



# NEWSLETTER

Issue No 9 May/June 1993

## EDITORIAL

When you read this newsletter, you may find that items which you sent in for publication have been left out. Morwenna has been in hospital, and not everything sent to her has reached me. We apologise for the unavoidable omissions, and will try to include missing items in the next newsletter.

Items for inclusion in the next newsletter should reach Morwenna or myself by 31 October 1993.

### Subscriptions

If you have not yet paid your subscription for 1992-1993, please do so as soon as possible, or your name may be taken off the mailing list.

### New Members

If you would like to subscribe to the Newsletter, please send your cheque to Kimberly Hutchings, SHASS, Wolverhampton University, Castle View, Dudley, DY1 3HR. The subscription (2 issues per year) is : waged £5; student/unwaged £2.50. Cheques should be made payable to Women in Philosophy.

### Next Conference

We urgently need volunteers to organise the next conference - see p.3 for details. If you think you can help, please contact Moya Lloyd, the conference convenor, as soon as possible.

Margaret Whitford

Items for inclusion in the next newsletter should be sent either to Morwenna Griffiths, School of Education, University of Nottingham, Nottingham NG7 2RD, or to Margaret Whitford, French Dept. Queen Mary and Westfield College, Mile End Rd., London E1 4NS.
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## SWIP NEWS

Steven Gerrard at UCL Press would be interested in hearing from SWIP members with any book proposals they may have.

UCL Press Limited  
University College London  
Gower St.,  
London WC1E 6BT.

Emmanuela Bianchi is coordinating a conference at  
The New School, New York, on

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'Is Feminist Philosophy Possible?'

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on 8 October 1993.

If anyone is likely to be in New York at that time and  
would like to participate/contribute, contact :

Emmanuela Bianchi, The Graduate Faculty,  
Department of Philosophy, New School for Social Research,  
65, Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10003, USA.  
If contributing, send abstract and cv a.s.a.p.

## SWIP CONFERENCE

At the last SWIP business meeting I agreed to take on the role of Conference Convenor. It will be my responsibility to a) find willing groups of individuals to organise the twice-yearly conference; b) to collect and collate as much general information as possible on conference organisation, with the ultimate goal of putting together an information pack; and c) to act as a general conduit for all material questions etc. related to SWIP conferences.

I shall be writing directly to a number of people whose names have been suggested for the meeting in October/November. However, if there is anyone else who is prepared to take responsibility for this meeting, please do not hesitate to contact me. All volunteers are welcome - as are suggestions for possible future conference themes.

I can be contacted by post c/o :

Moya Lloyd,  
University of Wolverhampton,  
SHASS, Castle View,  
DUDLEY DY1 3HR.

or by phone on : 0902 323462 (work)  
0902 756542 (home)

I hope to hear from you soon. Details about the next SWIP meeting will be sent out by mail later in the summer.

Moya Lloyd

## Call for Papers

### The Monist

Special Issue on Feminist Epistemology : For and Against  
Deadline for submission of papers : last day of September  
1993 for publication in October 1994.

Earlier feminist philosophy focussed primarily on issues in political and social theory and in ethics, and was frequently concerned to expose stereotyped conceptions of 'feminine' character as dangerous prejudices, unfounded in fact. An influential tendency in recent feminist theory, however, urges the need for a new feminist perspective in all areas of philosophy, including metaphysics, logic, the philosophy of the physical as well as the social sciences - and epistemology. The new 'feminist epistemologies', far from repudiating the 'feminine', insist on its importance. Whether in the relatively modest versions which, for instance, are concerned to stress the social character of knowledge, or in the most ambitious versions which insist that traditional notions of objectivity, impartiality, rationality, represent 'masculine' values which must be overhauled or abandoned, they presuppose a distinctive female (or, in some variants, feminist) 'way of knowing'. Enthusiasts are convinced that the new feminism represents an intellectual revolution comparable to those of Copernicus, Darwin or Freud; sceptics find such claims embarrassingly exaggerated at best, alarmingly sexist at worst.

Papers are invited on any aspect of feminist epistemology (e.g. exploring the relation of feminist critiques to other contemporary trends towards contextualism, sociologism, relativism in epistemology, assessing the feminist critique of objectivity, etc.), whether supportive or critical of the possibility and defensibility of a feminist theory of knowledge. The goal is that the Monist issue on 'Feminist Epistemology : For and Against' should

represent the arguments on both sides in as rigorous and detailed a fashion as possible.

Address for submissions :  
Professor B. Smith, Editor,  
Internationale Akademie Für Philosophie,  
Obergass 75, FL-9494 Schaan,  
Liechtenstein.

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## Conference Reports

### AGENDA FOR GENDER ; RESTRUCTURING HIGHER EDUCATION

A group of students and staff from the MA in Women's Studies at Kent organised the conference on Gender Inequality in Higher Education, which was held at Birkbeck College, London, on 18 March 1993. It was a lively and stimulating occasion, attended by about 80 people from all over the country, mostly lecturers in Women's Studies. The uptake indicates the extent to which this is felt to be a pressing problem, and the need for continuing discussions and campaigns at a national level became clear as the day progressed.

The morning session consisted of four short papers on the Culture of Management in Higher Education. This opened with a brief statistical review of the position of women in Higher Education, and then a more in-depth discussion of why this position is so disappointing. In particular, it was shown that equal opportunities procedures and 'equality proofing' were either circumvented, or for their working relied upon a significant number of the minority in question being already in place throughout the structure. Jennifer Fitzgerald analysed practices at

Queens University Belfast, as a useful case study, and the discussion agreed that equal opportunities had to be understood as a continuous process relevant to all aspects of the institution rather than an achievement.

