

Analytic Feminism: A Brief Introduction

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This essay introduces the subject of this special issue by offering a characterization of analytic feminism in terms of its context, methods, and problem areas. I argue that analytic feminism is a legitimate subfield both of feminism and of analytic philosophy. I then summarize the problems addressed by the essays of this issue.

The purpose of this issue of Hypatia is to highlight the work of analytic feminists, to demonstrate that feminist analytic philosophy (or analytic feminist philosophy) exists and merits consideration both by feminist philosophers working in other traditions and by other analytic philosophers who have not yet examined, or who have rejected, feminist philosophy. It is, we hope, an exercise in bridge-building, not fence-building. The idea for this special issue arose at about the same time that similar projects were getting under way in other forums. In early 1991, Virginia Klenk, my co-editor for this issue, sent out an inquiry to philosophers who she thought might be interested in (but not necessarily agree with any particular tenets of) the intersection of analytic philosophy and feminism. The result was the formation of the Society for Analytical Feminism, which now meets at American Philosophical Association (APA) conventions and provides a forum for analytic feminism. Meanwhile, Louise Antony and Charlotte Witt were putting together their anthology, A Mind of One's Own: Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity, a book that has a preponderance of essays in what we would call analytic feminism, and whose expressed aim was similar to ours here. Last summer Susan Haack was the guest editor of an issue of the Monist on the topic of "Feminist Epistemology: For and Against" (see the essay by Lynn Hankinson Nelson in

the present issue for an interesting critique of the aims of that issue). It was, it seemed, (and still does), an idea whose time had come.

Nonetheless, many philosophers to whom I pitched the idea for this issue had some initial concerns. First, some asked, isn't analytic feminism well-trodden ground, since most of the early feminist philosophers were trained in analytic philosophy? Second, is analytic philosophy even compatible with feminism, or is "analytic feminism" really just a masquerade for a backlash against feminism and, hence, likely to be more a source of conflict, or worse, for feminists? More fundamentally, is analytic feminism a recognizable body of work, a legitimate category of philosophy, at all? To begin, then, I would like to respond to these concerns.

Although many feminist philosophers who began writing about feminism in the sixties and early seventies, such as Marilyn Frye, Ann Garry, Sandra Harding, Alison Jaggar, and Joyce Trebilcot (this is no attempt at a comprehensive list), were trained in analytic philosophy, they began to question that tradition in the process of clearing ground institutionally and theoretically for feminism in philosophy. Eventually many of them gave up trying to work within the analytic tradition and began to reject the authors and even the problems and concepts that sustain that tradition. Feminist philosophy is now a legitimate field of philosophical research, and there now exist institutional structures that nurture feminists and women in philosophy, such as the Society for Women in Philosophy (SWIP), the APA Committee on the Status of Women, this journal, and the SWIP-I on the Internet. One can even get an NEH grant for research on feminist issues in philosophy. Not to overstate things or suggest that we are home free, we must acknowledge that the first wave of feminist philosophers has been enormously successful in staking a claim to institutional territory and theoretical significance. Still, much philosophical work remains to be done. Many of us believe that it is important now to re-engage the analytic methods, problems, concepts, and

authors that attracted us in the first place and to see how they might be put to feminist uses and, likewise, to see how philosophical feminism can illuminate issues in philosophy that we might have thought unrelated to feminist concerns. Although feminist philosophy originated at least partly in analytic philosophy, it is especially valuable now to re-examine analytic concepts and methods with the extensive background of philosophical feminism we have since developed.

When I conceived this special issue of Hypatia I knew that eventually I would have to characterize analytic feminist philosophy in some detail. Try as I might, I cannot give necessary and sufficient conditions for what counts as a piece of analytic feminism. But analytic philosophers can be quite satisfied with noting the family resemblances between instances of a concept, and this is perhaps all that is possible in this case. As I have suggested, a philosophical approach distinguishes itself by its problems, methods, and the tradition of canonical works on which it draws. Feminists in the analytic tradition, like analytic philosophers more generally, value clarity and precision in argument and use logical and linguistic analysis to help them achieve that clarity and precision. They draw on a canon of traditional work that is common through the nineteenth century with most Western philosophical traditions. The analytic canon then takes a decisive turn away from France and Germany, and toward England (with a keen interest in what was going on in Vienna in the early part of this century) and, later, the United States and Canada.

