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# TWO KINDS OF FEMINIST PHILOSOPHY

BY

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**Abstract:** This article makes a distinction between two kinds of feminist philosophy. One looks ‘up’ to the realm of philosophy and aims to intervene in this realm in order to make it feminist. The other looks ‘down’ to the world of human experience and aims to make it feminist. This article argues that feminist philosophers’ efforts are better spent on the second kind of feminist philosophy. Feminist philosophy can better achieve its aims by applying philosophy to the critical analysis of women’s lives and gender norms, rather than by attempting to change the discipline of philosophy itself.

## 1. *Introduction*

This article makes a distinction between two kinds of feminist philosophy. One kind looks ‘up’ to the realm of philosophy and aims to intervene in this realm in order to make it feminist. I call this ‘feminism in philosophy.’ The other kind looks ‘down’ to the world of human action and experience and aims to intervene in this realm in order to make it feminist. I call this ‘practical feminist philosophy.’ I argue that there are some concerns with the project of making philosophy feminist in the first sense and that feminist philosophers’ efforts might be better spent on feminist philosophy in the second sense. Feminist philosophy is most successful when it uses philosophy for the critical analysis and evaluation of women’s lives and gender norms, rather than when it attempts to change the discipline of philosophy itself.

In the past few decades we have seen the development of feminism within most, if not all, academic disciplines. We have seen the development of feminist history, which has shown the importance of women actors as well as of the structural concept of gender.<sup>1</sup> We have seen the development of feminist literary criticism, which uses literature to gain insight into women’s subjectivity, including how subjects take on gendered norms.<sup>2</sup> We have seen the development of feminist social science, which both analyzes the experience

of women within the context of broader social forces, and also shows how women ourselves constitute a social force.<sup>3</sup> And, feminism has had an impact on the life sciences, in fields such as women's health, by showing male bias in scientific studies as well as in the scientific profession as a whole.<sup>4</sup> By including women in their studies, as well as by reflecting on the content, origin and effects of gendered norms, researchers have contributed to the progress in freeing women from some form of oppression, be it discrimination in the workforce, unequal social policy, sexist health care practices, or the oppression of strict gender norms. They have thereby made these fields feminist. In what way, then, has philosophy been made feminist?

One way has been through the project of putting feminism 'in' philosophy. In the introduction to a volume with this title, the editors describe this project as one that, rather than creating a separate and distinctive branch of philosophy or as replacing philosophy, '[takes] feminism to be a radicalizing energy internal to philosophical inquiry.'<sup>5</sup> The idea is to take the standard areas of mainstream analytic philosophical inquiry, such as epistemology, philosophy of science, philosophy of mind, ethics, etc., and to radicalize them by making their method of inquiry feminist. The result is 'feminist epistemology,' 'feminist philosophy of mind,' 'feminist philosophy of science,' 'feminist ethics,' etc.<sup>6</sup> In what follows, I will argue that there are limitations to the project of putting feminism in philosophy by making feminism part of the methodology of philosophical inquiry. I do not think that this particular project has succeeded in radicalizing philosophy, nor do I think that it is possible for it to do so. In Section 2, I will discuss what I call the 'blind spot' approach to 'feminism in philosophy' and present some criticisms of this view. In Section 3, I will present some examples of the 'feminism in philosophy' that I critique in Section 2. In Section 4, I discuss what I call the 'meta-philosophical' approach to 'feminism in philosophy' and present some criticisms. In Section 5, I present my positive view, which I call feminist practical philosophy.<sup>7</sup>

Before I begin, I will explain what I mean by the term 'feminist.' 'Feminist' is certainly a broad term, which includes a range of views. Still, I think there is a core notion of what it means for something to be feminist: it is what is actively engaged in promoting the agenda of ending the oppression of women in any of its various forms.<sup>8</sup> To say that something is *feminist* is to endow it with a kind of power or activity. This is due to the 'ist' suffix that is added to a noun in order to indicate engagement in an action. A pianist, for example, is someone whose life is engaged in playing piano. For doctrines such as feminism, capitalism, etc., the 'ist' suffix that makes them into the adjectives 'feminist' and 'capitalist,' indicates a description of someone, or some policy, that is engaged in the activity of promoting this doctrine. A feminist is therefore not someone who merely believes, for example, that women are equal to men, but someone whose actions are guided by this

belief. To say that something, such as philosophy, is feminist is therefore to say that it is an activity that is engaged in the project of promoting the feminist agenda. This activity can take many forms. But a necessary element must be that it aims to improve the lives of women.<sup>9</sup> This core view allows for feminist activity not just to include making new laws or starting social movements, but also to include research that gives us insights into our condition. Research that enables us to see, for example, that pornography in the work place is a form of harassment and is therefore wrong is feminist.<sup>10</sup> Providing information about the world is a feminist activity when the aim of this activity is to make visible the harms done to women with the aim of ameliorating them, or to make visible what is beneficial to women with the aim of promoting it. To say that something is feminist is therefore to say that it has a worth that is due to its role in guiding action that aims at improving women's lives.

Feminism is therefore ultimately concerned with values, which guide action, rather than with mere facts. An insight into the facts of women's lives is feminist only if it is given in the context of an argument that evaluates these facts for the sake of improving women's lives. Pointing out that women are sexualized in the workforce is only a *feminist* observation when it is part of an argument that provides an evaluation of this activity as a form of harm and hence as something that should not be done. Or, showing that, historically, 'when opportunity has existed, women have never failed to take the jobs offered,'<sup>11</sup> is only *feminist* history when this research is part of an argument that women ought to be given the opportunity to work. On this account, scientific inquiry, both natural and social, which is about the facts, can be feminist when the facts with which it is interested are those that are to be used in arguments for improving women's lives. Feminist science thus recommends including more women in its studies or focusing on issues that are of special concern to women because these studies can be used in arguments for how to improve women's lives.

It is my view that many of the arguments employed by feminist philosophers who aim to put feminism in philosophy do not qualify as feminist in the core sense described above. The arguments that they make do not serve as a guide for action that aims to improve women's lives. I will now proceed to describe this project and present my concerns.

