a distinct literature including a journal devoted exclusively to feminist philosophy. Essays in feminist philosophy appear, if still infrequently, in mainstream journals. Feminist philosophy is taught at the undergraduate and graduate levels, and has been the explicit (and implicit) focus of doctoral dissertations. Job descriptions now include it as an area of specialization.
And its importance has been reflected in several Presidential Addresses in the American Philosophical Association and in the developments in other philosophical specializations, such as those that are represented in this volume: political philosophy (see Hirschmann), ethics (Friedman and Bolte), epistemology (Code), philosophy of science (Potter), aesthetics (Brand), history of philosophy (Schott), among others. The area is already vast and growing so quickly that a volume such as this cannot do justice to all the creativity and insights generated by feminist philosophical inquiry.

This anthology provides but a sample of many of the central areas to which feminist philosophers have made contributions that have advanced the field. It also includes feminist work in relatively new areas of philosophy, such as medical ethics (Lindemann), moral epistemology (Walker), the philosophy of race (Zack), lesbian philosophy (Calhoun), postcolonial philosophy (Schutte), and philosophy of disability (Silvers). The essays collected here are not, however, intended to be merely summaries of these fields over the decades. We have assembled some of the best and most influential feminist philosophers in a variety of areas and asked them to critically reflect on the field as well as to write about recent debates “in their own voice.” Thus, readers will find essays here in which authors are taking positions and offering substantive arguments rather than attempting to write in a “voice from nowhere.”

In the spirit of that assignment, in this introduction we, the editors, will offer our own view of the field of feminist philosophy and take our own position on debates over the nature of feminist philosophy, its relation to the field of philosophy as a whole, and its political content given the current climate of criticism of liberal politics in the academy. First, however, it is important to note that the topic of gender and the relation between gender and justice are not new to philosophy.

**Gender in Canonical Philosophical Writings**

Writings about women by philosophers such as Aristotle, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche for example, were arguably not motivated toward justice for women, as Mill or Wollstonecraft were (Plato is a more complicated figure as what he has to say about women in the *Republic* and in the *Laws* are arguably at odds with one another). Assertions about women and the proper or natural gender relations are sometimes included as asides. At other times, they are part of explicit claims about the nature or natural condition of women, which are intended to justify or explain women’s subordination. Assumptions about women’s inferior (although similar) or distinct (but still inferior) capacities also come to figure in larger arguments about the right order of social, ethical, or political life, or as part of arguments about the true nature of mankind. Often these claims were not well developed or carefully argued or developed through a consideration of contrary points of view. Indeed, as Michèle Le Doeuff has pointed out, “where women are concerned the learned utter, and institutions let them utter, words which fall clearly below
their own usual standards of validation." When opining about women, the philosophers who rank among the accepted luminaries of “the canon,” (with some notable exceptions such as Condorcet and John Stuart Mill) largely manifest the tendency to accept these lowered standards. In this they mirrored and did not challenge the accepted opinions of their day. In fact, at times they represented the most conservative accepted views of women’s capacities and place in life. Kant wrote notoriously that a woman with her “head full of Greek, like Mme Dacier, or [one who] carries on fundamental controversies about mechanics, like the Marquise de Chatelet, might as well even have a beard; for perhaps that would express more obviously the mien of profundity for which she strives.” Thus, the ultimate aim of unpacking the story of sexism in the history of philosophy, as Robin Schott argues in her essay for this volume, is to “help philosophy do its job better.”

