

APA Newsletters

NEWSLETTER ON FEMINISM AND PHILOSOPHY

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FROM THE EDITOR

I have long wanted to hear what people had to say about knitting—especially those feminist philosophers I’ve admired whenever I have seen them knitting in professional philosophy conferences. I am continually amazed by the beauty of their knitting projects and the intensity of their philosophical questions, which they often ask with hardly a pause in the knitting. There’s been a resurgence of sorts in knitting and, if one looks hard enough, there are many public knitters, guerrilla knitters, and knitting clubs. I even hear that knitting is “all the rage” in dorms across the country. I’m a bit of a knitter myself; I’ve knit a few sweaters (with uneven sleeves that I wore proudly) and lots of scarves. I knit mostly during those periods of my life when I needed to be creative philosophically. In a way, I think that doing something other than writing philosophy helps to write philosophy. Today, my most ambitious knitting projects are sleeping bags for my kids’ stuffed animals. But I recognize a certain pull—a desire—to express in concrete, tangible, and complete ways some sort of creative element.

The essays gathered here pay tribute to all the nonphilosophical creativity of feminist philosophers but especially knitting. The issue came together not unlike a knitting project. I contacted the half dozen knitters I knew and asked them who they knew. They gave me further names who, in turn, gave me even more names and more creative activities and more ideas. Even when I posted a general call for contributors on two prominent feminist philosophy listservs, it was evident that some social knitting was going on. My email was forwarded to others and the collective project generated even more contributors. I was impressed by the enthusiasm of the response and the community of scholars who support each other both in their scholarship and in their non-philosophy creative work. Although ultimately not everyone was able to contribute to this issue, I was truly inspired and I hope that we will have similar opportunities to share our collective wit and wisdom.

I want to thank all of the contributors to this issue—the joy in writing truly comes forth in these essays—and, indeed, all of the contributors to all of the issues I have edited over the last five years. This is my last issue as editor. I pass the torch to Chris Bellon. The *Newsletter* brought me into contact with some truly wonderful people. I especially thank and praise Erin Shepherd, publications coordinator at the APA National Office. Erin is terrific to work with and brilliant at her job. She deserves a great deal of gratitude for bringing all the *Newsletters* to us twice a year. I will miss thinking about each issue and working with such great people. Nevertheless, I look forward to continuing to read the *Newsletter* and I am confident that Chris will continue to bring you interesting, diverse, and challenging articles on women and all things feminist.

ABOUT THE *NEWSLETTER ON FEMINISM AND PHILOSOPHY*

The *Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy* is sponsored by the APA Committee on the Status of Women (CSW). The *Newsletter* is designed to provide an introduction to recent philosophical work that addresses issues of gender. None of the varied philosophical views presented by authors of *Newsletter* articles necessarily reflect the views of any or all of the members of the Committee on the Status of Women, including the editor(s) of the *Newsletter*, nor does the committee advocate any particular type of feminist philosophy. We advocate only that serious philosophical attention be given to issues of gender and that claims of gender bias in philosophy receive full and fair consideration.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

1. Purpose: The purpose of the *Newsletter* is to publish information about the status of women in philosophy and to make the resources of feminist philosophy more widely available. The *Newsletter* contains discussions of recent developments in feminist philosophy and related work in other disciplines, literature overviews and book reviews, suggestions for eliminating gender bias in the traditional philosophy curriculum, and reflections on feminist pedagogy. It also informs the profession about the work of the APA Committee on the Status of Women. Articles submitted to the *Newsletter* should be limited to 10 double-spaced pages and must follow the APA guidelines for gender-neutral language. Please submit essays electronically to the editor or send four copies of essays via regular mail. All manuscripts should be prepared for anonymous review. References should follow *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

2. Book Reviews and Reviewers: If you have published a book that is appropriate for review in the *Newsletter*, please have your publisher send us a copy of your book. We are always seeking new book reviewers. To volunteer to review books (or some particular book), please send the editor a CV and letter of interest, including mention of your areas of research and teaching.

3. Where to Send Things: Please send all articles, comments, suggestions, books, and other communications to the editor: Dr. Christina Bellon, Department of Philosophy, Sacramento State University, 6000 J Street, Sacramento, CA 95819-6033, bellon@csus.edu.

4. Submission Deadlines: Submissions for Spring issues are due by the preceding September 1st; submissions for Fall issues are due by the preceding February 1st.

NEWS FROM THE COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

We look forward to another exciting year of work as the CSW gets ready to welcome its new members on July 1st: Lisa Schwartzman (Michigan State University), Sharyn Clough (Oregon State University), and Elizabeth Hackett (Agnes Scott College). This means it is time to say goodbye to Ruth Groenhout, Christine Koggel, and Janet Kourany. I would like to thank them for their work and I know that we can all look forward to hearing more from them in the future.