## ***2. Feminism in philosophy – correcting a blind spot***

What would it mean to make a field of philosophy, such as epistemology, philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, ethics, etc., feminist? What would a theory of knowledge, or of the mind, etc., be that could improve the lives of women? One way that what I am calling 'feminism in philosophy'

has answered this question has been to take an area of philosophical inquiry, such as 'epistemology' or 'philosophy of language,' etc., and change its norms (for what knowledge, language, etc. is) by confronting it with norms associated with women's experience. Through such an approach, feminist philosophers have sought to correct what they see as a 'blind spot' in a philosophical theory, often due to the fact that it is a theory put forward by men who are not interested in women's concerns. This model can be likened to that of feminism in the empirical sciences where women are included in research that previously included only men. By including women in clinical trials, for example, norms of health have been changed from those that were based on studies of men alone, and, as a consequence, we have become aware of more opportunities for improving women's health. Or, in the social sciences, by including studies of women, we have become aware of previously unnoticed power relations and of how they are harmful to women. In philosophy, a classic example of such correcting of a 'blind spot' is the inclusion of an ethics of care in theories of moral reasoning. Feminist philosophers, often with reference to work of Carol Gilligan, have argued that the traditional norms of moral reasoning, such as reasoning from principle and abstracting from particulars, are typically male and that an ethics of care better represents women's ways of moral reasoning.<sup>12</sup> Hence, by including as a norm of moral reasoning the value of relationships and of care for others, women's moral reasoning gains a value that it was previously denied.

However, as the example of an ethics of care indicates, the parallel between philosophy and the empirical sciences with regard to correcting a 'blind spot' cannot be made so easily. Unlike the natural and social sciences, feminist philosophy does not conduct research on actual women.<sup>13</sup> Rather, feminist philosophy includes women in philosophy at the conceptual level. Typically the way one gets women 'in' philosophy is by making what historically has been associated with women into a methodological concept or symbol<sup>14</sup> through which the philosophical theory can get a grip on the realm of inquiry with which it is concerned. Feminism in philosophy thus includes concepts of the feminine that are historically associated<sup>15</sup> with women such as 'care,' 'the body,' or 'the social,' which play a role in the structure of the philosophical theory.<sup>16</sup> It is noteworthy that Gilligan, the psychologist, gave as evidence for her argument about girls' moral psychology the moral reasoning of the girls she interviewed. But when her views are understood as part of an attempt to bring feminist ethics into *philosophy*, then the ethics of care comes to be representative of women's reasoning in general. Indeed, often in philosophical theories of ethics, the mind, epistemology, etc., concepts such as care, the body and the social are made to stand in for women.<sup>17</sup> But, as many have pointed out, it is dubious that these concepts of the feminine really are representative of real, contemporary, women, especially when one considers the differences among us in terms of race, class,

ethnicity, etc.<sup>18</sup> Nor is it clear that they do not also represent men. In addition, it must be noted that even if these concepts did represent women, it is not necessarily the case that adding them will really correct a blind spot in philosophy. Most of the concepts that feminists use in order to put feminism in philosophy have their origin in non-feminist arguments already made by men.<sup>19</sup> For those of us who study the history of philosophy, this is not surprising. In the history of philosophy, one can find for every argument in favor of ‘masculine’ concepts, such as ‘reason,’ ‘universals,’ ‘principles,’ arguments against these concepts. ‘Radicalizing’ philosophy is very hard to do.

But even if we suppose that that the concepts that we have gotten ‘in’ to feminism do succeed in radicalizing philosophy, that is, in changing its norms – there is still a further criticism to be made of feminism in philosophy. This is that ‘feminism in philosophy’ commits a kind of genetic fallacy. A genetic fallacy is what occurs when the origin, source or cause of a statement or belief is taken as evidence for its truth or falsity.<sup>20</sup> It is the fallacy of considering factors in the context of the discovery or origin of a statement to be relevant to its context of justification and to whether it is true or false.<sup>21</sup> An example of a genetic fallacy would be to say that, because the origin of Plato’s philosophy is his unresolved Oedipal conflict, his theories need not be taken seriously.<sup>22</sup> The kind of genetic fallacy committed by ‘feminism in philosophy’ arguments, however, is not with regard to the *truth* of the theories they propose, but with regard to the *feminist* nature of these theories. Here the fallacy is to assume that because a theory has its origins in a feminist intention to correct a ‘blind spot,’ the theory that results from this correction is itself feminist in the sense that its arguments are directed at the improvement of women’s lives.

Let us again use Gilligan’s *In a Different Voice* as an example. While Gilligan’s work is certainly to be praised for giving us a different perspective on moral reasoning, and, indeed, radicalizing moral philosophy to include an ethics of care, it is still an open question whether an ethics of care is feminist. Although the origin of the research and the writing of *In a Different Voice* was Gilligan’s feminist intention to show that girls can be just as good at moral reasoning as boys, it is possible that the theory of moral reasoning that resulted from Gilligan’s research is itself not feminist. That is, if we were just to take the conclusion of Gilligan’s argument – that making moral decisions based on an ethics of care can be as valid as making decisions based on abstract principle – we would not necessarily find this to be a feminist conclusion and take this to contribute to improving women’s lives. Without regard to its origin in Gilligan’s feminist inspired research, and without taking an ethic of care to be representative of women’s reasoning, but simply by considering the nature of moral reasoning endorsed by the theory, feminists and anti-feminists alike could endorse an ethics of care (or, indeed, they both could dismiss it).<sup>23</sup>

I think that we can find this kind of genetic fallacy in many 'feminism in philosophy' arguments that try to radicalize philosophy by introducing into it something associated with women.<sup>24</sup> I will discuss examples of these in the next section. They claim feminist status for their theories, since the origin of the theory (its context of discovery) is feminist in intent. However, what makes the theory acceptable as a good theory (its context of justification) is independent of its feminist origin and need not be connected to it. Moreover, once the theory is found to be a good, well-justified theory, it is hard to see its connection to improving the lives of women. This has become evident to me in teaching feminist philosophy. In order to explain why a theory of embodiment, for example, is a feminist theory, I have to provide a lot of the history of feminist philosophy and explain the origins of the theory. I have to explain how, in the history of philosophy, discussions of the body have typically been excluded and also how the body has been associated with what is feminine. Still, there is a gap from this genealogy to the validity of the theory of embodiment itself, and moreover, to any feminist purchase in the present. Aside from correcting a historical 'blind spot' in philosophy, it is not evident what are the feminist gains to be achieved by using a theory of embodiment in contemporary theories of the self. In other words, it is not clear what exactly makes these theories feminist.