It is also true that we can turn to almost any age in philosophy to find feminist arguments, from Ancient Greece (notably Plato), through the Middle Ages (such as Christine de Pisan), into the era of Cartesian philosophy and the later Enlightenment (see O’Neill’s discussion of Marie de Gournay, this volume). There are specific feminist philosophical writings, such as those of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648–95) in the seventeenth century, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97) in the eighteenth century, John Stuart Mill (1806–73) and Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860–1935) in the nineteenth century, and of course there are the influential writings of Simone de Beauvoir, in the mid-twentieth century. It is noteworthy that many of those mentioned are frequently not included within lists of philosophers. As Eileen O’Neill remarks, “If we utilize that method of historiography known as ‘historical reconstruction,’ we will take as central those issues deemed by the philosophers of the past to be the central ones; and we will count past figures to be philosophers just in case they were so deemed by their contemporaries.” To the extent that the content of their works was not among those deemed to be central issues for philosophers of the past, they fail to be counted as philosophers in contemporary compendiums. Nonetheless, these writers were to have a profound effect on contemporary feminist philosophers, for whom the content of their works is decidedly central.

The Emergence of Contemporary Feminist Philosophy

A significant amount of feminist philosophy might fairly be characterized as an application of philosophical methods and approaches to feminist concerns. Mary Wollstonecraft’s rational arguments in her animadversions directed at Rousseau’s denigration of women; John Stuart Mill’s logical argumentation in laying bare the fallacies of those who deny the equality of women; Simone de Beauvoir’s deployment of existential philosophy in analyzing the restricted existential domain of women are prominent examples. One of the principal areas of debate among feminist philosophers concerns the utility, or disutility, of various philosophical approaches for the elucidation of women’s oppression and for developing effective
solutions. Some argue, for example, that feminist philosophy, with its doubled focus on theory and practice, will find its strongest resources in pragmatism (see Sullivan, in this volume). Others argue that poststructuralist approaches to conceptualizing identity and the self can best address the issue of differences among women (see Lorraine, in this volume).

If one is tempted by such examples to characterize feminist philosophy as the application of neutral philosophical means (which are untouched by feminist aims) to feminist topics of concern, this may be motivated by the desire to show that feminism affects only the choice of questions. On such a view, the answers to these questions are pursued with detachment and impartiality and have the same objectivity as any other philosophical investigation. Yet such a view does not adequately characterize feminist philosophy as a whole, nor, arguably, any field of inquiry within philosophy. This is because method and subject matter cannot really be made as distinct as this characterization presupposes: certain questions at times give birth to new methods. And new methods in turn, will highlight some questions, obscure others, and render still others unintelligible. There are questions that only arise once a new methodology has been introduced. We have seen such a process operative in metaphysics. Philosophy has only recently developed modal approaches as a way to adjudicate between competing intuitions about thought experiments. These modal considerations about possible worlds have themselves yielded new questions, such as questions about the nature of possibility. This last reflexive turn highlights a feature of philosophy that has helped to shape the emergence, nature, and trajectory of feminist philosophy.

For what is new in the more recent period of feminist work in philosophy is a greater self-consciousness about precisely the relationship between feminism and philosophy, and a questioning of philosophy itself as understood through the canonical works. The existing canons in both the Anglo-American and the Continental traditions in philosophy have been contested for their exclusions of women, as well as for viewing the women who wrote philosophy as mere chroniclers rather than original theorists and disputants (see O’Neill, this volume). These moves have been facilitated by the powerful liberatory movement of women that has very quickly changed the default assumption from “women are inferior to and ought to be subjugated to men” to “women and men are equals.” Even conservatives find that they have to make arguments differentiating women’s roles by arguing from the assumption of women’s equality.

Earlier feminists had to develop arguments to show that women have the requisite capacities for self-governance, for rational thought, for the pursuit of knowledge, etc. Then as women slowly have come to be accepted as equals, the persistent absence of women in the canon of philosophy puts the onus on philosophers, rather than on women, to explain themselves. Why were the writings of so many female philosophers systematically excluded? Why were the writings on women by so many of the great male philosophers so obviously riddled by distorted logic and personal bias? As Code argues in her essay here, the persistence and ubiquity of such biases have led feminist epistemologists to explore the
“normative conceptions of epistemic subjectivity” that have masked privilege and vested interest in the operations of philosophy itself.