It is also a time of transition for the *Newsletter*. Chris Bellon will be the next editor. We look forward to her tenure in this position. Please join me in welcoming Chris to her new role. I'm sure she would be happy to hear your ideas: bellon@saclink.csus.edu. Please also join me in thanking Sally Scholz for all her work on the *Newsletter* and on the CSW. She has simply done amazing work.

We continue to be active putting together interesting sessions for the various Divisions of the APA. So far this year we had a session on "Reflections on Being a Woman Philosophy Student: Lessons for the Profession" at the Central APA meeting and "Strategizing Changes in the Culture and Ideology of Philosophy" and "Feminist Perspectives on Vice" at the Pacific APA meeting. At the next Eastern APA meeting we are co-sponsoring a session on Miranda Fricker's book, *Epistemic Injustice*, and sponsoring a session on "Philosophical Perspectives on Female Sexuality" and one on mid-career issues faced by women. There will be panels on mid-career issues at the Central and Pacific meetings in 2009 as well. These panels on mid-career issues are part of our ongoing effort to see and understand where all the women have gone. We welcome your ideas for future sessions.

We continue with our project with the National Office to gather membership and job placement information so that we can get more information on the status of women in the profession. Thanks to the persistence of Miriam Solomon, the National Office has hired a part-time employee to gather the information we requested. We look forward to reporting more on this information in the future. In the last *Newsletter* I reported that we were pursuing the possibility of developing a position of an ombudsperson to handle complaints and concerns related to diversity issues. This has been taken up by Cheshire Calhoun, chair of the Inclusiveness Committee, and is proceeding nicely.

As I mentioned last time some of our priorities include continuing to pursue the data on hiring and APA membership, making sure we go beyond organizing panels to produce concrete benefits and improve the future, keeping up with Chris Bellon's list of women/feminist friendly graduate programs, finding ways to make the information we have more accessible (blog?) to APA members. Again, if you have ideas related to any of these issues, or want to add to the list, please contact a committee member.

The committee will meet again at the Eastern APA meeting. Thank you to everyone on the committee for all the work you have done. And thank you to everyone who supports the work we do.

Erin McKenna, Ph.D.

Professor

Chair, APA Committee on the Status of Women
Pacific Lutheran University

ARTICLES

Knit a Bridge and Get Over It

Lisa Heldke

Gustavus Adolphus College

About fifteen years ago, a colleague showed me the gorgeous sweater on which she was working. "Gee, I wish I could knit!" I said admiringly. And then I paused.

I *did* knit—or at least I *had* been a knitter, way back before I had Become A Philosopher and put off childish things. What made me stop—stop knitting, that is, but also stop even identifying myself as one-who-knits? What would Freud say? Forget Freud; *what would Mrs. Brady say?*

Mrs. Brady taught me to knit in 4-H, when I was ten years old. Growing up in a small town in northern Wisconsin, I was an active member of our local 4-H club. Indeed, our entire family's life revolved around 4-H, church (yes, yes, we were Lutherans), and school. Work—housework and summer jobs at our family's business (okay, it was a creamery)—filled the rest of our days. My sisters and I were walking, living, breathing clichés of rural Wisconsin life.

In 4-H, my older sisters learned to sew from my mother, and won blue ribbon after blue ribbon at the Dress Review. For reasons I've never determined (was she tired of teaching small hands to guide a piece of fabric in a straight line? Was I particularly inept at it? Did I appear uninterested?), she and I never really sat down for that first learn-to-sew lesson when I was a child. Instead, when I was ten, she sent me off to Mrs. Brady's house where, for the next several years, I would spend each Monday evening learning how to purl,¹ how to cast on and cast off, how to make a pompon, and, as time passed, how to turn the heel of a sock and sew the sleeves into a sweater.

My mother has never been much of a knitter. When I was eight, she made me a navy blue cardigan that bore the pain of its creation in every tight, puckered stitch. (She describes it as looking as if someone had tortured it out of her.) I don't know if I took up knitting with such interest precisely because my mother *didn't* knit (which meant that I had a fighting chance to be better at it than her), because it gave me a grownup opportunity to go off on my own once a week, or because I genuinely felt an aptitude for the craft. Whatever the case, by the time I graduated from high school (and, simultaneously, from 4-H), I had become a reasonably accomplished knitter. I have independent verification of this fact; that orange acrylic turtleneck sweater I made still survives, and the tension in it really *is* superb, if I do say so myself!