I think that the approach to feminist philosophy that involves this genetic fallacy, by which we take a theory to be feminist because it is the result of including representations of women in philosophy, is due to feminist philosophy wanting to model itself on the empirical sciences. In the empirical sciences, including women in research that had previously only included men allows women's bodies and our social relations to be included as what is empirically true about the world and enables the sciences to be responsive to women's needs. In philosophy, however – or at least in the kind of analytic philosophy that the feminists with which this article is concerned want to put philosophy 'in' – what is being argued for is not an empirical truth. It is rather an argument for a conceptual truth – for what is the right way to conceive of the mind, linguistic meaning, personal identity, or ethics, for example.<sup>25</sup> But women cannot be included in, for example, philosophy of language, in the same way that we can be included in cancer research or studies of poverty. This becomes clear when we see that 'feminism in philosophy' often refers to what is symbolic of women, rather than to actual women. In this case, the intent to include women in philosophy, while often making us rethink some of our philosophical assumptions with regard to concepts typically associated with women, does not necessarily translate back into a theory that contains an argument for the improvement of women's lives.

The feminist origin of a theory should therefore not be confused with its ultimate status as a feminist theory. By making this error, the project of

‘feminism in philosophy’ often ends up making claims whose feminist content is difficult to discern. Once a ‘female’ concept has been put ‘into’ a theory, even if the theory is accepted as a good theory, it can be hard to see how it is a feminist theory in the practical sense of what can guide us in improving women’s lives. It is now just a theory to be used to determine its object, such as the nature of the mind, language, science, ethics. It is not a theory that can be used to tell us what we ought to do.

Perhaps one could respond that this kind of genetic fallacy is a problem for feminist arguments in any field in which there is a feminist context of discovery. One could say, for example, that if one did not know that the context of discovery of a historian’s research on women and work had as its origin the feminist goal of showing that women should be given more work opportunities, then the historical facts that she discovered – that women will take jobs that are offered them – are themselves not necessarily feminist. But I do not think this is the case. Even if we are unaware of its context of discovery, the historical fact that women have taken jobs when they are offered them carries with it its own feminist value as a fact about women’s behavior, and can still serve as evidence and have a practical value for future feminist arguments about women and work. But it is unclear how the fact that valid moral reasoning includes an ethic of care can have a feminist value once we forget the origin of the theory. Unlike women’s desire to work, this is not a fact about women, but rather a fact about moral reasoning in general. If an ethic of care is to be a feminist ethics – that is, to have a practical value for improving the lives of women – then it must also be shown that women do in fact reason according to an ethic of care and also, indeed, that we *ought* to reason this way. But insofar as such theories are just theories about what is a valid form of moral reasoning, they are not feminist in the sense I described above. Certainly, any theory that is true can be of value in improving women’s lives. But this is simply in virtue of its truth. Such theories are feminist only in a contingent sense, not in the sense that I have described in which their value is due to its role in guiding action that is aimed at promoting what is beneficial to women. A feminist theory is one that guides our action not simply in virtue of its being true, but also because it indicates that the action in question will improve women’s lives.

### 3. *Examples*

I will now discuss some examples of feminism in philosophy that aim to correct a ‘blind spot’ in philosophy in light of the preceding argument. In ‘Feminism in Philosophy of Mind: The Question of Personal Identity’,<sup>26</sup> Susan James argues that theories of personal identity that deny bodily continuity marginalize the ‘symbolically feminine.’<sup>27</sup> According to James, traditional masculinist theories of personal identity in analytical philosophy often ‘focus

on psychological continuity as the stronghold of the self independent of bodily continuity.<sup>28</sup> When they do so, they secure a kind of self, 'which would in other circumstances be regarded as pathologically disturbed,' since it denies the complexity of our lives and the role of the body in our personal identity.<sup>29</sup> For James, putting feminism in the philosophy of personal identity thus requires showing how the body plays a role in our identity.

I think James' argument is susceptible to the criticisms of 'feminism in philosophy' I mentioned above. First of all, she leaves it unclear in what way the body represents women's experience, nor does she explain why it ought to.<sup>30</sup> Secondly, it is not clear what it is that makes James' argument feminist, in the sense described above, as what is engaged in ending women's oppression. James' argument for including the body in accounts of personal identity is convincing; but this is regardless of any relevance to feminism. Although feminist concerns clearly motivate James to make the argument for the importance of the body in personal identity, the claims to validity that the argument makes are not themselves feminist claims, but rather are about the role of one's – that is *anyone's* – body in personal identity. In fact, in this case, James' feminist motivations are not even needed in order to fill in the blind spot in philosophy and make the case for the importance of the body. Nearly a century ago, Maurice Merleau-Ponty argued for the importance of the body in our conscious relation to the world. Here, then, is a case where it is unclear what is feminist about an argument for 'feminism in philosophy.'