This shift can be observed in one of the earliest, and arguably still one of the most audacious pieces of feminist philosophy, Marilyn Frye’s now classic collection of essays, *The Politics of Reality*. Frye, trained in the area of philosophy which favors conceptual and linguistic analysis of important terms, utilizes the method of conceptual analysis in exploring feminist concerns. But at the same time she gives birth to a new philosophical approach. Using standard conceptual analysis, Frye endeavors to clarify newly created feminist terms such as “sexism,” “male chauvinism,” and the startling application of “oppression” in conjunction with traditional female roles. Frye examines the meaning of these terms, giving them the coherence and intelligibility necessary before we can evaluate whether they refer to real phenomena. But in considering the meanings of these terms she makes reference to the concrete experiences of a group, namely women, rather than experiences that are presumed to be universal. Like J.L. Austin, she appeals to usage in the general language to establish meaning but her experience is not abstracted from its particularity in gender and culture. Implicit in her modification of conceptual analysis is, therefore, a critique of the putative universality of philosophical claims and the putative neutrality of philosophical methods.

If philosophy is to include the lives and experiences of women, it must own up to its false universalization of men’s experiences. In the title essay of the book, Frye argues that those who possess power also possess the means to define their own reality, a reality that excludes the experiences and sometimes even the existence of those who make their own lives possible. Philosophy, as created by men who are dominant over women, has created a philosophical “reality” that scarcely recognizes women or their experiences. Women, she remarks in one essay, are the stagehands behind the world stage in which both the actors and the audience are men. But this “reality” is as illusory as that of Plato’s cave. And it is for women philosophers to expose the errors of philosophy itself.

The process of exposing such errors has yielded important feminist investigations into standard issues of philosophy, but they are considered now in a new light. For example, the nature of rationality is explored with reference to the gendering of reason as masculine and the emotions as feminine; the mind–body problem is revisited with reference to the idea that we are first and foremost embodied and thus dependent beings; accepted notions of justice are criticized for their reliance on an understanding of human relations based on models of interactions between men; and so forth.

**Reflexive Critique within Philosophy**

In all of this work just described, it is clear that feminist philosophy has a particularly strong reflexive engagement with philosophy as a field. One might imagine
that philosophers would welcome such an intense reflexive scrutiny of the field’s founding assumptions, given the general level of respect which self-scrutiny is accorded and the general level of intensity with which it is pursued. Much of feminist philosophy naturally raises such metaphilosophical questions in regard to how deeply androcentrism is integrated into the philosophical enterprise itself.

One place to raise the question about androcentrism concerns the presumption that philosophy should deal only with universal non-contingent matters. Differences in the bodies of persons, or their different social conditions have been seen as contingent factors in light of the preeminent importance of a shared human capacity to reason. It is the presumed universality of what is essential to being that has permitted western philosophy to hold that valid answers to its inquiries are valid universally. Questions about the nature of the good (or the true, the beautiful, the just, etc.) have been presumed to be about what the good is (or the true, beautiful, just, etc.) regardless of whose good is in question. (Aristotle, recognizing that the good in itself may be different for different individuals, wrote “that we should pray that the good in itself be good for us.”7) To ask, as some feminist philosophers have insisted doing, whether what has been spoken of as “the” good actually applies to women is an odd question under the presumption of universality. But feminist philosophers have shown that when men in traditional philosophical writings have used the term Man, presumably in the generic, they have really had in mind “man” used in a gender-specific way.