Other papers showed how the problem was not only structural but, (perhaps more importantly) cultural, with a masculine, and often misogynist ethos dominating which often excluded and disempowered women. Dianne Abbott, MP, gave startling examples of how this culture operates in the house, and Di Parkin reported on the overwhelming evidence discovered by equal opportunity audits that her firm has conducted for Universities. Maggie Humm's paper specifically focused on the new managerial practices, and the way in which they are functioning in piecemeal ways to deny difference, and generate fear. A recurrent theme in the discussions throughout the day was the way in which equality of opportunity failed to give equality of participation; although women have succeeded in getting into Higher Education, their experience in it is one of marginalisation, disempowerment, and frequently victimisation,

These themes were picked up again in the afternoon, when the focus was on gender in the curriculum. The experience of being both a black student and lecturer was powerfully analysed by Delia Macauley Jarrett, while Sarah Franklin gave an insight into the way that Women's Studies changes when it becomes a successful element in an Enterprise Culture, as it has at Lancaster University. Throughout the afternoon session, several useful insights into what we aim at in educating students were given.

The final plenary consisted of a discussion of what should be done next. Helen Landers of E.O.C. made a useful contribution here, indicating their concern about the situation of women in H.E., and asking for as much evidence of discrimination as possible. It was agreed that it is important to log all cases of discrimination through the Women's Studies Network, or WHEN, even if they are not likely to lead to legal action, so that profiles can be built up.

It was agreed that we needed to develop discussions of the issues raised by the conference in all our institutions, and a good focus would be the CVCP document 'Promoting People'. It was also thought that we needed to draw up our own agenda, which should be aimed not only at gaining access for women to Higher Education, but also at participation and power within the institutions of Higher Education.

Our next step is to publish a collection of papers on this issue. For more news, watch this space.

*Anne Seller*

SWIP CONFERENCE, 13 MARCH 1993, UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

'And the other .. with which is accomplished the primary hospitable welcome which describes the field of intimacy, is the Woman.' (Totality and Infinity, p.155)

Disregarding, for the moment, that Levinas's use of concepts may be 'gender-biased', and that the term 'woman' may commit us to a form of essentialism, the five women who travelled from Dundee to Warwick were given a warm welcome. This has not been the case always for some of us who have attended other conferences which are very much male-dominated. On arrival, we were immediately impressed by the organisation for registration, signing up for meals, and the much-needed cup of coffee. You had even managed the weather - a beautiful spring day, which showed the campus looking its best.

I have been present at several philosophy conferences and can make comparisons; for others in our small group, this was their first conference experience. I was struck by a less aggressive approach in the arguments following the papers than I have come to expect. This did not mean that the discussions were less rigorous. It seemed to me that discussions were less concerned with point-scoring than with following through the argument in a



reasoned way. A less aggressive and formal approach makes it easier for more participants to voice opinions, although the time to do so was quite short. With so many papers to get through, it is important to keep within the timescale as set out, but this does mean less time for discussion.

I have never been at a conference before where abstracts have been provided for the parallel sessions. At the Joint Session Meetings of the Aristotelian Society and Mind, papers can be sent out in advance; that is, papers in their entirety. I should imagine that such a bulk of paper may put people off reading through them. The short abstracts provided for the papers at Warwick were just enough to whet the appetite and give some inkling of subject matter; it would have been difficult in some cases. e.g. the paper entitled 'Cactus Sexuality', to choose a paper related to one's interest.

Most appropriately for a conference of SWIP, there was a diversity of approaches to the subject of Gender and Language, ranging from the seriousness of Alessandra Tanesini's 'Whose Language?' to the more light-hearted (though equally thought-provoking) approach of Deborah Cameron's 'Verbal Hygiene.' We also appreciated the fact that we heard papers from both experienced philosophers like Christine Battersby and from postgraduate students like Catherine Constable.

We have no course on Feminist Philosophy in Dundee; indeed there are no women on the teaching staff (apart from tutorial assistants/postgraduates like myself), yet women undergraduates outnumber male undergraduates. The most important effect of the conference on the five of us was a resolve to try and do something about this. Obviously we can have little or no say in the appointment of staff, and the majority of the group felt that feminist philosophy needs to be taught by a woman; what we do hope to do is to start a reading group next academic session and we must continue to make our voices heard whenever possible. All in all, we found the experience of our day in Warwick most stimulating. Speaking personally, it was a refreshing experience

to be amongst others who are philosophers, but philosophers who are also other, and to hear discussions on the problems relating to language that arise from being in this situation. More usually, my experience is to be amongst philosophers who choose not to think or recognise the other as Other, and are thus unwilling to admit that any such problems exist.

If we thought that people would be willing to travel to Scotland, we would very much like to return the welcome!

'If woman has always functioned "within" the discourse of man, a signifier that always referred back to its opposite signifier which annihilates its specific energy and diminishes or stifles its very different sound, it is time for her to dislocate this "within", to explode it and turn it around and seize it, and make it hers'. (Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa')

*Lily Forrester*  
*University of Dundee*

## A Letter from Australia

I live on one edge of the national capital. Five minutes walk in one direction are cows and kangaroos, horses and snakes, farms and wilderness, while ten minutes in a car southwards will get you to the artificial lake around which doze drowsily or throb excitedly - never quite sure which - the various buildings of power, government and national significance which form the city's heart. In this land called Oz, it is a question whether this heart is made from tin; but in any case the corrugated tin roof and ubiquitous tin shed are so much a part of the Australian landscape maybe a tin heart will do the job here too. Trying to understand a culture which bears so many similarities and yet so many striking

differences to one's own is a task full of such questions, better pondered on than answered.

So I try to describe to myself the impression, which surprised me, that the relations between staff and students at the uni seemed in some way more formal than those in Britain - how come, in this land of informality where lecturers where shorts to work? How come the only person I had met who conformed to the stereotype of the sexist, bullish Aussie male was in fact a European? It was almost a relief in the face of such puzzlement to attend a lunch party recently, peopled by the genteel heads of this national monument and directors of that government department, and find myself sitting next to a drunken loudmouth who taunted me insistently and nastily for my vegetarian diet, commented on women's 'bosoms' and asked the Director of the National Library over the cheese course if he had been circumcised. My first 'Aussie bloke'! I felt secure.