My memories of knitting during college are vague; it was something I did, occasionally, on school breaks when I went home, but it certainly wasn't the sort of thing I would have done in my dorm room at night after studying, nor would I

have advertised the fact that I knew how; I knew better than to jeopardize my just-forming intellectual credentials by being caught engaging in homespun handicrafts! If I went around knitting when I could be playing backgammon or engaging in witty, knowing banter about trees falling in the forest, I might just as well announce I was coming to college in order to get my Mrs. degree!

While my college memories of stealth knitting are vague and uncertain, I know without question that I quit knitting, cold turkey, when I entered graduate school. My college years had been spent in a small town not unlike my hometown. Graduate school, on the other hand, was in the big city. The big urbane, sophisticated, cultured, symphony-and-art-museum-and-theater city. My graduate school classmates were all—to my eyes—equally urbane, sophisticated, cultured, symphony-and-art-museum-and-theater-going people. They all—all!—wore black and talked knowingly about Perugia² and the later Heidegger.³ They did *not* trade tips on eliminating that little hole that always appears in the mitten at the place where you pick up the stitches for the thumb. Nor did they ever commiserate about the impossibility of actually finishing a Norwegian sweater while also studying for prelims. Needless to say, they also weren't starting any guerilla knitting movements,⁴ or knitting any coral reefs⁵ (Of course, neither was anyone else in 1983.)

In graduate school, I actively and intentionally cultivated what I might call my non-knitter identity. It involved systematically distancing myself from virtually any activity that had anything to do with my first eighteen years of life—anything, that is, that had to do with small towns, rural life, farms, craft work—all that stuff done by that class of citizens Plato doesn't even really talk about in the *Republic*, the ones who have iron in their veins and dollar signs in their eyes. I had entered the life of the mind and, not coincidentally, the life of the city. If I was to survive in this new life, I had to hang up the practical, country-mouse routine, no question about it. So, the cable needles stayed in Wisconsin, while I set about acquiring more black clothes and Heidegger.

Thinking back on it now, I find it interesting—though not surprising—that at the same time I was dropping knitting like a bale of wool, I was buying cookbooks and prowling ethnic grocery stores⁶ at every available opportunity, working to feed my voracious appetite for new tastes. At times, these activities waged a small border skirmish with my coursework over the matter of which of them would claim more of my time.⁷ While I wouldn't have wanted to try to explain to my dissertation advisor just quite how much time and energy I was devoting to the pursuit of Thai food, I also didn't feel the need to hide my obsession from my graduate school friends. Food—particularly unusual ethnic food—was *definitely* seen by them to be a sophisticated, urban pursuit, whatever connections it might also have had to all that temporal, bodily practicality Descartes taught us to avoid. If I cooked rather more than the rest of them (a potentially dangerous association with the homespun), well, they were willing to overlook it—so long as I invited them for dinner. Cooking not only didn't draw down my balance at Cultural Capital Savings Bank; it actually made deposits in my account, and accrued interest for me.

Years—okay, okay, decades—passed. During those years, I began to question, quite seriously, the ways in which my experience of being a philosopher (if not my literal philosophical training) had taught me to draw a bright, white line between the life of the mind and the life of the 4-Her. Why was it that to choose the life of an intellectual seemed to require eschewing (at least publicly) all those parts of me that had been educated by the Mrs. Bradys in my life? Why couldn't *those* parts of me be philosophical?

I got help—philosophical help—from pragmatism and feminism in asking these questions. By challenging the dichotomy between theory and practice, pragmatist feminism helped me to “fuzz” the bright, white line I'd drawn in my own life. I began to treat food—that most practical and embodied of topics—as a topic of serious philosophical consideration. Returning to knitting was also a piece of that boundary-blurring work, undertaken primarily from the direction of practice. It was also, perhaps even more importantly, my effort to reconnect, publicly, to my own life history.

Publicly? Whatever do I mean by that?

I mean that I knit in public—academic, philosophical public—whenever I get the chance. I knit at our college's faculty meetings; along with a handful of others⁸ (all women), I use it as a way to remain, ummmm, *centered* during those end-of-day meetings. I knit my way through conferences, lectures, and any other periods of extended sitting-and-listening. (No, I do *not* knit in class—though I understand it's not at all unusual for *students* to do so in Germany and France.)

I always say that the reason I knit in all these public academic contexts springs from my Lutheran heritage. It's all about the Protestant work ethic, I say: Why just *listen* to a talk, when you could be making a hat at the same time? Many's the meeting of this-or-that-society I've attended, at the conclusion of which I've thought to myself, “well, at least I finished a sock.” Knitting satisfies the part of me that hates to do only one thing at once—especially if that one thing involves sitting still with my mouth shut.

But thinking about the matter, I have come to realize that my public knitting is also part of my effort to wear down the theory/practice divide from the other side. Instead of just theorizing it out of existence, I'm trying to knit my way out of it.