A careful look at historical texts reveals the occasional reference to women that betrays the presumed universality of the conclusions about (generic) Man. In particular, women’s embodiment, their presumed deficiency in reason, and their inferior social status have rendered them deficient and falling out of the scope of the “universal.” For Aristotle, only free men possessed all the elements needed for fully rational deliberation and action.8 Women had the capacity to deliberate, but lacked the capacity to act on the results of their rational deliberation – their rational faculty lacked the requisite authority. Kant’s sublime was an experience reserved for men, who alone could revere the power of the rational, while women’s aesthetic capacities were limited to the sensuous pleasures of beauty.9 Rousseau, who argued so eloquently for man’s freedom and for man’s autonomy, argued at the same time in favor of an education for Sophie (Emile’s helpmeet and female counterpart) that would make her docile, and subservient, and Emile, her husband and master.10 The servility that Emile was to escape by a proper education was the very aim of Sophie’s upbringing. And as Susan Okin11 demonstrated, even Rawls in A Theory of Justice12 made the parties to the original position “heads of households,” a term which in contrast to “female head of household” is gendered masculine. The putative universality of much of philosophy has been revealed to have a limited scope, one which is confined to men (and then, only to some men). This raises a serious question about whether or not the putative universality of philosophical claims should simply be extended to women, or whether those claims are in reality irreducibly and irrevocably particular, in which case philosophy needs to reconsider its attachment to universalistic arguments.
The insistence that the topics and results of philosophical inquiry have a universal scope has not only masked ways in which women were excluded from its midst, it also precluded asking about gender-specific phenomena such as contraception, abortion, pregnancy, and childbearing. This insularity was pierced in the 1960s and 1970s when philosophers entered debates on the permissibility or impermissibility of abortion. The literature on abortion by philosophers now fills volumes. Even this relatively conservative application of philosophical analysis to concerns important to women challenges any assumption that philosophy is a discipline whose boundaries are fixed and stable, or that philosophy is only about questions that know no gender or other distinctions among humans. And yet much of the philosophical literature on this gendered issue focuses on the status of the non-gendered fetus and on the rights and duties of (genderless) persons, not on the specific burdens and responsibilities a pregnancy imposes on women.

Subsequent feminist philosophers have asked still other questions about abortion and more generally about the way in which the woman’s embodiment and her existential situation can be the subject of philosophical investigation. Might men and women view, and reason, about abortion differently? Being pregnant is a unique experience of being a singular individual who, at the same time, incorporates another entirely dependent being. Might a woman’s perspective of having been pregnant, or anticipating the possibility, give her a relationship to the fetus and to abortion that is not readily available to men? If women had originally been the world’s philosophers rather than men, might we not expect a great deal of theorizing about pregnancy (including the individuation problems posed by pregnancy) and might not a woman’s right to abortion already be a nearly settled question?

In their pursuit of answers to such questions, feminist philosophers have had little motivation to follow the regulatory customs of philosophy, which have separated analytic from Continental approaches, and which have segregated the domains of value inquiry from ontological inquiry as well as from epistemological inquiry. We must accept the possibility that feminist philosophy will put pressure on philosophy itself, will expand its current boundaries, challenge unquestioned assumptions, and invent new methods. Many other fields recently developed within philosophy have had similar stretching effects. Consider the impact of naturalized epistemology on epistemology, or the influence of moral psychology on moral philosophy, or the sway of philosophical work in cognitive science on the philosophy of mind. There is no consensus about the proper effects of these new fields on existing problematics, but there have certainly been some dramatic proposals. So too in feminist philosophy.

**Reflexive Critique within Feminist Philosophy**

Just as philosophy needs to examine and reconsider its assumptions and methods in the face of feminist scrutiny, so feminist philosophy must itself be open to reflexive critique and its challenges. This means that feminist philosophy should neither
be limited to the application of philosophical methods to feminist concerns, nor should it be characterized as the application of feminism or feminist methods to philosophy. How feminist philosophy defines itself, its subject matter, and its methods needs to be open to self-scrutiny, no less than philosophy itself must be. Many feminist philosophers have recognized that we ourselves must take care to avoid generating false universalisms. As Zack argues forcefully in this volume, we must diligently examine our own starting points and privileges. Otherwise they may be blind to the ways we fashion our reality and our philosophy around our limited experience (if not our interests). Feminist philosophy must remain self-aware that, as it purports to speak on behalf of women in the male-dominated world of philosophy, it does not occlude the experiences of those women who have not been sufficiently privileged to have a philosophical training. Feminist philosophers like Zack and Schutte in this volume have brought questions of racial identity and the ongoing legacy of colonialism to the forefront of any analysis of women’s situation, disrupting any easy generalizations about female subjectivity. Cheshire Calhoun brings to the fore the importance of considering a woman’s sexuality, while Anita Silvers underscores ways in which presumptions about ability and disability have (mis)shaped philosophical studies among feminist and non-feminist philosophy alike. At the same time, many of the advances of feminist scholarship have opened possibilities for considering various forms of embodiment and social situation. Still we must ask when, if ever, does feminist philosophy speak for all women? If it ought not to presume to speak for all women, what is feminist about it?