I had lived a lonely life as Sole Woman in a philosophy department for many years and now I suddenly am mixing much more often with other female academics. We will have three female lecturers in our department by July, plus one part-time research fellow, we are next door to Women's Studies, there are more women in the Research School, and I know others in universities in New South Wales. So how can I decide what changes are due to this and what changes due to the difference between here and Britain? It sometimes seems that there is more overt acceptance of the need to address problems of discrimination, but what does one make of overheard remarks that 'we need to get a few more Sheilas on the committee'?

In some ways it often strikes me that the Australians more openly admit the presence of conflict than the Brits, and that maybe there are ways in which this is a slightly more open society. Certainly, for example, the freedom of information act is years ahead of Britain. But then, one doesn't usually know the ways a society is closed until the door is slammed in one's face. And what about the fuss last December about the Secret Conference here on

The Sexual Contract - a great topic for a conference and a chance to explore feminist ideas, but it was by invitation only, and who gave out the invites? How were the organisers to know upon whom to bestow this cultural gift? How could they possibly know that my friend Tamara is writing her PhD in the area and would love to have attended? And how could they not know that my colleague teaches and researches in the area, and why didn't she get an invitation? Didn't they get a hint of the fury? I just don't think selection or some quest for academic seriousness justifies such patronage, and such exclusion from debate in a national institution.

And are Australian women academics more advanced in their commitment to feminism than ones in Britain, or had I failed to notice or understand what was needed? Another strange contrast here is that between the archetype of the relaxed laid back Australian lifestyle and that of the little Aussie battler, the relentless pioneering spirit. But it's certainly only the latter that I have noticed in women academics around me. Maybe it's me, maybe I'm just a whinging Pom, but I feel exhausted just thinking about the extent of the personal, emotional and social sacrifices I see women making in their staggering drive to advance their academic careers; am I lazy, or do I just have different ideas in thinking that we ought to be changing the goalposts in academic success and career advancement to make it a little more humane? The only woman I have heard to make similar noises to me, I just realised while writing this, is American. But at a talk I went to on International Women's Day, I heard that Australian women make fewer sacrifices for their careers than American. So which is really Australia? Lucky this is a letter not a sociological treatise. I'm off for a quick break, to check on the veggie patch behind the corrugated tin shed.

*Paula Boddington  
Philosophy Department,  
Australian National University,  
Canberra,  
April 1993.*

## REVIEWS

### Books received

If you would like to review any of the books received (described below), please contact Margaret Whitford promptly.

Somer Brodribb, Nothing Mat(t)ers : A Feminist Critique of Postmodernism, Spinifex Press Melbourne.

In this eloquent work, Somer Brodribb not only gives us a feminist critique of postmodernism with its masculinist predeterminants in existentialism, its Freudian footholdings and its Sadean values, but in the very form and texture of the critique, she literally creates new discourse in feminist theory. Brodribb has transcended not only postmodernism, but its requirement that we speak in its voice even when criticising it. She creates a language that is at once poetic and powerfully analytical. Her insistent and compelling radical critique refuses essentialism - from both masculinist thinkers and their women followers. She demystifies postmodernism to reveal that it and its antecedents represent yet another mundane version of patriarchal politics. Ultimately, Somer Brodribb returns us to feminist theory with the message that we must refuse to be derivative and continue to originate theory and politics from the condition of women under male domination. (Publisher's catalogue)

Kathy Davis, Monique Leijenaar and Jantine Oldersma (eds), The Gender of Power, Sage Publications London.

Drawing on feminist theories of women's oppression and on social theories of power, this book offers original analyses of the relationship between gender and power. The Gender of Power presents a critique of feminist theories of power as simply top-

down models of the oppression of women. The authors argue that this notion presents women as passive victims and ignores the diversity and complexity of women's experiences. The ideas on power of Bourdieu, Giddens, Lukes and Foucault are also evaluated in terms of their usefulness in explaining relations between men and women, which can often be covert, consensual and intimate. (publisher's blurb)

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## Reviews

Michèle Barrett, *The Politics of Truth : From Marx to Foucault*, Polity Press 1991.

The Politics of Truth assesses the state of Marxist theory in the 1990s and how it arrived here. It also attempts to point in the direction it could go next. Barrett's project is to scrutinise some of the central concepts native to Classical Marxism and beyond, and to examine them in terms of post-structuralist ideas. She locates theoretical dead-ends within Marxism (specifically in the theory of ideology) and puts forward possible solutions to these problematic areas of debate. One such area concerns a critical issue for Marxism : the insistence on the primacy of social class. Barrett shows how Marxist theory of ideology came to be defined as 'mystification that serves class interests'. She rightly highlights the weakness of this idea in the contemporary setting where other determinants have equal if not greater influence on the makeup of social structures, for example : sexuality, ethnicity, ecology. These and others need to be incorporated into any theory which hopes to provide a framework to explain the way in which society operates. I would have liked her to have pursued this point further instead of simply noting its general absence from most Marxist debate, but she plays a useful part in highlighting its importance nonetheless.

Barrett cites four figures who contribute to the collapse of Classical Marxism : Gramsci, Althusser, and later Laclau and Mouffe. She focusses on these theorists because she believes them to be what she refers to as 'limit points' in Marxist theory. She is least patient with Althusser for whom she does not always restrain her disdain, whilst being generous enough to recognise his importance concerning conceptualisations of the subject and individual agency within Marxist theory. She traces Laclau and Mouffe's Post-Marxism back to work begun by Gramsci. Their work rejects, amongst other Marxist precepts, the 'class belongingness' of Marxist versions of ideology. She largely defends their work, at one point even suggesting that Marxists should 'look at the world, even if only for an experimental period, through the glasses of Laclau and Mouffe' (p.75). This is a tentative and conciliatory gesture to those hostile to their critique of Marxist theory. It is perhaps too careful here. If their theories have so much to offer, then an 'experimental period' looking at the world from their point of view would surely be of no lasting value? To engage with their work as Barrett does herself seems to be much more fruitful an approach.