But can we really knit a bridge across a dichotomy? And will the finished product be as gorgeous as a crocheted coral reef? I must admit both outcomes seem unlikely, and they give rise to a serious question: Do I only knit publicly now because it is intellectually acceptable—cool, even? Has knitting become the ethnic cooking of my forties? Am I in fact fuzzing the bright, white line, or am I just participating in a collective effort to lob this particular activity over to the other side of the line? Now that knitting is urbane and sophisticated, is it just becoming “honorary theory,” an activity safe for intellectuals?

I'd like to think that's not the case, but I'm just not sure. Would I be willing to be the lone knitter at a conference, or at a faculty meeting? Would I have the academic street cred to pull off something like that? And what colors would Kaffe Fassett use to do it, do you think?⁹

Endnotes

1. **Well then why don't they call it purling?** Early into the present knitting renaissance, I was knitting during a talk at my college. Afterwards, a student came up to me, gushing, “I just love to knit, don't you? I just learned how to knit! Pretty soon I'm going to learn how to purl.”
2. **Perugia:** Site of some important summer phenomenology program to which all my classmates seemed to flock (or to say they were flocking, at least) each year.
3. **Later Heidegger:** You know! (stated impatiently) The Heidegger of *QCT*!!!
4. Guerilla knitting: Check out Rose Miller, guerilla knitter and sociology Ph.D. candidate.... <http://www.yarnivore.com/>.
5. Okay, okay, *crocheting* any coral reefs. http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/04/arts/design/04crochet.html?_r=1&oref=slogin.
6. Ask me about the time I traveled halfway across the city on the El, to buy chili paste in a Chinese market. Standing on

the train platform waiting for the return train, I thought I'd just open the jar and taste a little bit....

7. In the end, I guess it paid off okay; check out *Exotic Appetites*, if you want to see how I turned my graduate school hobby into actual philosophy.
8. One of those others deserves a special shout out. Barbara Kaiser invited—nay, insisted—that I take up knitting again. She escorted me on my first yarn buying trip, and sat by me patiently in the tea shop afterwards, while I struggled to remember “did I hold the yarn in my left hand or my right? Did I *really* used to know how to do this?”
9. Kaffe Fassett is the designer of spectacular—and devilishly difficult—knitted garments. Find his knitting, along with his quilting, needlepoint, and other fiber arts, online at <http://www.kaffefassett.com/>. Or just stop in at your local knitting store and pick up one of his designs. Go ahead. I double dog dare you.

Knitting and the Unfinished Project

Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr.
Miami University, Ohio

It might at first seem strange for a Wittgensteinian feminist (“philosophy unties knots in our thinking”) to spend a good deal of time tying knots, and knitting is, in fact, something I only recently really learned how to do. My mother tried to teach me how to knit when I was young, but I had no patience for it and so was unable to keep it up. She was much more successful at teaching me to think philosophically and to live as a feminist. Nonetheless, it was as a feminist philosopher that I found myself wanting to take it up again and finally, really learn how to knit.

The desire to knit sparked in me one December while attending an Eastern APA meeting. I was at a paper session (about what I cannot even remember) when I noticed a philosopher whose work with which I was familiar sitting in the audience attentively listening while knitting away at something or other. I remember having a feeling of great admiration at the sight. In the front of the room there was some very self-important philosophizing going on and here was this woman knitting! It's not that she was ignoring the talk (as something like reading the *Sunday Times* would rudely convey); she was listening and attentively so, but the fact that she was engaged in her knitting at the same time seemed to convey a kind of ordinariness to the atmosphere that I much appreciated at the time. It also suggested a kind of integrated way of being that is characteristic of feminist philosophy—who I am and what I do in my life, I bring to my philosophizing and vice versa. Lastly, it had a kind of MacGyver-esque¹ quality to it that I much enjoyed: hand me those two sticks and a piece of string and I'll jimmy together a sock for you. Much of the philosophizing I most admire has proceeded in this manner—pulling together ways of thinking where thinking seemed impossible (and here were the tools I needed all along! I just hadn't seen them!).

The second event that brought me to knitting was the birth of my first niece. Here was an excuse to begin and to begin with a small project which I could actually finish. While growing up, I had an aunt who was very adept at all kinds of stitching. Whenever there was an opportunity for gift giving she would make something for us, a wall hanging, a doll, an ornament. Handmade gifts seem to escape (at least a little bit) the consumerism that too often accompanies the practice of gift giving. In contrast to gifts that are bought, gifts that are made take time. They would not exist except for your having made them and your having made them for someone in particular.

Again there is something very akin to feminist philosophy in this attempt to recuperate a practice (gift giving) that has been subsumed into a system (capitalism) it seemed to have the possibility of escaping (insofar as the idea of gift giving exceeds an economy of return—when you give a gift with the expectation of getting something back, it's not really a gift, is it?).