Feminist Philosophy as a Research Program

How then are we to define feminist philosophy in a way that is at once inclusive and critical? If we were to define feminist philosophy by reference to a number of substantive commitments about the nature of women’s oppression and the nature of the solution, such commitments would help demarcate the field. But defining the field in this way would also risk dogmatism insofar as there is not much agreement on either the nature of the problem or the solution to whatever problems are identified. On the other hand, if we refuse to define feminist philosophy at all, how can we demarcate the field?

We suggest that feminist philosophy can be characterized as a research program or area of inquiry within philosophy that consists of a set of questions rather than commitments. In this way it is analogous to nearly every other research area within the discipline. Like other areas, feminist philosophy sets out to pursue inquiry about a specific area, but it remains open to the conceptualization of that area, its relation to other areas, even to its very existence. Epistemology pursues inquiry into knowledge, but there is no consensus over how to define knowledge, and many epistemologists have been busily deflating truth (which one might think is the object of knowledge). Still others have seriously considered the possibility that
Defining Feminist Philosophy

the skeptics are right and there is no knowledge after all. Yet most epistemologists believe philosophers can contribute to an understanding of what knowledge is (or is not). Similarly within political philosophy and ethics, one can assume that every contributor considers “justice” or “the good” to have value, but what one philosopher considers justice another considers the height of injustice. Some argue that justice is unattainable but can act only as an ideal, and postmodernists argue that the claim that justice has been reached, even about the most local event, is to invite injustice! Thus, research areas within philosophy do share some very minimal concerns or aims but they leave open the way those concerns and aims are pursued, conceptualized, and defined. And it is also possible, and not infrequent, that a major participant within a research area declares the whole project bankrupt.

Feminist philosophy has followed a similar trajectory. Minimally, feminist philosophers might be said to be those concerned with questions concerning gender. As the term “feminist” connotes the social movement of women for gender justice, it suggests that “feminist” philosophy carries with it such a political appeal as well. But there is no agreement on what gender means, whether gender is a legitimate category, even whether women can be truly said “to exist,” that is, whether there is a single category that includes all and only those who should be, or generally are, categorized as women. (Here incidentally, is an area of inquiry not imagined prior to feminist probing, namely “the philosophy – or ontology or metaphysics – of gender.”) All this is just as it should be, given the necessity of philosophy to be as uncompromising in its self-scrutiny as it is in scrutinizing the assumptions of others.

We also suggest that feminist philosophy is very broadly concerned with issues of justice for women – that is why it is feminist and not feminine. This suggests that it is an area of philosophy that has a political agenda. That it might have such an agenda is, in many philosophical circles, suspect. How can philosophical investigation be rigorous and objective if it has a political mission? But to say that it is an area of philosophy concerned with justice for women is just to say that it is an area concerned with justice, but one which rules out only such antediluvian positions as the claim that it is legitimate to treat women unjustly, as mere means to others’ ends, as simple commodities, or that women should remain politically subordinate to men. It otherwise embraces a wide variety of positions concerning the nature of justice as well as the nature of gender, and in this regard is no more prone to adopting any one political stance as a favored position than does any other area of philosophy that concerns itself with justice and matters of value.