Barrett turns then to post-structuralism as a self-proclaimed 'alternative to the entire framework of assumptions and conventions in which such epistemological problems (concerning the theory of ideology) have got stuck' (p.160). It is to Foucault's work in particular that she turns and with good reason. He is one of the few Post-Structuralists who actually engage with Marxist preoccupations, and his theoretical sweep, particularly his work on knowledge, truth and power, is reminiscent of all-encompassing Marxist theories. Barrett's interest in Foucault's work stems from her view that he provides ways out of the dead-ends of Marxism. His work on the way knowledge and power work in society provides Barrett with some answers to the problem Marxist theory has with relativism. However, she hesitates before adopting an entirely Foucauldian stance, partly because of his anti-humanism which she considers to be a weakness, but partly also because of the inadequacy of his work when confronted with the question of agency. Barrett clearly sees

Foucault as part of the solution to the deadlock within Marxism, but not the answer in itself. Inevitably from a Post-Marxist perspective, Barrett opts for a radical overhauling of present Marxist thinking. She believes that its universalising tendencies are untenable and if it wants to survive at all, it must both incorporate ideas of the subject and individual agency in order to explain more clearly why groups of people behave the way they do, and also move away from its reliance on economic determinism. Barrett's book is indispensable for all those interested not only in the current problems surrounding Marxism, but also in ways of dealing with them.

*Claire Kenney*  
*Hertford Regional College*

Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self : Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*, Polity press 1992, p/b £11.95.

Benhabib's Situating the Self sets itself two fundamental tasks. The first is to formulate a post-Enlightenment defence of the universalist tradition in practical thought, a defence which is sensitive to the neo-Aristotelian objections raised against classical liberalism, paradigmatically the communitarian critique of the unencumbered self and the Hegelian charge of formalism. As the terms 'post-Enlightenment' and 'defence' suggest, Benhabib's relation to liberalism is not Manichean; the text aims to be at one and the same time a critique and a hermeneutic radicalization. The critical moment hinges on the central idea that liberal thinkers operated with a monological concept of rationality which she sees as resulting from their overly abstract concept of the self. However, whilst sharing with neo-Aristotelian critics of liberalism the premise that human beings are situated selves, Benhabib believes that the rational core of universalist thought can be vindicated by appealing to a genuinely intersubjective, dialogical model of reason. Norms and institutions, for Benhabib, derive their validity from 'an actual dialogue among actual selves' such as the one which can take place among members of what she calls



a post-conventional society or a community whose participants 'have moved beyond identifying the ought with the socially valid and thus beyond a conventional understanding of ethical life.' Benhabib's dialogic model of reason is not to be construed as a hypothetical thought process, but as an actual dialogue among concrete selves; it presupposes, consequently, a certain philosophy of history leading up to the kind of critical culture in which her dialogic model can be actual.

Benhabib's second task is to consider what can be a distinctively feminist contribution to philosophy, a contribution which, whilst acknowledging that the formalism of the universalist tradition in practical thought was biased in favour of men, does not forsake the ideal of women's emancipation. This concern for women's emancipatory struggle, according to Benhabib, is lost when feminists fail to separate what is good from what is bad in the tradition of liberal thought. On the one hand, feminists' sympathies for the postmodern dissolution of the subject have resulted in a bankrupt theoretical allegiance because, in deconstructing the subject, post-modern feminists have, ipso facto, destroyed the possibility of women's agency; on the other hand, in identifying women's voice with the female voice of care and responsibility (as opposed to the male voice of justice), communitarian-inspired feminists have destroyed the possibility of dialogue between men and women by making them speak two different languages. According to Benhabib, a discourse ethics freed from the formalist/hypothetical approach of classical liberalism can allow for a feminist contribution to the tradition of philosophical thought which, whilst acknowledging the bias of universalist thought, can remain loyal to the ideal of women's political struggle for emancipation. If discourse ethics is conceived of as an actual dialogue among situated selves willing to question their differing conceptions of the good, women's issues, as the issues of active participants in the discussion, will be brought forward in the traditionally male-dominated public domain. The first and the second of Benhabib's tasks, therefore, although analytically kept apart and dealt with respectively in the first and second part of the text, are deeply related; Benhabib's

approach to the question of the feminist contribution to philosophy arises from a non-dogmatic engagement with the tradition of universality in liberalism, which is sensitive to its merits as much as its failures.

There is one critical comment I'd like to make : if Benhabib's non-hypothetical, non-formalist dialogical model presupposes a philosophy of history which leads up to the kind of post-conventional Sittlichkeit which makes that dialogue possible, the liberal task of justification or legitimation of the just polity would seem to become unnecessary. Perhaps Benhabib fails to think through the implications of the historicity of her project for her own concept of philosophy; it does not seem accurate to describe one's own project as one of legitimation if the reflexivity of post-conventional societies has created the cultural preconditions for actualising Benhabib's dialogue between concrete selves. The criticism is not mild because if it does not challenge Benhabib's project content-wise, it does question her philosophical self-understanding. However, Situating the Self is the result of a consistently thoughtful engagement with the philosophical tradition; it contains an illuminating comparative analysis of Arendtian and Kantian conceptions of judgment, and it has the rare merit of making the Anglo-American and Continental traditions of philosophy engage in a productive and mutually enriching exchange.

*Giuseppina D'Oro*  
*University of Essex*

Gisela Bock and Susan James (eds), *Beyond Equality and Difference : Citizenship, Feminist Politics and Female Subjectivity*. Routledge 1992. P/b £11.99.

As the editors explain in the Introduction, one of the aims and, one may add, one of the strengths of this collection is to present the wide variety of approaches that go under the label of feminism. The result however, also reveals a remarkable cohesion

and unity of purpose which cuts across disciplinary and geographical boundaries. The point of convergence is the need, felt by all the contributors alike, to overcome the dualisms that have characterised much of feminist discourse.