In her essay, 'Feminism in Philosophy of Mind: Against Physicalism,' Naomi Scheman argues for a philosophy of mind that shifts 'attention [away from physicalism] to understanding persons as both bodily and social, and knowledge as interpersonal and interactive.'<sup>31</sup> She argues that reorienting physicalism to pay more attention to feminist questions can help 'reframe problems that vex the literature – problems of accounting for ourselves as physical beings in the world.'<sup>32</sup> She writes, 'taking commonsense psychology seriously is to be committed *not* to a theoretically vexing ontology of objects (mental events, states and processes), but rather to practices, explanation among them, and to the nuances of our lives as shaped and made intelligible through those practices.'<sup>33</sup>

Yet, although, as Scheman writes, 'feminist perspectives shift attention to understanding persons as both bodily and social, and knowledge as interpersonal and interactive,'<sup>34</sup> it is hard to see what exactly makes the conclusions of her own argument feminist. Moreover, Scheman's arguments for a social theory of the mind are, as she admits, similar to those arguments put forth by men in non-feminist contexts. She cites John Dupré, Ian Hacking, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. I am convinced by Scheman's Wittgensteinian account of the mind. Yet I think this view of the mind could be held by feminists and anti-feminists alike. Still, one could argue, the origins of Scheman's argument in a concern for the body and the social are what give



this theory a feminist value. But this begs the question of what exactly is the feminist value of these notions – ‘the social’ and ‘the body.’ What is it that makes paying attention to the ‘nuances of our lives’ feminist? Even if we grant to Scheman that women tend to pay more attention to the nuances of our lives, more needs to be said to explain why this is a feminist act.

In ‘Feminism and Philosophy of Language,’ Jennifer Hornsby argues that communicative speech acts should be included in the philosophy of language and that ‘once these ... are in place various feminist (and other political) themes can be explored.’<sup>35</sup> Again, we have an instance of there being a standard ‘male’ form of philosophy, which, it is argued, can be made feminist by the inclusion of something associated with women; here, it is ‘the social.’ According to Hornsby, the male account of language is one that, like Grice’s, argues that language expresses our beliefs through our intentions to get them across. Such a view, however, ignores the fact that language is more interactive, and that it is fundamentally social.<sup>36</sup> For Hornsby, it is feminist to argue for the social aspect of language, since it can help us to understand social forms of speech, such as hate speech, and to see how, through communicative speech-acts, hate speech can be resignified.

But, again, if we are to take Hornsby’s thesis, that ‘an idea of communicative speech acts belongs in philosophy of language,’<sup>37</sup> without knowing her motivations for making this claim, we would not necessarily see this as feminist. Moreover, as she notes, J.L. Austin, who had no explicit concern for feminist issues, first developed the theory of communicative speech acts. So, a feminist motivation was not even necessary for the inclusion of the theory of speech acts in philosophy.<sup>38</sup> Although Hornsby does indicate that this account of language could have liberatory practical applications with regard to hate speech, she still needs to connect hate speech to a specifically feminist concern. *That*, in my view, would be a feminist argument. And, in fact, in an earlier article, her discussion of speech acts and pornography is more successful in this regard, as I will show in what follows.

Let us now consider these examples of what I am calling the genetic fallacy in feminism in philosophy. James argues for a theory of personal identity that includes the body. Scheman argues for a social theory of the mind. Hornsby argues for a philosophy of language that takes into account speech acts.<sup>39</sup> Put this way, it is hard to see how these arguments count as feminist. How are they arguments that would help to eliminate the oppression of women, by indicating a harm or injustice (or a benefit or a goal) that affects women so that we can be aware of this in our actions and policies? As I described them, the conclusions reached by the arguments above do not appear to be feminist because what they claim is simply some general philosophical truth. On the face of it, a social theory of the mind, for example, is neither feminist nor not feminist. It is simply true (or not true, depending on one’s view). It is also not really the case that these papers impart a ‘radicalizing’

energy to philosophy. What they are arguing for has, for the most part, already been argued for by men who were not motivated by feminist concerns.

Perhaps the problem with these arguments is merely that they are incomplete. They fail to carry the argument through to its conclusion about the feminist impact of such a theory and leave it implicit why talking about the body or the social, for example, has a feminist value. For example, it is possible that, in those instances where there really is a gendered blind spot in a sub-field of philosophy due to it being dominated by male philosophers, correcting this blind spot can enable this field to engage with issues of women's oppression. I think that there is indeed feminist value in directing our attention to the body, care, or society as an object of philosophical inquiry, especially with an eye to the role they play in women's oppression. But this is in virtue of our attention being directed to these topics as *objects* of investigation. It is not in virtue of making these things themselves the *tools* of the investigation, or its 'method.' By taking the body, care, or the social, as an object of an investigation into women's oppression, we are able to come up with feminist norms with regard to these things.<sup>40</sup> But simply making the body, care or the social the *norm* of the theory itself – of what constitutes the mind, language, or ethics – still leaves it an open question of what is the feminist value of such a theory. It leaves undone the work of discussing what the feminist norms for such objects should be. It is my view that what is most valuable in feminist philosophy is its use of philosophy to argue that, with regard to women, certain actions are right or wrong. Arguing for putting women 'in' philosophy simply with the aim of 'radicalizing' philosophy is less valuable.<sup>41</sup> This is because the feminist content of such arguments is obscure.

#### **4. *Feminism in philosophy – the meta-philosophical approach***

There is, however, another way that feminist philosophers can be understood to be arguing for feminism in philosophy, which is, perhaps, also implicit in the examples above. I will call this the meta-philosophical approach. This approach, rather than correcting a blind spot and arguing that the right form of philosophy of mind, epistemology, philosophy of language, etc. is one that includes certain concepts associated with women, instead argues that we can make philosophy feminist by taking a step back and choosing a certain philosophical methodology that would be good for feminism. In fact, in the examples discussed above, it is possible that what these feminist philosophers have in mind as the practical end of their arguments is that we accept the theory of the mind, identity, language, etc. they recommend because it is useful to feminism. In other words, they are not arguing for the truth of the theory, but for its usefulness for a feminist agenda.

An example of such an argument is Julia Driver's 'Constructivism and Feminism.' Driver presents a Humean constructivist meta-ethical position that 'seems quite friendly to feminist concerns.'<sup>42</sup> This is a view about morality that 'preserves the truth value of moral claims while, nevertheless, basing morality on desire, on a sympathetic engagement with others.'<sup>43</sup> According to Driver, this is a view that feminists who want an ethics of care while also preserving moral objectivity would endorse. Here it is not necessary to evaluate Driver's proposal for Humean constructivism, since the aim of her paper is not to defend the correctness this position as such, but rather to argue for the virtues of this theory for feminist philosophy.