The disagreement within the field of feminist philosophy is as much a sign of philosophical vigor as it is of unsettled philosophical questions. It is true that to give such a minimal characterization of feminist philosophy as we have will result in including a very wide variety of views and concerns. Still there are some ways of doing philosophy that are excluded. Not included would be those which consider the question of women’s status relative to men to be an issue which remains unsettled, that is, positions that still entertain the possibility that one sex, namely woman, is inherently inferior and needs to be subjugated to another, man. Aside from such an exclusion, feminist philosophy must either concern matters related
to gender in some form, or must approach a problem with lessons learned from considering the ways gender has been philosophically investigated. Thus, to characterize feminist philosophy as a research area or sub-field that pursues questions related to gender justice is to give it no more, or less, political unity than that which exists in political philosophy or ethics or other sub-fields. And it also avoids a dogmatism that would shield political values or commitments from analysis.

**Feminist Philosophy as Transformative**

As a research program, feminist philosophy then has the potential not only to add to the list of traditional philosophical questions, but also to transform philosophy itself by introducing new approaches to traditional questions. This transformative effect of feminist philosophy is more developed in some areas than in others. Two of the most advanced areas are ethics and epistemology, and the insights gleaned have both influenced and in some cases been drawn from the sub-areas of the respective fields. They have also been influential on and influenced by related areas. Represented in this volume is the area of ethics, for example, but also bioethics, moral psychology, and the related area of political philosophy. We will consider first the case of ethics and then epistemology.

If any area of philosophy is amenable to exposing the false universalizing of traditional western philosophy it is one that discusses the nature of how we should conduct our lives and organize our social world. For it is clear that in everyday life, men and women have traditionally occupied two separate worlds. Women’s world, whatever else it may look like, has been occupied by children and others who are more or less inherently dependent on caring labor. And women’s relationships to men have been defined in large part in terms of care. The ethical concerns of women importantly have been shaped by these constraints, while men’s ethical concerns have featured relations with other adults, other ethical subjects, each of whom is independent of every other. The moral psychology that arises in these different contexts is marked as well and plays an important role in the way in which moral concepts are understood in overarching theories as well as in applied areas such as bioethics (see Walker and Lindemann, this volume). Much of ethical theory joins political philosophy in taking the public space largely occupied by adult men as its sphere of inquiry and so it appears that ethical issues arise only among equal and independent adults (see Hirschmann, this volume). But this picture poorly reflects women’s daily experiences, which often have been dominated by relations with dependents, i.e., with those who are not their equals. Feminist philosophers have argued convincingly that concerns reflected in the ethical theories developed by men rarely speak to ethical realities that women confront.

The development of an ethics of care has been the consequence of considerations such as these. Care ethics, like the conceptual analysis employed by Frye, has similarly performed a double duty in both addressing itself to specific ethical ques-
tions and in stretching the boundaries of ethics. Care ethics takes the paradigm case of human experience to be embedded in familial and dependent relationships, rather than in those of autonomous individuals, and it emerged in part from feminist philosophers’ knowledge of caring relationships. But the virtues and conceptions of self, ethical decision-making, and goals of ethical deliberation discerned in the practice of caring for dependents appear to be of importance beyond the confines of the domestic sphere in which they play their major role. A care ethics postulates the importance of a concept of self that is always in-relationship, a self with somewhat permeable ego boundaries that sees itself connected to others. Care ethics reveals the limits of rational deduction as a method of ethical deliberation, and emphasizes the role of empathy, of responsiveness, and attunement to the other. And where much of traditional ethics emphasizes the importance of non-interference with another’s plan of life, care ethics emphasizes the importance of maintaining connections with others in a manner that is neither violent nor injurious. Values and conceptions such as these have importance outside the domestic sphere, for example in health care, welfare policies, social organization, peace politics, and global concerns. In expanding our understanding of the ethical to include the concept of care which has a wide applicability in human affairs, care ethics has a transformative potential in both political and ethical theory.