It is not only the language of equality and difference that comes under scrutiny here, but also the very framework that imposes and thrives upon such oppositional thinking. The 'sameness/difference dilemma cannot be resolved; it can only be reformulated' (Rhode). Therefore, rather than substituting new categories for old, the aim is to think the limits and the complexities already present in the terms available. This critical aspect is of course far from new; after all, feminism has always involved questioning stereotypes and redefining roles. What is new is the awareness that critique need not involve a uniform allegiance to any kind of theoretical superstructure. Feminism appears as a 'critical ideology ... in its own right' (Offen). The applications of this critical project are manifold. They range from an exploration of the hidden assumptions of the modern discourse of rights (Cavarero) to the complex and often contradictory functions of motherhood in different political configurations (Pateman, Bock), to the inadequacy of the liberal use of the vocabulary of dependence/independence (James), to the paradox inherent in the 'powerlessness of women' (Bethke Elshtain).

The process of reexamination or 'dis-illusionment' (Flax) operates in two ways. First, by showing that the binary structure of modern political discourse is far from transparent and unproblematic, the polarities within feminist thought are contested as well. Understanding difference or 'differences' (Violi) involves allowing for a composite feminist voice which refuses to submit to the blackmail of either/or. And second, through the reevaluation of the dilemma inherent in feminism (and inherited from our foremothers Des Gouges and Wollstonecraft), the domain of praxis becomes redefined. Politics and ethics are at the heart of the feminist agenda : '[t]he exploration of what is possible is more than a cognitive undertaking because it requires us to assume responsibility and take an ethical stand' (Vegetti Finzi); or :

'grappling with those powerful terms of political discourse that necessarily define politics is an unavoidable task' (Bethke Elshtain). By asking for equality and difference, feminists challenge the rigidity of identitarian thinking and indicate the ways in which the dichotomy of thought and action itself may be overcome.

This is a stimulating and welcome collection, not least because it offers English readers the opportunity to engage with the generally under-represented work of Italian feminists. One hopes that the high standards of the contributions included here will help to make the latter better known.

*Katerina Deligiorgi*  
*University of Essex*

*Teresa Brennan, The Interpretation of the Flesh : Freud and Femininity. Routledge 1992.*

In this text, Teresa Brennan's focus is the unresolved 'riddle of femininity' in Freud's work, an issue which, she argues, remains unaddressed by both Lacanian psychoanalytic theory and object-relations theory, despite their overriding concern with the formation of masculine and feminine identities. The riddle of femininity is central to Freudian theory. Femininity is a pathological state (most readily linked with hysteria and masochism within psychoanalytical discourse) which restricts and inhibits both women and men, causing an inward-turning of the self which is destructive of subjective agency. However, it has tended to be associated (both within feminist theory and without) with biology, building up a characterology of woman as 'passive female'.

Exposing some of the problems of the 'characterology perspective', Brennan argues that we should turn to an energetic/physical reading of Freud. This involves an interpretation of the subject in terms of the drives and the psychic energies which must be

spatially and temporally encountered by the subject in order for coherence and stability to arise (overtures of Derrida are clearly present here). Psychic energy works within and between individual subjects. It can help us account for the shifting of emotion from one to the other. Brennan proposes that we abandon the concept of the energetically self-contained subject that Freud was working with. The subject undergoes a series of complex psychic manoeuvres before self-containment and fixity can be reached. Clearly, these psychic processes are different for the female subject, and it is she who is more prone to the riddle.

Producing a complex theoretical argument, Brennan argues that an economy of attention (or visualization) is itself a form of psychophysical energy, embodying direction which can be turned narcissistically upon the self, and outwards through abstraction of the self and the ties to a uterine past (Brennan's thesis hinges on an analysis of the pre-oedipal communication between mother and child). Attention, and its division into conscious and unconscious energetic expenditure, is crucial to the construction of identity. Masculine and feminine subjects have different amounts of attention consequential on the Oedipal experience and constituent drives. Masculine drives, specifically the 'drive to mastery', construct a border between the ego and the maternal at the cost of the female subject (as mother, masculine other) who provides him with 'an anchor in the flesh' (p.132). Hostility and aggression is projected on to her as the masculine subject effectively 'expends' her creative energies and subjective capacities. The feminine subject is prone to inertia and repression; she also enables the masculine subject to fix his identity and reflect knowledge in his name.

Brennan balances a scholarly, critical reading of Freud's oeuvre (a necessity if this difficult argument is to be clearly presented), as well as a recognition of the contemporary terms of the debate within feminism (she notes that her work could almost be read as a dialogue with Kristeva). The section entitled 'The Second Debate' (pp.66-81) argues that the feminist focus on Freud's

phallomonism has been a hindrance rather than a help, leading to a valorization of the riddle.

This is not a book to be branded essentialist or reductionist. Whilst Brennan's argument seems to depend on a 'uterine connection' for a theory of language/representation to respond to the logic of the flesh (p.224), the psyche is viewed as an interface between the social and the physical; psychical reality is always overlaid by material reality, i.e. historically-specific conventions (see chapter 5). It is quite a demanding book, but the presentation of Brennan's argument is clear, well-referenced and supported by a useful bibliography, making it an accessible text for those unfamiliar with Freud's work. It is a book which will be of interest to those concerned with epistemology and philosophy as well as feminism and psychoanalysis more generally.

*Caroline Williams*  
*University College, Swansea*

Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body : Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*, Manchester University Press. P/b £14.95.

Feminists by now are familiar with Freud's work on sexuality and the castration complex; Bronfen points out that death is as important a theme in psychoanalytic theory as sexuality, but that like the rest of our culture, we have preferred not to notice this too much, although death can be considered as a 'castration' which affects men and women equally. It has been cogently argued by other theorists that the identity and stability of the male subject is secured by 'castration' : lack is projected on to the female body. What we discover, if we look at representations of the female dead body, argues Bronfen, is that the fear of castration serves to mask the fear of death. 'What is put under erasure by the gendered concept of castration is the so often non-read theme of death, forbidden maybe because far less conducive to efforts of

stable self-fashioning than notions of sexual difference ... notions of domination and inferiority based on gender difference are secondary to a more global and non-individuated disempowerment before death' (p.35). Because they are familiar, she writes, we are culturally blind to the uniqueness of representations of feminine death, and we do not ask questions about their significance.