Lastly, I was encouraged to take up a craft of some sort while I was in graduate school. During the semester I taught feminist theory for the first time, my friend and office mate, Emily Lee, happened to be teaching a section of feminist theory as well. We both lived in NYC so would drive home together after our day at the university was done. Fairly regularly Emily could be found in the pottery studio at the end of the day when it was time to head home. I was really amazed by the things Emily could make and we would often talk about her pottery, how it was coming along, what she would be working on next, etc. At one point Emily noted that pottery was a sustaining activity for her during the dissertation process. In the pottery studio she could begin and finish whole projects and the fact that there was a tangible product to show for it was very satisfying. Given my own relationship to my dissertation, taking up such an activity seemed like a good idea. I should say that my friendship with Emily and a number of other women sustained me a great deal through graduate school as well. Upon finishing my dissertation I received a handmade teapot from Emily and I knit her a shawl when she successfully defended hers.

These are the things that brought me to knitting. There are, of course, other aspects to the craft that I find wholly consonant with philosophizing and philosophizing in particular ways. One thing that I have had to learn is to be willing to rip out stitches and start again when something has gone wrong with my knitting, much in the way that one must go over one's thinking, revising and reworking areas, when one is working through a philosophical concept. Pieces of knitting are held together by loops within loops—there is no foundation on which the cloth hangs; rather, it is all held together through the weaving. As with Wittgenstein's rope, pieces of yarn intertwine with other pieces, no one piece maintaining the whole, nonetheless you have a cloth. Lastly, much like philosophy, knitting is never really done. Even while one project is finishing up, a knitter often thinks ahead toward her next project. The point of knitting, as with feminism and with philosophy, isn't finally to be done with it but to keep doing it.

Endnotes

1. For those unfamiliar with the late 80s television series, MacGyver was a secret agent whose main resource was his ability to use common items in resourceful ways. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MacGyver>.

Knit Two, Ponder Three: Reflections on Knitting, Philosophy, and Family¹

Deborah Perron Tollefsen
University of Memphis

I have been knitting and listening to philosophy since I was an undergraduate at St. Anselm College. I think philosophical audiences often have a misconception regarding my practice. If I am knitting, it is thought, I must not be listening very carefully to the lecture. I'd like to correct that misconception here: I am listening carefully. I am also knitting carefully. You can do both at the same time. Now that isn't to say that I do both well all the time. I occasionally drop stitches or a line of argumentation. Complicated patterns sometimes draw my attention to the

knitting and away from the speaker (so I usually stick to simple patterns); complicated arguments do the reverse. I drop the yarn to pick up the thread of an argument. I lose my place in a pattern while focusing on a speaker's closing remarks. I knit two, ponder three. Occasionally my understanding is imperfect; more often my knitting is. Despite this, knitting and philosophy can be done at the same time and can be done well.

Here is something else you can do at the same time as doing philosophy—have a family. Now this isn't to say that you can do both well all the time. I have four children, ages two, three, six, and nine. Soccer games, day care, field trips, baby sitters, after school activities, and parent/teacher conferences, among other things, have considerably complicated the pattern of family life. Luckily, I have a supportive partner. But even so, I often have to slow down and pay more attention to the details. I have to remind myself to enjoy the process and take time to appreciate what I have, with the help of my husband, created. I've had to drop the thread of my own philosophical arguments with the hope of picking them up during nap times and after bed times. And when my career has been in need of mending, I've put off my children's pleas for attention, I've left them with my husband for stretches of time to go to conferences, and asked my husband to put his own career on hold. Like my knitting, my mothering is imperfect. Thankfully, none of my children have one arm shorter than the other. I wish I could say the same thing about my sweaters.

Knitters have several ways of dealing with the inevitable imperfections that arise as a result of the texture of the yarn, a miscounted row, a purl where there should have been a knit. I find these methods useful in thinking about how to deal with the inevitable imperfections that arise from trying to weave together a career in philosophy and a family.

The method of "blocking" involves stretching and shaping finished knitted pieces to reach the dimensions suggested in the pattern or to make stitches look cleaner and more even. I've learned to block in life. I've learned to stretch my time and energy. When I feel I haven't spent enough time with my family I try to even things out by putting aside work. When my teaching and research need attention I've altered the dimensions of my day; working early in the morning and late at night. I've adjusted my expectations regarding both work and family (the laundry is chronically neglected) and shaped my schedule to focus on the most important aspects of my life.