Analytic feminists distinguish themselves from nonfeminists by an interest in a wider variety of works by feminists: works that draw on other traditions in philosophy as well as work by feminists working in other disciplines, especially the social and biological sciences. Most important, analytic feminist work is characterized by the conviction that there is value in the pursuit of notions of truth, logical consistency, objectivity, rationality, justice, and the good, despite the fact that the pursuit of these

notions has often been dominated and perverted by androcentrism. But unlike nonfeminists, analytic feminists insist on seeing how sexism, androcentrism, and the domination of the profession of philosophy by men distorts philosophers' pursuit of truth and objectivity. Analytic feminism often attempts to reclaim these notions from androcentric biases: to find what is epistemically compelling in these concepts and what is morally good in their application and to separate that from the sexist baggage that has traditionally accompanied them. Some analytic feminists (and this has been the focus of much of my own work) argue that, properly analyzed, these concepts can be used to undermine androcentrism or unjust gendered social institutions.

Analytic feminists share the conviction that the social constructions of gender create a fundamentally unjust imbalance in contemporary social and political arrangements. But no further political generalization can be made about us. Some analytic feminists fit Alison Jaggar's description of the liberal feminist, but others reject liberalism and consider themselves to be politically socialist or radical. Analytic feminists run the gamut of political views from libertarians to liberals to socialists to radicals. Analytic feminism is not to be confused with some sort of conservative feminism, or worse, a backlash against political or academic feminism. Perhaps the only social or political position that analytic feminists can be said generally to take is that there is a sex/gender distinction, though they may disagree widely on how this distinction is to be drawn and what moral or political implications it has.

Among those who are skeptical of analytic feminism there is also a deep concern about its viability; some charge that analytic feminism is an oxymoron. (I might note that this charge comes from philosophers hostile to feminism as well as feminists hostile to analytic philosophy, though this is not the place to respond to the former.) In recent years, analytic methods and traditional issues and authors in many fields have come under attack by feminist intellectuals. Regarding philosophy, they charge (in various

ways) that the notions of reason, truth, objectivity, or the methods of logical and linguistic analysis are hopelessly masculinist, and cannot be reclaimed for feminist purposes. Many canonical philosophers, including Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Rousseau, Frege, Quine, and Rawls, have been criticized as sexist or at least androcentric, and are said by some to have nothing useful to say to women. These charges pose a serious dilemma for feminist philosophers who have been trained in the analytic tradition and who find that tradition valuable. Analytic feminists tend to make the following kinds of responses. While it is true that there are sexists who are analytic philosophers, this is no less true of postmodern and Continental philosophy. (Hegel, it may be argued, is among the most explicitly sexist philosophers in any canon, after all.) So, if we were to reject philosophers on those grounds we would have to reject almost the entire history of philosophy. But the real question is whether their ideas can be corrected and rescued by an enlightened critical reader. There is in any case a value in exploring how one can turn the weapons of the oppressor against the oppressor. Further, many traditional philosophical notions are not only normatively compelling, but are in some ways empowering and liberating for women. Louise Antony's discussion of the "bias paradox" makes this clear; more generally, if we want to reject a view because it is false/oppressive/unjust to women, then we need some rational, objective ground from which we can argue that it is in fact false/oppressive/unjust to women. Thus, analytic feminists have begun (in a second wave) to explore the connections between feminism and traditional problems in analytic philosophy, and to examine the history of philosophy with the critiques of androcentrism and sexism in the tradition in mind, at the same time maintaining a clear sense of the need for defensible notions of truth and objectivity.

Last, our response to the skeptics must be simply that the proof of the pudding is in the eating: let's see what you think when you have digested these articles. Are they

politically or morally retrograde, or are they, as Ann Garry argues, at least minimally decent? Do they advance the debate over philosophical issues of importance to feminism? Do they advance debates in analytic philosophy by making good use of feminist analyses? The editors of this issue feel that the essays here, as well as other writings of feminists in the analytic tradition, should make it abundantly clear, if there was ever a real question, that feminism and analytic philosophy are not only compatible but are often symbiotic. Analytic philosophy can make significant contributions to feminism, and it can also be greatly illuminated by feminist perspectives.