Bronfen's rereading of Freud's theory of the death drive shows the disappearance of the maternal body to be essential to this apotropaic structure. Whereas castration anxiety is negotiated over the figure of the dead father, anxiety about death (annihilation or disappearance of the self, destruction of identity and so on) is negotiated over the figure of the disappearing or lost maternal body, which vanishes from the theory too. Bronfen's account discusses in detail representations of dead women from Clarissa to the twentieth century, drawing attention to the startling proliferation of (mostly) beautiful female corpses littering western literature. Her final chapter addresses the problems raised for women authors by the persistent function of the dead woman in the self-construction of the writing subject (e.g. the problem of Virginia Woolf's invocation of the imaginary Judith Shakespeare - if not beautiful then poetically gifted - as an inspiration to twentieth-century women writing). In a gesture akin to that of Irigaray in This Sex Which Is Not One, she suggests that the only strategy currently available is a mimetico-critical one : women writers cannot write as if the image repertoire of the west were obliterated; they can only present its topoi in the form of critical scenarios, but they cannot occupy a feminine subject-position in these scenarios so long as feminine subjectivity is equated with absence of subjectivity (or death).

While it is difficult to render the complexity of the argument (over 400 pages) in a brief review, I'd like to recommend the book highly; it seems to me both significant and original; and in returning to feminist discussions of psychoanalysis the missing theory of the death drive, it will enable us to take a fresh look at

what the conjunction of psychoanalysis and feminism might elucidate.

Margaret Whitford,  
QMW, University of London

Nancy Fraser and Sandra Lee Bartky (eds), *Revaluing French Feminism : Critical Essays on Difference, Agency and Culture*. Indiana University Press 1992. p/b.

The articles in this collection, which includes contributions from Luce Irigaray, Sarah Kofman, Judith Butler, Diana Fuss and many others, are consistently interesting and of high standard. The topics covered range from readings of Rousseau and Plato to discussions and reevaluations of those psychoanalytic themes with which 'French feminism' has come to be almost inextricably linked by Anglophone readers. All the articles are taken from the North American journal *Hypatia* which is not easily available in Britain, and since only one of them (the Judith Butler) has been published in book form in English elsewhere, their appearance here is to be welcomed.

Despite the undoubted quality of the contributions, however, the collection, does not, it seems to me, really work as a collection. In her editor's introduction, Nancy Fraser argues that, ten years on from the publication of Marks' and Courtivron's New French Feminisms, the time has come for a re-evaluation of 'French feminism' and its status in Anglophone feminist circles (hence this book's title). Unfortunately, this collection lacks the necessary coherence and sense of purpose to provide that re-evaluation. For example, Fraser comments on the way the original heterogeneity of New French Feminisms has been obscured by a subsequent over-concentration on Cixous, Kristeva and Irigaray, and yet this collection, which tends to condense the focus even further (there is a marked emphasis on Kristeva and Irigaray in the selection of articles), neither addresses nor 're-evaluates' that over-concentration. The same can be said of the reduction of 'French



feminism' to 'psychoanalytic feminism' : all the articles but one have a psychoanalytic interest, and that odd one out - a transcript of two late interviews with Simone de Beauvoir - serves merely to throw that focus off balance rather than to contrast with or to contextualise it. There is also an irksome imbalance amongst the articles themselves; Irigaray's reading of Plato, for example, receives an introductory article and two replies of its own, in addition to the discussions of Irigaray's other works which appear throughout the volume. Kofman's reading of Rousseau receives one introductory article, but her work is neither discussed nor even cited by any of the other contributions; Kristeva's work is discussed by a large proportion of the contributors, but the collection does not include any work by Kristeva herself.

None of this detracts from the importance of these articles in their own right - the genuine re-evaluations and contextualisations of Lacanian psychoanalysis and its political influences are especially timely and illuminating, But I doubt whether the collection can function as a source volume in the way that New French Feminisms - for better or worse - has done. An interesting and undeniably very useful book, but one for dipping into rather than for taking as a whole.

*Merl Storr*  
*University of York*

Helen Bequaert Holmes and Laura M. Purdy (eds), *Feminist Perspectives in Medical Ethics*. Indiana University Press/Open University Press 1992. P/b £11.99.

Despite the rapid growth of medical ethics during the last two decades - not least in relation to issues like reproduction which are of primary relevance to women - the discipline has until recently been remarkably resistant to questions of gender. Not surprisingly the feminist challenge to the gender-neutrality of

mainstream moral philosophy has found in the field of health care a highly appropriate ground for the development of new paradigms, and for several years now the journal *Hypatia* has been at the forefront in promoting feminist medical ethics. This new book gathers together articles from two 1989 issues devoted respectively to the general field of medicine, including AIDs, clinical research, and nursing care; and to specific reproductive concerns like surrogacy and IVF treatment.

Insofar as the nexus of emergent feminist ethics is taken to centre on notions such as care, responsibility and context, then it meshes easily with the everyday caring at the heart of much health work. Indeed, one complete section of the book is focused on what one contributor, Virginia Warren, characterises as 'housekeeping issues', which stand in contrast to the dramatic, crisis issues - euthanasia, abortion, consent to surgery - which so often occupy masculine accounts. And even where these latter concerns are the focus of analysis, an ethics of care, often explicitly derivative from Carol Gilligan's work, is frequently privileged. Not all contributors, however, are comfortable with such an approach, and both Laura Purdy and Susan Sherwin caution that a concentration on caring may serve to obscure the political context of patriarchal power relations. I was disappointed however that there was no explicit alternative offered to an ethics which takes for granted the stability and unity of its (gendered) subjects. Susan Wendell's piece 'Towards a Feminist Theory of Disability' did at least pose some uncomfortable questions of sameness and difference, but without that entailing a more general critique of liberal ethics.