The method of "redescription" involves re-describing the apparent imperfections of a work in more positive language. The imperfections are described as "charming." Rather than taking away from the quality of the work, they are seen as contributing to its beauty. They make the piece unique. My life certainly seems unique. I don't know many philosophers who change diapers on their office desk or finish papers during labor. My nine-year-old son recently came across the word "continental" in a history textbook and said, "Mom, isn't that a type of philosophy?" My children have access to people, books, and conversations they may not have otherwise had. My time away from them means more time spent with their father. And though the house is in constant chaos, chaos can be beautiful.

It is very common for seasoned knitters to point out to beginners that the imperfections aren't always noticeable to the untrained eye. This is somewhat comforting, but the danger is that people, both the trained and untrained, will lose sight of the fact that juggling family and a career is not easy. It may appear to you that I am "Super Woman." Most of the time, I

am just "Tired Woman." I chose to have a big family but there are lots of other types of families and lots of other personal choices that can make it difficult to balance the public and the private. All of us that struggle to pursue a personal life and a professional life simultaneously know that regardless of whether the imperfections are visible to others, they are there.

Finally, knitters often attempt to minimize imperfections at the outset by implementing the method of "checking your gauge." You knit up a small swatch and see whether it matches the suggested dimensions of the pattern. If your gauge is off (your swatch too big or too small) you adjust needle size. It's a sort of prophylactic measure because it is supposed to prevent mistakes.

Militant knitters insist on checking one's gauge at the beginning of every project and some even insist on checking it at variable intervals during the project to make sure stitches remain uniform. Militant knitters also follow patterns religiously and shun improvisation. A less militant approach is that advocated by Elizabeth Zimmerman. Zimmerman is known for revolutionizing the practice of knitting in the U.S. Opposed to the "rigid, back and forth method" of English knitting, she advocated knitting in the round with flexible needles. She also encouraged knitters to experiment and develop their own patterns. Her motto—"Knit on with confidence and hope, through all crises"—is an inspiration to knitters throughout the world.²

I have often skipped checking my gauge, both in knitting and in life. Four children is some evidence of this. I much prefer the EZ (as her devoted followers call her) approach to knitting and family. Planning a family and raising a family are necessarily contingent affairs. Although some planning is possible, how we get pregnant, when and whether we get pregnant, whether we carry to term, and whether we have healthy children, these are all matters we cannot completely control. Likewise, careers often take different paths than what we originally planned. We have to improvise, we have to experiment, and we have to be open to making up a new pattern. Above all we have to be flexible because crises will inevitably occur. If we stop to check our gauge at every moment and never improvise we'll be very rigid parents and partners and our lives will be less rich because of it.

I hope my casting about here offers some reassurance that, just as knitting and philosophy can be pursued simultaneously with some success, so too can philosophy and family. If you make time to enjoy your creation, adjust your expectations, make room for happy accidents, plan but not militantly, and face crises with "confidence and hope," it can be done well. And this is good news because there is more to life than philosophy.

So, when you see me knitting and listening to philosophy, think of it as my attempt to juggle, metaphorically, the private and the public—the domestic and the professional. I am listening carefully, knitting carefully, and living well.

Endnotes

1. I'd like to thank Sarah Clark Miller and Joel Priddy for their extremely helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay. They introduced me to the knitting philosophy of Elizabeth Zimmerman. I am particularly grateful for their insight regarding the contingencies of family life and how a less militant approach to family and career can be risky, but also incredibly joyful.
2. Zimmerman is also famous for her ability to carry on knitting while doing other tasks. Apparently she knit while riding on the back of her husband's motorcycle.

Knitting

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My grandmother had long silver hair, high blood pressure, and congestive heart failure. She wore the silver hair in a bun during the day and in a braid at night. I remember her sitting in the day parlor of my grandparents' southern Illinois bungalow, telling the same stories of their small town, over and over again. She was the first person from her family to finish high school and the fact that she had studied Latin was a source of great pride to her. (Studying Latin and eventually reading Lucretius in the original was how I got into philosophy, but that's the subject for another essay.) And she taught me how to knit.

The earliest I remember knitting was about when I'd learned to read "big" books, the kind that had chapters. My father was an only child, and his room was the half-finished entire second floor of their bungalow. The eaves were full of bookshelves: the Radio Boys, the Hardy Boys, the Bobbsey Twins, Bunny Brown and his Sister Sue, the entire series of Oz books, and Jules Verne's *The Mysterious Island*. My parents and I and my little sister would visit my grandparents for two weeks at a time, every summer, when the humidity in the Little Egypt area of southern Illinois seemed higher than the temperature and chigger bites itched intensely. All there was for me to do was read or knit with my grandmother as I listened to her stories. First the knitting involved a small spool with a hook to pull loops over yarn on the spool—the result was a long, thin tube that I curled into rugs for my doll's house at home. Then, I got "real" needles and learned how to make "grown up" things. I think I'd finished my first sweater by the time I was eleven or twelve, and I've never stopped knitting since.