But now there is a problem for feminism in philosophy from the other direction than that of the 'blind spot' views discussed in the previous section. Now, the problem is not whether a correct account of epistemology, the mind, etc. really counts as feminist. Rather, the problem is that it is not clear whether the theory that feminists ought to adopt really is correct. Indeed, the nature of metaethical constructivism is currently much in debate, with Kantian constructivists arguing against Humean constructivists, and realists arguing against constructivism altogether. Should we adopt a Humean constructivism just because it is good for feminism? If Humean constructivism is wrong, then it is hard to see how such a theory could be feminist friendly or friendly at all. If it is right, then this would be argument enough in its favor.

I will give one more example of what I am calling meta-philosophical feminism in philosophy. In her paper 'Ethics Naturalized: Feminism's Contribution to Moral Epistemology,' Alison Jaggar endorses a naturalized form of ethics as the approach that is best for feminists. Moreover, Jaggar argues that naturalism in ethics allows for a distinctively feminist form of naturalism, one that 'seeks moral understandings that reveal rather than obscure empirical inequalities related to gender.'<sup>44</sup> According to Jaggar, a feminist naturalized ethics can make a contribution to moral philosophy 'by paying attention to real life-practices of moral inquiry, including those used by women.'<sup>45</sup> For Jaggar, feminist ethics is naturalized ethics because it makes use of methods that 'are multidisciplinary and informed by empirical knowledge, rather than rationalist or idealist in the sense of purporting to appeal to reason alone.'<sup>46</sup> Moreover, she argues, it *ought* to be naturalized because 'attention to the "real-life" practices of moral inquiry is indispensable to determining which practices best enable the production of realizable moral claims.'<sup>47</sup>

Here, Jaggar, like Driver, is arguing that a certain form of philosophy is best for feminism. For Jaggar, it is naturalism, which allows feminists to 'reveal empirical inequalities related to gender.' But, as in the discussion of Driver, if Jaggar does not show that a naturalized ethics is itself the right form of ethics to adopt independently of its value for feminism – if it is still

possible that naturalized ethics is false – then its being useful for feminism is besides the point. Yet, nowhere in her paper does Jaggar give an independent argument for the validity of naturalism in moral philosophy. Jaggar seems to assume both that naturalized ethics is the right ethics because it is feminist and also that it is feminist because it is naturalized and pays attention to real life practices of moral inquiry. But suppose naturalism in ethics is not the right approach to ethics? Jaggar's own discussion could lead one to consider this possibility. She writes that 'few feminists reach their conclusions about abortion from abstract or general analyses of concepts, such as those of a human being or a right to life,' but instead take into account empirical inequalities related to gender.<sup>48</sup> But abortion does seem to be a case where abstract concepts of right can play a role. What is wrong with Jaggar's argument is that she assumes that because a philosophical method is a useful tool for feminism, then it is also the right method of ethics in general. But this is to take a specific position regarding what makes a philosophical method the right one to choose. It is to say that we should choose as 'right' those theories that are useful to us. Although this is a legitimate view – it is pragmatism – it is not the only view of theory choice and itself needs to be argued for. Perhaps, in fact, the grand theory that underlies many essays on 'feminism in philosophy' is indeed pragmatism. Again, however, pragmatism itself did not originate as, nor is it always, a feminist method.

I therefore have concerns about this meta-philosophical project, which recommends that we endorse a certain philosophical position about the nature of the mind, identity, language, or ethics because it is useful to the feminist project. I think that feminist values can play a role in philosophy, as they do in science.<sup>49</sup> But this is in the 'context of discovery,' where we decide which issues to investigate.<sup>50</sup> I do not think that feminist values should be part of the context of justification. The fact that an ethical theory is friendly for feminist care ethics should not in itself be a reason for accepting it. A necessary condition for accepting a theory is because we find it to be, in some appropriate sense, true or accurate. Indeed, a philosophical account with feminism 'in' it could be wrong and therefore should not be chosen. In fact, it is possible that two competing theories, such as Kantian ethics and Humean or naturalistic ethics, or a Gricean theory of language and an Austinian theory can both be found to be feminist.<sup>51</sup> So being feminist is not enough to decide the correctness, or, therefore, the usefulness, of a theory.

Yet perhaps this is not a fair description of what these meta-philosophical arguments for feminism in philosophy intend to do. Perhaps the feminist philosophers I have discussed are not arguing that we should accept some philosophical position simply because it is feminist, but rather they are arguing that if we want to have a feminist philosophy in the first place, such a philosophical position would be a necessary condition for it. If we look closely at the examples of feminism in philosophy that I have discussed

above, we can see that these theories are meant to give us a framework within which feminism is possible. It is noteworthy that a common theme in many 'feminism in philosophy' articles is that a feminist epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of science, ethics, philosophy of mind, etc., should be a social or intersubjective or naturalistic theory of knowledge, the mind, ethics, etc. These articles can therefore be understood to be making a kind of transcendental argument that, if a feminist philosophy is to be possible, then it must include what is natural and social.

But why is it that natural or social theories of 'x' are the ones that get to count as feminist theories? In the history of philosophy, Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche, for example, have all made arguments for a social theory of the self, and many non-feminist male philosophers have argued for naturalism. So here it is not a case of filling in a blind spot. I think the reason why these articles argue that feminist philosophy should be a natural or a social theory of 'x' is because achieving the feminist agenda requires an understanding of the empirical, social world. It is not just a conceptual issue. Feminism is about what occurs 'on the ground' in women's lives as we are influenced by social forces. This is why the empirical sciences have an easier time of putting feminism 'in' their disciplines. In the case of the empirical sciences, what is feminist is what includes women in scientific research. It is what focuses on and is attentive to women's psychology, bodies and social positions. It is through these empirical enquiries that we can see what can make a difference in women's lives and answer the evaluative questions that we have.<sup>52</sup> This is true even for literary studies, which engages in research on the cultural representation of women in novels.