Feminist epistemology began with questions coming from the sciences and the social sciences, about why, and how, women had been excluded from the sciences and how the many blatantly biased theories about women produced in both the natural and social sciences had achieved credence. This led feminist epistemologists to the more general question of why, and how, have women all over the world been epistemically disauthorized as knowers. Was this disauthorization justified? If not, what theories of justification provided an alibi for this general disauthorization? Feminist values of equality and inclusiveness have led to better empirical methods in the social sciences, correcting theories dependent on an evidentiary base that ignored women’s experiences or women’s interpretations of their experiences. Therefore, feminist epistemologists have argued that contextual values – that is, values beyond the usual list of parsimony, breadth, and simplicity to include such social values as democracy and egalitarianism – are useful guides of inquiry, not biases to be left behind, and that the epistemic effects of various value commitments can be judged and compared. One of the critical debates this has in turn engendered among feminist epistemologists and feminist philosophers of science is whether empiricism needs to be abandoned, or whether it can be reformed, a topic discussed by Potter in this volume.

While we have limited our discussion to feminist ethics and epistemology, we find similar transformations in other sub-disciplines. And the reach of feminism in philosophy has also impacted areas such as pragmatism, phenomenology, critical theory, postmodernism, race theory and postcolonial studies, among others. New fields have also been spawned including the metaphysics of sex and gender, and lesbian philosophy, areas in which the fundamental terms of sex and gender have been questioned, as well as the nature of oppression or injustice that requires a response (see Calhoun, this volume).
Although there is no consensus on major issues, there are a number of strong threads that run throughout feminist philosophy’s diverse sub-fields. These include an emphasis on relationality, on the social context of life and thought, on the use of personal narrative, and a breakdown of rigid borders between rationality and the emotions. Thus, in epistemology feminists have emphasized the importance of testimony and of epistemic communities (see Code), and in ethics feminists have emphasized family obligations and validated emotional attachments (see Friedman and Bolte, and Walker). The epistemic themes are prominent in the ethical concerns as well. As Hilde Lindemann points out, the question of what counts as epistemic legitimacy and who has epistemic authority has a profound impact on the care provided by the medical profession. Similarly, feminist philosophers of science and epistemologists have taken the role of our emotional and relational lives into consideration when discussing the production and reception of knowledge. Feminist philosophers have then pointed to the broad impact a relational understanding of the self and subjectivity can have on philosophical matters. This revised understanding of subjectivity and connectedness has underscored the relevance of narrative accounts of the self and of social identity that portray the self as necessarily emerging out of dialogical contexts beyond the borders of any sub-discipline.

Any one of these emphases is not unique to feminist philosophy. Take for instance, the use of first-person experiences: other philosophers use first-person experiences to jog our intuitions or concretize a type of problem. For feminists, however, the importance of using first-person examples comes from more than the need for illustration but from a different understanding of how philosophy is connected, and responsible, to everyday life and to the silenced experiences of women. We suggest that it is these common threads – of relationality, of the importance of experience, and of a kind of pragmatic connection to the everyday – that have helped the field of feminist philosophy to cross borders that have long characterized, and limited, philosophy, borders such as the analytic and Continental divide in philosophy and disciplinary borders within and beyond philosophy.

In expanding the scope, method, and vision of philosophy, in allowing for a permeability of disciplinary boundaries, and in the active engagement of reflexive critique, the work of feminist philosophers has begun to overhaul our understanding of philosophy, even as it remains undeniably philosophical. The essays in this volume cover only a portion of this transformative literature. But we hope that they will be sufficiently provocative to make the reader want to explore further and stimulating enough to invite more voices into this vibrant conversation.

Notes

3 Le Doeuff, *Hipparchia's Choice*, p. 29.
5 An electronic edition of her complete works based on the text of Adolfo Méndez Plan- carté and Alberto G. Salceda can be located at http://www.dartmouth.edu/sorjuana/
8 Aristotle writes: “For the slave has no deliberative faculty at all; the woman has, but it is without authority, and the child has, but it is immature.” Aristotle, *Politics*, translated by Benjamin Jowett, New York: Dover Publications, 2000, Book 1 Part XIII 1260a12–14.
9 See Kant, *Observations*, p. 76ff.
Part I

Women and the Philosophical Canon