In the absence of a postmodern fix, I found myself uncharacteristically engaging with Mary Anne Warren's highly traditional contribution 'The Moral Significance of Birth', which among other things offered a strong defence of rights as compatible with the feminist emphasis on social interaction. It's all very familiar territory, but however well argued doesn't really move the debate on. In the same way, Callahan and Knight's article 'Women, Fetuses, Medicine and the Law' gave a neat, worrying account of the way in which pregnant women, like

criminals, are deemed to have forfeited their legal rights. This is clearly important, but again, what the appeal to rights misses is any analysis of the ways in which legal and medical discourse are fundamentally complicit with a system of oppression.

Nonetheless, the feminist perspectives in medical ethics collected here initiate a necessary and accessible debate; my hope is for a further collection of *Hypatia* articles which go on to problematise the liberal humanist ground of that debate.

*Margrit Shildrick*  
*University of Warwick*

Anne Phillips, *Engendering Democracy*, Polity Press 1991, p/b £9.95.

'Gender challenges all our political perspectives' writes Phillips in this very readable account of how feminism challenges democratic theories, forcing us to rethink such notions as participation, representation etc. She gives a clear review of how the liberal democratic theory is so resistant to the inclusion of women, from the hidden (and not so hidden) privileging of the male behind the apparently genderless individual, to the distinction of public/private spheres along gender lines. Because of its reasonableness and clarity, this is the text to use to break into the 'mainstream' curriculum, where consideration of gender issues in Political Philosophy courses still rarely goes beyond a quick look at Mill on women. But the book does significantly more than that. For through the consideration of the under-representation of women in politics, Phillips develops a dialectic between feminism and democracy which indicates the questions that we need to ask as we move from radical critique to theorising our own inclusion in the polity. So the book belongs to the 'coming of age' genre, incorporating the lessons from feminist mistakes as well as insights into a vision of a more democratic society.

A central issue in this agenda is that of difference. The abstract individual (sometimes citizen) turns out to be male, but the concrete person drives us into ethnocentricity. We need more women representatives, but there is no core identity or group interest for them to represent. Nor can the representation of women be fitted into a democracy based on locality. There may be dominantly black or working-class constituencies, there are no dominantly female ones, and feminism has never come to terms with the problem of accountability to women, partly because it has never had to. But until our assemblies etc. reflect the gender structures of the population, women will continue unequal. Mechanisms to secure a 'mirroring' of the population imply moving from the liberal emphasis on individuals to the recognition of groups, acknowledging difference as a political concern.

A brief review cannot do justice to Phillips' treatment of these dilemmas (which includes fascinating examples ranging from Iceland to Nigeria). Her ultimate vision is of an anthropocentric society where 'people are treated like people', but mechanisms are necessary to achieve this. Women should not have to leave their gender identity behind when they enter politics, but neither should they have to define themselves by this one criterion. Once on the political stage, 'politics is engaging with people who are different', which means that we need the capacity to stand back from the contingent experiences, beliefs, etc. which form our identities to see the problem from the perspective of the other'. Thus the political processes of the rape crisis centre cannot simply be transposed to civic politics. Her consideration of the public/private distinctions is a similar mix of pragmatism and astute insight. Philosophers may not be excited by her solutions, but all political theorists should be concerned with her agenda, and if you know anyone involved in political party selection procedures, give this book to them. It can only do good for both women and philosophers.

*Anne Seller*  
*University of Kent*

Susan Sherwin, *No Longer Patient : Feminist Ethics and Health Care*. Temple University Press 1992. H/b.

This is a book I wish I'd written, with an enviable theoretical breadth and analytical depth. Sherwin, professor of philosophy at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, is concerned with both the substance and the process of medical ethics. About the process she is particularly incisive; about the substance she offers a productive series of suggestions on 'feminist expansions of the bio-ethics landscape' to include problems which have been not-so-strangely invisible, and some powerful if occasionally familiar critiques of the marginalisation of women's interests in the traditional choice of problems in health care ethics. But we can never be reminded too often that women's interests will tend to be obscured in the new internal NHS market as much as in the old centralised model. As Sherwin writes, 'as long as women are oppressed because of their sex, to disregard the significance of gender and treat everyone simply as an "individual" is to perpetuate women's oppression.'

Dominance relations are always in the focus of Sherwin's sights, and *No Longer Patient* owes much to feminist activists : even more to those women like Catharine MacKinnon who straddle the academic/activist divide. Initially it seems as if this will entail a feminist critique of medicine from a sociological viewpoint, rather than a philosophical evaluation of underlying concepts. There are in fact social scientific points to be made : for example, Sherwin points out research reflecting the lesser weight accorded to women's requests for euthanasia. But in fact Sherwin quickly progresses into feminist epistemology, which she treats sceptically; she distinguishes feminist ethics from the supposedly women-centred inductive model of ethics, propounded by Harding and others.

Sherwin also distinguishes - memorably - between 'feminine' and 'feminist' approaches to ethics, relegating Gilligan and Noddings to the former camp. Gilligan's concept of a separate female moral voice which emphasises the demands of relationships is a useful antidote to the tendency of deontological moral theories, in particular, to prioritise general moral claims and duties above specific obligations. Likewise, utilitarianism has wrongly demanded a level of impartiality from moral agents which assigns no particular weight to a person's status as subordinate or dominant. Sherwin agrees that 'feminine' ethics, putting moral worth on sensitivity to relationships, has reclaimed women as moral and political agents from the derogation of male philosophers and psychiatrists (such as Kant, Rousseau, Kohlberg and Freud) who thought us incapable of the necessary rule-following powers and abstraction.

But Sherwin follows and develops the argument made against Gilligan by Jean Grimsahw and others : that considerations of caring in relationships can be subsumed under the ethics of justice. Further, she argues, the apotheosis of the 'feminine' perspective - Noddings' argument that caring is the only legitimate moral consideration - merely replicates the traits and thankless jobs accorded to women within dominance relations. The virtue of caring is one of the virtues of subordination, and dualisms of any kind block our attempt to think creatively about genuinely gender-neutral ethics.