The feminist philosophers I have discussed, however, who want to put women 'in' the mainstream fields of philosophy – fields whose form is too abstract to include empirical research<sup>53</sup> – often must make women into abstract 'symbols' or 'concepts,' which fail to represent women's diversity. When they do not do this, we often find them instead making meta-philosophical arguments for social theories of the mind or naturalist theories of ethics that take into account 'real-life' practices. But this is, in effect, really to recommend that feminist philosophy not be philosophy,<sup>54</sup> or to say that what makes feminist philosophy feminist is something other than philosophy. It is to say that if, as philosophers, we want a feminist approach to thinking about the mind, language, ethics, etc., we must then endorse a philosophical theory that, in turn, endorses research on these issues in the social sciences. But this is just to say that the disciplines where progress is made towards realizing the feminist agenda are in the social sciences, and not philosophy. Here it seems that the condition for the possibility of a feminist philosophy is that it not be philosophy.

Elizabeth Anderson's paper, 'Feminist Epistemology: an Interpretation and Defense,' implicitly indicates that feminist philosophy ought to defer to the social sciences. Anderson argues that rather than being about 'feminine

ways of knowing,' feminist epistemology is better understood as 'the branch of naturalized, social epistemology that studies the various influences of norms and conceptions of gender and gendered interests and experiences on the production of knowledge.'<sup>55</sup> But, it should be noted, social epistemology, as Anderson describes it here, is really empirical social science. In my view, Anderson's argument signals the end of the project of 'feminism in philosophy.' She rightly points out that 'feminist' cannot qualify philosophy as a specifically female way of doing philosophy, since such a project relies on dubious claims about feminine cognitive differences.<sup>56</sup> We cannot, therefore, get feminism 'in' philosophy by means of some specifically female method. Instead, Anderson makes a meta-philosophical argument for a form of feminist epistemology as social epistemology. She writes, 'without claiming that women, or feminists, have a globally different or privileged way of knowing, naturalized feminist epistemology explains how feminist theory can productively transform the field of theoretical knowledge.'<sup>57</sup> Notice in this quotation that the role Anderson gives to philosophy is once removed from the empirical sciences. The role of 'naturalized feminist epistemology' is not itself to further the feminist agenda directly, but rather to explain how 'feminist theory' – that is, feminist social theory – can transform our field of knowledge. The role of philosophy, as 'naturalized feminist epistemology,' is not itself to transform the field of theoretical knowledge, but instead to provide the conceptual framework in which this can be done by the social sciences.<sup>58</sup>

### 5. *Feminist practical philosophy*

Is this the best feminist philosophy can do? To step back and describe a view of knowledge, or the mind, or ethics, etc., in such a way that these fields are in turn open to the empirical work that could further the feminist agenda? I agree that philosophy in general must respond to the empirical sciences. But if feminist philosophy consists of nothing other than meta-philosophical arguments for social epistemology, or social or naturalistic theories of the mind, or ethics, etc., then I think that those of us who look to feminist philosophy for insights into women's oppression have a right to be disappointed. This kind of feminist philosophy is only very indirectly concerned with putting actions into the world. It comes up with the framework within which it is possible to use feminist (or any) values in empirical inquiry, but it does not engage in the inquiry itself, nor does it say what are the feminist values that should guide our inquiry.<sup>59</sup>

I would like to suggest that feminist philosophers' efforts are better spent engaging in what I call practical feminist philosophy. Rather than trying to get feminism 'in' philosophy at the abstract level of philosophical theory in order to change the nature of philosophy, feminist philosophy should have its aim lower down and try to gain insight into women's condition in order

to articulate our intuitions about wrongs done to women with the aim of eliminating them. In other words, feminist philosophy should be the development and application of philosophical norms to the lives of women, as studied by the natural and social sciences, in order to get clear about their structure and, more importantly, to evaluate them. In my view, feminist philosophy ought to look at women's lives and gender norms through the lens of philosophy, rather than look at philosophy through the lens of feminism. Feminist philosophy should be philosophy in the service of feminism, not feminism in the service of philosophy.

It is easy to find examples of feminism in the service of philosophy in feminist political philosophy.<sup>60</sup> But there are also examples of philosophy in the service of feminism in other fields of philosophy, such as epistemology and philosophy of language. In her essay 'Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?' Sally Haslanger argues for a 'critical analytical' approach to race and gender whose task is to develop accounts of race and gender that will be effective tools in the fight against injustice.<sup>61</sup> Haslanger's project is not a meta-philosophical project that takes some particular philosophical theory and makes it feminist by putting feminism in it. Instead her project is to use the philosophy at hand, regardless of whether it is considered to be 'masculinist' or 'feminist,' for the practical task of creating a tool for the feminist end of improving women's lives.<sup>62</sup> This is in contrast to the aim of achieving an internal change within philosophy and using feminism to achieve that. Haslanger's aim is not to change the status quo of philosophy; rather it is to change the status quo of women.

Another example of practical feminist philosophy is Rae Langton's and Jennifer Hornsby's argument against pornography as what silences the speech of women. Building on MacKinnon's argument that the free speech of men silences the free speech of women, Langton and Hornsby use Austin's work on speech acts to further explain and articulate how pornography interferes with women's freedom of speech. They argue that pornography is what creates a context in which women's illocutionary speech acts – speech acts through which one performs an action – are ineffective.<sup>63</sup> The aim of Langton's and Hornsby's argument is to articulate a way in which pornography is harmful to women and also, ultimately, to argue that these are harms from which the law should protect women. It is for the sake of this aim that they make use of speech act theory. Here, the argument is not that speech act theory is itself feminist philosophy, but rather that pornography is harmful to women and speech act theory can show us why.