What does knitting mean to me? It means connections to the women in my family, like my grandmother who lived a life of such limited horizons but sent her only son onto a life of great ambition and success as a lawyer in Washington, D.C., or my mother who took out more of her frustrations on needlepoint than on knitting. It means connections to fictional women, like the subversive Madame DeFarge (although I always resent, just a bit, the inevitable comparison when I knit in public). It means connections to all the ways in which women's lives have been reflected in the patterns that can be created from needles and string: the different Channel Island gansey patterns said to have been used to identify sailors lost at sea,¹ the Fair Isle intricacies of color and design,² Scandinavian patterns of stars and diamonds and shields,³ and even the Aran patterns created for modern tourists.⁴ I love the stories of women working together, like the stories of American Victorian domesticity told in Anne McDonald's magisterial history of knitting in the United States.⁵ And I love how traditional patterns have been incorporated into modern manifestations of Scandinavian folk socks,⁶ traditional African cloths,⁷ or Andean motifs.⁸ I love cabling, intarsia, two-color knitting, and entrelac.

Over the years of my knitting, I've made countless sweaters, blankets, socks, caps, environmentally friendly shopping bags, and even dishrags (they scrub stuff off pots wonderfully well, go straight into the washing machine with any load, and save plastic). I give them to family, friends, family of friends, auctions, and even keep a few for myself. To be honest, I don't even fully

know how they fare. Some are far too elaborate, some are misshapen (yes, even now, some things just don't quite hang right), and some are just plain warm and comforting I hope.

Knitting also appeals to my egalitarianism. Knitted garments are tough, functional. Hand-knit socks, with reinforcement woven-in, last far longer than commercially purchased ones. I've always thought that everyone should have an "after the revolution" job; mine would be clothing people—with what I knit or sew. Many years ago, Perri Klass, a pediatrician, fiction writer, and journalist, wrote a piece in the *New York Times* about knitting as a woman professional. At the time, she was a relatively junior member of the faculty at the Harvard Medical School, and she said she always looked around the room to see if anyone senior to her was knitting, before she pulled out her own handwork.⁹ I thought then, and still believe, that this way of thinking was profoundly wrong. I try never to knit when I believe that I will insult someone in the room, because they will believe I'm not paying attention to them. (Those who know me, however, know that I pay attention far better when I'm knitting than when I'm not. But appearances really matter.) I wrote a letter of protest to the *Times* after the article appeared; they didn't publish it, and I never saw a letter to the editor that remarked on Klass's sense that knitting branded her as inferior and that she needed the protection of status in order to feel safe doing it. Anyway, I try to let people know that I knit in all meetings, all papers—even often when I'm reading something, the more complicated the better.

On at least one account, "knitting" means "to tie together."¹⁰ There's no better way than this for me to answer the question why I knit.

Endnotes

1. See, e.g., The Guernsey Knit Company, "The Story of the Guernsey." Available at <http://www.guernseyknitwear.co.uk/story.htm>. Accessed May 1, 2008.
2. Ann Feitelson. *The Art of Fair Isle Knitting: History, Technique, Colors & Patterns* (Loveland, CO: Interweave Press, 1997).
3. Sheila McGregor. *Traditional Scandinavian Knitting* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004).
4. For a debunking of the history of Aran patterns, see Alice Starmore, *Aran Knitting* (Loveland, CO: Interweave Press, 1997). The last time I checked Amazon.com, this book was out of print and used editions sold for \$269!!! <http://www.amazon.com>. Accessed April 30, 2008.
5. Anne L. McDonald. *No Idle Hands: A Social History of American Knitting* (New York: Random House, 1990).
6. Nancy Bush. *Folk Socks* (Loveland, CO: Interweave Press, 1994).
7. Marianne Isager. *Knitting out of Africa* (Loveland, CO: Interweave Press, 2005).
8. Helen Hamann. *Andean Inspired Knits: Designs in Luxurious Alpaca* (Loveland, CO: Interweave Press, 2006); Marcia Lewandowski. *Andean Folk Knits: Great Designs from Peru, Chile, Argentina, Ecuador, and Bolivia* (Asheville, NC: Lark Books, 2006).
9. Perri Klass. "Hers; A Stitch in Time." *New York Times*, sect. 6, p. 12, col. 3 (April 19, 1992). In this otherwise wonderful article, Klass captures perfectly the feeling and concentration knitting provides.
10. Richard Rutt. *A History of Hand Knitting* (Loveland, CO: Interweave Press, 1987).