The articles in this issue focus on the methods and problems of analytic feminism, leaving debates about particular figures in the canon to other occasions. Two essays might be best classified as focusing on the methodology of analytic philosophy. Ann Garry proposes to "take a fresh look at the relation between feminist philosophy and analytic philosophy" to ask whether analytic feminism can offer, in the words of her title, "A Minimally Decent Philosophical Method?" We believe that you will find her essay thoughtful and provocative, (perhaps painfully) honest, and ultimately ambivalent. Lynn Hankinson Nelson discusses the charge that feminist epistemology or feminist science is "incongruous," a charge that she notes comes from both the left and right flanks, one might say. She argues that this incongruity is only apparent and that there is a place for feminist epistemology within both philosophical feminism and mainstream epistemology, on any reasonable view.

The other six articles focus on particular themes of interest to analytic feminists. Reflecting the dominant trend in analytic philosophy generally, epistemology is discussed nearly to the exclusion of metaphysics, and these analytic feminists favor naturalized (and socialized) epistemology. Elizabeth Anderson's "Feminist Epistemology: An Interpretation and a Defense" is sure to become a definitive piece, showing through numerous examples of actual feminist science just how a feminist

critique can inform and improve the objectivity of science. She distinguishes and illustrates four ways that feminist critiques serve as a corrective to the distorted lenses of masculinist science: through the critique of gendered structures in the social organization of science, through the analysis of gendered symbols in scientific models, through exposing sexism in scientific practices and focusses, and through revealing androcentrism in its concepts and theories. It is exactly the kind of work that one can use to counter the philosophical missourians in philosophy of science who demand that we show them just how the feminist critique makes a difference to the substance of scientific theories.

Two authors function as analytic underlaborers to existing feminist critiques of science. Mark Owen Webb, in "Feminist Epistemology and the Extent of the Social," distinguishes and examines six ways that an epistemology can be socialized (on analogy with "naturalized" epistemology), engaging the work of three prominent feminist epistemologists to develop what he considers the proper formulation of socialized epistemology. Geoffrey Gorham, in "The Concept of Truth in Feminist Sciences", argues for a particular concept of truth--"truthlikeness"--that he thinks fits well with the feminist critiques of science offered by feminist authors with such very differing views as Donna Haraway, Sandra Harding, and Helen Longino.

One article is in moral epistemology. Margaret Little's "Seeing and Caring: The Role of Affect in Feminist Epistemology" examines the epistemic role of caring in ethics, engaging the literature of analytic ethics, epistemology, and Aristotle studies. In doing so she illustrates in moral philosophy two of the kinds of feminist critiques that Elizabeth Anderson described and illustrated in feminist science: identifying the androcentrism in supposing that typically male ways of seeing the moral are the only ones and identifying the sexism in then taking that way of seeing to be the primary virtue of moral epistemology.

Finally, two essays take on feminists' criticisms of analytic philosophical concepts directly. In "Feminism, Objectivity, and Analytic Philosophy," Sara Worley defends analytic epistemology against critiques by Susan Bordo and Evelyn Fox Keller, arguing that they show at most that men might tend to like analytic epistemology more than women do. Although she agrees with the outlines of their critiques of "objectivity," she shows that analytic epistemology itself provides similar reasons to reject the view that knowledge is absolute and perspectiveless, and she argues that neither Bordo nor Keller have yet provided a viable alternative conception of objectivity. Louise Antony's "Is Psychological Individualism a Piece of Ideology?" investigates the charge made by Naomi Scheman that psychological individualism is masculinist ideology that serves to maintain capitalism and patriarchy. Antony distinguishes among several theses and defends the one--realism about individuals' beliefs and desires--that Scheman appears to attack. In Antony's view, realism about objects is supported by theoretical necessity, and "the best theory of the mind entail[s] the existence of beliefs and desires." Antony argues further that liberal political philosophy does not in any way depend on this thesis of psychological individualism; indeed, she shows that liberalism is compatible with psychological holism.

Finally, we include Julie Maybee's book review of Elizabeth Anderson's Value in Ethics and Economics. This book is of special interest to feminists because of the applications Anderson makes of her novel theory of value in the book. Maybee's remarks critically examine Anderson's claims about how her theory of value could be extended to treat racism.

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