The metaethical section of the book concludes with a well-argued discussion of feminism and moral relativism, and a search for a distinctively feminist approach to questions in health care ethics. The practical section of the book applies the theoretical insights gained in the first four chapters to abortion, new reproductive technologies, paternalism and clinical trials. These are 'standard' bio-ethical domains to which Sherwin applies a fresh feminist analysis; in Part III, Sherwin asserts the need for new areas of study to match the new logic. These topics - 'illustrative rather than comprehensive' - include ascriptions of illness, particularly in relation to pre-menstrual syndrome and hormone replacement

therapy; medical construction of sexuality in the work of Foucault and others; and gender bias in the distribution of scarce health care resources.

The backlash finds ever more polished ways of excluding women, Sherwin argues, as feminism itself gains a continually increasing theoretical sophistication. One can only hope that Sherwin's own highly sophisticated analysis does not produce the same ironic counter-effect.

*Donna Dickenson  
The Open University*

*[This is a shortened version of Donna Dickenson's review; readers who would like to consult the full version (about twice as long) should write directly to the reviewer at the Department of Health and Social Welfare, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA.]*

Janna Thompson, *Justice and World Order : A Philosophical Inquiry*, Routledge 1992.

In this book Thompson offers an examination of different conceptions of a just world order in the philosophical tradition, and suggests ways of moving beyond them to a new and more adequate conception. The book begins with a survey of contemporary views of international justice and the problems that world justice poses. Thompson goes on to examine and criticise concepts of international justice in the work of thinkers in the 'cosmopolitan' tradition, including Hobbes, Kant and Marx. Drawing on the strengths and weaknesses of these views, Thompson then sums up the pros and cons of cosmopolitan justice conceived as either a global federation of states or as a world state. In the second half of the book, Thompson turns to the rival 'communitarian' tradition of thinking on world politics and critically assesses the thought of Hegel and Rousseau as examples of this tradition. Thompson then looks at nationalism as a

principle for a just world order, and weighs up its strengths and weaknesses. In the final chapter, building on all of the preceding discussion, Thompson puts forward her own conception of what a just world order would look like in terms of a new concept of nation, grounded in communities which are not confined to the bounds of nation-states as they currently exist. Throughout the book, Thompson assesses theories in terms both of their ethical validity and of their adequacy in relation to actual developments in the world.

Thompson is clearly aiming to blend the best of cosmopolitan, universalist conceptions of international justice with the best insights of the communitarian tradition. She is very well aware of how difficult a task this is, and spells this out to the reader. However, although Thompson provides a useful contribution to the debate over international justice, she does not succeed in transcending its terms, and therefore remains open both to well-worn universalist gripes about communitarian moral relativism and communitarian objections to abstract universalism. My own feeling is that Thompson errs too much on the side of cosmopolitanism, universalising the moral value of general concepts of freedom and community outside of concrete historical context, and without a sufficiently thorough definition of her moral terms. It is also disappointing that Thompson takes her bearings entirely from mainstream texts and debates and does not make use of contemporary critical work in the philosophy of international relations, including feminist work. Having said that, given the dominance of the cosmopolitan/communitarian arguments in discussions of global justice, this is a praiseworthy effort at synthesis and raises a lot of serious questions about the prevailing terms of debate.

*Kimberly Hutchings*  
*University of Wolverhampton*



Else Viestad, *Kjønn og ideologi - En studie av kvinnesynet hos Locke, Hume, Rousseau og Kant* [Gender and Ideology - An Investigation of the Image of Women in Locke, Hume, Rousseau and Kant], Oslo : Solum Forlag 1989.

The author of this book is a philosopher whose mother tongue is Norwegian. The topic is European. Viestad chooses two British empiricists, Locke and Hume, and confronts their progressive views of women's humanity and of the role allotted to them in society with the sexist ideas of French 'liberation' writer Jean-Jacques Rousseau, which are fairly well-known but only in rough outline, and with those of the founder of German Idealism, Immanuel Kant, which are not readily spoken about.

When Kant's misogyny is measured by the human outlooks of Locke and Hume, and contemplated in the light of the towering position that he, the youngest of the three, acquired in European philosophy, the possibility that we are faced with a historical case of backlash comes to the fore. Viestad, incidentally, does not say that we are, and may not even be prepared to defend such a thesis. However, that may be, the deliberations of the latter two, Rousseau and Kant, on women's lower nature and worth have served European thought and society as legitimation structures throughout the nineteenth century and still do. This book, written in a lucid style that ought to appeal also to a wider readership, can serve as a scholarly correction. It is analytical (in a broad sense) rather than speculative, the observations are well documented and the arguments seem completely valid.

One of the most interesting parts is found around pp.70-72, where the author produces some schematic illustrations of competing traditions in the history of ideas, concerning the entanglement of gender division and general systems of value. It seems worth while to mention that these schemata find a most interesting corroboration in the history of biology (Laqueur, Making Sex (1990) on different biological concepts of 'sex') as well as, believe it or not, in the history of my own field, logic.

Locke and Hume are discussed in Part I, Rousseau in Part II and Kant in a shorter Part III. If an English, or German, or French, translation is undertaken, I would recommend that a section on Johann Gottlieb Fichte be added; this would extend and round off in a most natural manner the chronological sequence of authors analysed and further enhance the picture of European demise in casu women and men, in philosophy and in society.

This seems to me to be the first book that goes to some length to document the differences between some of the philosophical anthropologies that have sold well since the seventeenth century. This is done in a translucent, manner, free from rhetorical padding, free also from (justified) expressions of indignation but with due emphasis on the significance of the sequence in time of the chronologies in question.

For linguistic reasons the book is not yet accessible to university students and staff outside Scandinavia, which is a pity. So, to my great regret, I have been unable to put this book on students' reading lists, where it would come in extremely handy. This book certainly deserves to be translated at least into English, preferably into German and French as well.

*Else M. Barth*  
*Department of Logic and Analytical Philosophy*  
*Groningen University*

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