## 6. Conclusion

In order to be feminist, the discipline of philosophy does not need to be radically changed. In fact, it is arguable that, of all the disciplines, philosophy

already has the greatest capacity to be feminist. This is because philosophy is the discipline that articulates and defends the norms that ought to guide our lives and our interactions with others. As the discipline that argues for what is right or wrong and good or bad, philosophy certainly has a lot to offer the feminist project. Rather than trying to be like the empirical disciplines, and include feminism 'in' philosophy, as part of its method of inquiry, and rather than simply advocating that philosophy take empirical evidence into account, philosophy should contribute to feminism what only it can offer; norms of justice and the good. There is therefore no special kind of philosophy that is feminist. Universalism, particularism, naturalism, deontology – all philosophy can be feminist. What makes philosophy feminist is the nature of the conclusion that the argument aims to prove. And *good* feminist philosophy is made up of good arguments for these ends.<sup>64</sup>

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The literature here is vast. See, for example, Scott, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Gilbert and Gubar, 1979; Moi, 1985.

<sup>3</sup> See Milkman, 1986; Mackinnon, 1979; Roth, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Fausto-Sterling, 1992.

<sup>5</sup> Fricker and Hornsby, 2000, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> For a complete list of these feminist forms of philosophy, search the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy under 'feminist.' See <http://plato.stanford.edu/search/searcher.py?query=feminist>.

<sup>7</sup> I should note that these are not the only two alternatives. There are many kinds of feminist philosophy. Walker writes that 'feminist work that attends mainly to women, to the impact of gender on life and thought ... is, one might say, the "root" of feminist philosophy,' (Walker, 2005, p. 157). I agree with Walker's broad definition. My aim here is critically to evaluate one strand in feminist philosophy that I call 'feminism in philosophy.'

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of what it means to say that a woman is oppressed, see Young, 2011, pp. 39–48.

<sup>9</sup> I intentionally leave open what I mean by 'improving' women's lives. In fact, a main point of this article is that it is a goal of feminist philosophy to figure this out.

<sup>10</sup> See Mackinnon, 1979.

<sup>11</sup> Milkman, 1986, p. 376.

<sup>12</sup> Gilligan, 1982.

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of feminism and experimental philosophy see Pohlhaus, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of the symbolically feminine see Fricker and Hornsby, 2000, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> See Lloyd, 1984.

<sup>16</sup> I will discuss examples of these in the next section.

<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, the Summer 2011 special issue on 'Embodying the Ethical,' in *Hypatia*, 'A Journal of Feminist Philosophy.' The editors write; In addressing (issues of embodiment) feminist philosophers have alerted us to the ethical meanings of embodiment – to the ways that our bodies function as grounds for ethical theorizing, as the subjects of ethical demands, and as means by which these demands are articulated. Entering this conversation, the essays in this special volume introduce paradigms of embodiment that expose the blind spots of prevailing ethical



norms (Bergoffen and Weiss, 2011, p. 453). But, in the articles in the volume, is it hard to see what is the relevance for *women* of exposing these particular blind spots. 'Embodiment' seems to be just a 'stand-in' for women. For example, in describing the section on 'Creating Ethical Spaces,' the editors write that the authors:... ask us to rethink our being in space as an intercorporeal, multiperspectival ethical encounter. Together, they call upon artists and architects to express the power of sensuous experience through works that transform the ethics and politics of public spaces (p. 455). But they do not explain what this has to do with women and, moreover, why it is feminist argument. The essays in the section on 'Freedom, Dependency and Vulnerability' are described by the editors as:... thinking freedom in embodied ethical terms. They analyze the relationship between 'the desire to be seen as free' and our personal, political, and ethical ways of being in the world. Emphasizing the pragmatic, normative and ontological implications of corporeal vulnerability (the contributors) argue for the cultivation of new habits, new norms of personhood, and a new humanism, moving the discussion of freedom beyond the politics of rights (p. 456). Yet none of the articles in this section make explicit the import of such discussions of embodiment for women. The same holds true for the final section of the issue on 'Confronting Dis-Abling Norms,' (p. 457).

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Friedman, 1987, pp. 87–110; and Card, 1990, pp. 101–108.

<sup>19</sup> Such as Merleau-Ponty on the body, Hume on sentiment, Wittgenstein on social context.

<sup>20</sup> M. Salmon, 2013, p. 212.

<sup>21</sup> W. Salmon, 1984, p. 12.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>23</sup> See Baron, 1997, pp. 145–173.

<sup>24</sup> In Crouch, 1991, Margaret Crouch discusses another instance of the genetic fallacy in feminist philosophy. This is when feminist philosophers criticize theories put forth by men, because they are put forth by men. According to Crouch, however, these theories do not necessarily commit the genetic fallacy 'because they do not consider gender irrelevant *ipso facto* to the truth or falsity of the theory. They try to provide an argument for their claims' (p. 113). However, Crouch still does not think that gender is 'a category of a kind sufficient to do the work required for it' (p. 113). She writes, 'the reasons that feminists reject such (masculine) views are the same reasons that many non-feminists do: they don't work theoretically, they don't accord with experience, they are inconsistent, and so on. The fact that they are typically masculine is not a reason for rejecting them, unless you already have a reason for thinking that theories with the sorts of characteristics possessed by these theories are wrong. The term 'masculine' does not seem to be doing important work' (p. 114). I agree with Crouch, as my own version of a genetic fallacy in feminism will show.

<sup>25</sup> One might want to challenge this view of analytic philosophy as something that is distinct from the empirical sciences. But here it should be noted that the burden is not on me to defend the distinction between philosophy and the other disciplines, but rather on those who argue for a feminist philosophy, which, by its very name presupposes that there is such a distinction and, indeed, enforces it.

<sup>26</sup> James, 2000, pp. 29–49.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>38</sup> See Antony, 2012, pp. 245–278. Antony criticizes Hornsby for taking what Antony calls a ‘replacement’ view, whereby a theory has feminist value in virtue of ‘replacing’ a traditional theory that is ‘male.’ Antony points out the weakness of such a position, noting that Hornsby’s own view, which comes from J.L. Austin, could itself be understood to be masculinist. Antony also disagrees with Hornsby’s account of Grice. Yet, I think this is beside the point, which is really that arguments that attempt to put feminism ‘in’ philosophy, and to create, for example, a feminist philosophy of language, cannot be good arguments.

<sup>39</sup> Examples of ‘feminism in philosophy’ are not limited to the *Cambridge Companion to Women in Philosophy*. Crasnow and Superson, 2012, also contains several examples of what I am calling ‘feminism in philosophy’ as do articles in recent volumes of *Hypatia* and *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly* (see notes). For example, in ‘What is Distinctive About Feminist Epistemology at 25’, Phyllis Rooney, argues that what makes epistemology feminist is that it is historically and politically situated and ‘reflects the interests, questions and goals of individual knowers or communities of knowers that have particular social and cultural identities, locations and histories,’ (Rooney, 2012, p. 349). Feminist philosophy is also reflective of how social forces affect knowledge and it emphasizes epistemic virtues and ‘knowing well,’ (p. 359). But still, it is not clear why reflective epistemology or virtue epistemology is *feminist*. To know this we would have to know what are the norms of reflection it uses. Rooney notes that the ‘value turn in epistemology’ ‘is also now claimed by some working in mainstream epistemology,’ however, without making any reference to feminist philosophy (*ibid.*). Although it is indeed very possible that male bias is to blame for not crediting the feminist philosophers who discuss virtue epistemology, the fact that the very same theory can be both ‘mainstream’ and ‘feminist’ raises the question of the feminist value of this theory of knowledge. I think the best way to understand this version of ‘feminism in philosophy’ is as providing the conditions for the possibility of a feminist philosophy. That is, *if* we think of epistemology as reflective or requiring virtue, *then* it can be such that feminists can make use of it. I will have more to say about this in what follows.

<sup>40</sup> See Varden, 2012, pp. 301–326.

<sup>41</sup> A possible exception to this might be political philosophy where, for example, taking the body to be more central to theories of justice might help to combat women’s oppression by preventing such theories from downplaying the importance of rights over the body, the neglect of which is a source of female oppression. But if political philosophy were to do this by saying that rights themselves are embodied, it would be susceptible to the critiques of feminism in philosophy I discuss above. If, however, political philosophy was made to see women’s bodies as something to which rights apply, then this would be a case of ‘practical feminist philosophy’ that I discuss in what follows. It is possible that feminist political philosophy is a borderline case, since political philosophy, unlike, epistemology and the other subfields of philosophy I discuss, already implicitly has feminism ‘in’ it, since it is concerned with just institutions. I am grateful to the editors of *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* for making me think about this issue.

<sup>42</sup> Driver, 2012, p. 178.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>44</sup> Jaggard, 2000, p. 458.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 452 (abstract).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 458.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 464.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 458.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Longino, 1990; Anderson, 2012, pp. 377–402.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 383.

<sup>51</sup> See Antony, 2012, p. 263.

<sup>52</sup> See Anderson, 2012, p. 22.

<sup>53</sup> See Samantha Brennan’s discussion of the tension in feminist ethics between capturing women’s experiences and guiding women’s choices (Brennan, 1999).

<sup>54</sup> At least on the terms that the feminist philosophers I am discussing themselves set up. See endnote 25.

<sup>55</sup> Anderson, 1995, p. 54.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>58</sup> Here, one could say that my definition of philosophy is too narrow, and that philosophy is really an interdisciplinary field that interacts with other fields of research. It should be noted, however, that this is not my definition of philosophy, but rather the position of the philosophers that I discuss in this article. As I noted above (n.25), the project of feminist philosophy is, by definition, a project that works within disciplinary boundaries. The feminist philosophers I have discussed want to make the discipline of philosophy feminist just as feminist historians, for example, want to make history feminist. It is a disciplinary project. Anderson takes herself to be making a philosophical argument for feminist epistemology precisely because it is an argument about the legitimacy of the use of values in science. Anderson herself is not doing social epistemology in her paper (although she cites some social science). My point in this article is that *if* we are to maintain disciplinary boundaries, such that we can argue for something called ‘feminist philosophy,’ then the theoretical project of ‘feminism in philosophy’ is not the best approach. A better option, in my view, is what I call practical feminist philosophy. Another option would be to give up on the project of feminist philosophy altogether and endorse a more all-inclusive project of what could be called ‘feminist theory.’

<sup>59</sup> A final recent example is Lorraine Code (2015). Code argues that rather than detachment, ‘care is a vital component of ... inquiry’ (2015, p. 18). But is Code’s argument feminist? In fact, Code states that an aim of her paper in reclaiming care as epistemically vital is to ‘show emphatically that standard alignments of care with femininity – the female – are simply misguided’ (p. 1). So Code does not aim to fill in the standard ‘blind spot’ with regard to care. Instead, for Code, ‘care’ means what emerges from ‘real-life’ examples that allow one to engage with an issue (p. 15). But here Code is susceptible to my criticism against meta-philosophical arguments for feminism in philosophy. Namely, that advocating for care in epistemology and hence making it possible to see how values play a role in inquiry, while perhaps good epistemology, has a thin purchase for feminism in the sense of improving women’s lives. Indeed, as Code herself notes, ‘villains too care about the outcomes of their actions’ (p. 1). She continues: ‘Hence multi-faceted engagements with epistemic practices and processes are urgently required across the social political world’ (p. 1). In my view, it is in arguing for *these* engagements, such as critiquing male bias, that feminist work is invaluable.

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, Nussbaum, 1999. And more recently, Khader, 2011, and Gheaus, 2012.

<sup>61</sup> Haslanger, 2000, p. 36.

<sup>62</sup> Haslanger’s article considers both race and gender. Here, I focus on gender.

<sup>63</sup> Langton, 2009, p. 79.

<sup>64</sup> I am very grateful to the anonymous reviewers and to the editors of the *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* for their excellent comments. I would also like to thank Ana Barandalla, Jeanette Bicknell, Fa-ti Fan, Robert Guay, Nicole Hassoun, Anja Karnein, Christopher Morgan-Knapp, Amy Shapiro, Sue Spaid, Amia Srinivasan, Lisa Tessman, the audience at the SWIP-UK Conference at Oxford, 2014, and the Binghamton University Undergraduate Philosophy Club.

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