The Incurrable Knitter Learns about Teaching

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Introduction

Today I was bombarded with instructions, some of which I followed and some I ignored. For example, television advertisers instructed me to “Try this product by calling now”; my mother called and instructed me to give her a copy of my upcoming trip’s itinerary; and the New Jersey Transportation Authority instructed me to follow a detour to arrive at my destination. At a macro level, I suspect instruction-giving and instruction-following must be central to social life. The rearing and education of children, the administration of justice, the cultivation of meaningful relationships, and the procurement of material goods all depend in some part on valuing the conventions associated with instructions. Yet, as far as I can tell, philosophers have paid little attention to the humble instruction.¹

This essay will concentrate on two small slivers of instruction-behavior: knitting patterns and classroom writing assignments. Specifically, I want to reflect on why we fail to follow instructions. My thesis is: although we might usually follow instructions, certain beliefs can override or interfere. It is through my failures as a knitter that I have insight as to why my students occasionally fail to follow explicit instructions.

Knitting

I am, as my confessional title relays, an incurrable knitter. I have learned to knit three times, but forgotten it twice. So one might say I really learned knitting (in the sense of being able to do cast on, do stitches, and cast off) only a year ago at a continuing education class at my local high school. All of the students in this night class were women, and most of them were in their twenties or thirties, as I am. The instructors, a non-sense mother-daughter team, taught us basic skills. I took to it immediately, probably because I had attempted to learn twice before. It was no time before I had purchased extra yarn, a knitting book, and other accretions. Every Monday night I was the star pupil of knitting class.

My early successes emboldened me to venture out on my own. I made my mother a scarf by carefully following the yarn package’s pattern. It was lovely. After that my string of failures emerged:

- A project for my sister-in-law called for sized nineteen (very large) needles to make a glittering shawl of gold and grey ribbon-yarn. I judged that the purchase of these needles was a waste, as I had just bought size seventeen needles. I anticipated the smaller needles would change the size of the shawl so I “corrected” the pattern accordingly. When I finally cast off the shawl measured fifteen and a half feet long and one foot wide; a geometry teacher would call its shape irregular polygon. I wound up taking scissors to the mess and gluing part of it with crazy glue an hour before the birthday party.
- I tried to knit Christmas stockings for me and my husband. Since I hadn’t learned how to do knitting on circular needles, or with double pointed needles, I had to find a pattern for a Christmas stocking that could be done with regular, straight needles. I could not locate such a pattern, so I broke out my sized seventeen needles again and tried to make very large baby

booties in holiday red. This project also ended with scissors, frustration, and sewn seams on Christmas Eve. My husband wryly commented this did not look like the stockings his Nana used to knit.

- After seeing a women’s shoulder wrap in an online pattern, I decided I could improve upon the pattern by changing the yarn. I combined a pretty, lightweight cotton with a nubby black polyester. The fit was downright uncomfortable, and the finished product resembled a tube sock that had been threaded into some enterprising bird’s nest. I took the entire wrap apart, and now the two balls of yarn reside in my project bag.

By now you have discerned that the cause of my failures is my failure to follow knitting instructions, called patterns. I fully understand that I ought to follow the pattern directions; that these patterns are written by knitters vastly more knowledgeable than I; and that I am not experienced enough to make it up as I go along. Yet, I stubbornly persist in making entirely preventable mistakes. I click, clack my needles in front of the television and am heedless to the warnings of others (“Hey, are sure you’re doing it right?”). I second-guess the pattern’s needle size, yarn weight, and sizing charts. I have never once obeyed the command, “Save time! Check your gauge by making a swatch!” that appears in the beginning of all patterns.

Yes, I am incurrable. Even irrational, one might say, since I know full well that following the instructions is in my own interests, yet I fail to heed them. And it is my own refusal to follow instructions that vexes me most in my unsuccessful knitting career.

Teaching

On the first day of class I am quite frank when I tell students it is only marginally important to me that they remember the course content. After all, I explain to them, a couple of years from now no one will give them a job solely for precisely reciting Plato’s Allegory of the Cave. But what does make careers, I say, is being able to think through problems with clarity and originality; having solid writing and speaking skills; adopting values of responsibility and hard work, and so on.

This approach to higher education stresses skills and values (such as critical thinking, lucid writing and speaking, and responsible participation in social life) over advanced knowledge of content per se.² And as part of this teaching methodology, I always try to give very clear instructions on assignments. According to L. Dee Fink, for example, giving detailed explanations, expectations, and grading standards for assignments gives students a reasonable chance of measurable success.³

For example, the term essay for all my courses has an essay topic and two sets of grading standards. The first is a minimum that I mandate. These are the *instructions and minimum requirements*:

- Exactly x number of pages; Times New Roman 12 point font; double spaced; no extra spaces between paragraphs; margins of no less than 1 and no more than 1 ½ inch on all sides
- Proper citations with a variety of references in *Chicago* format; use of both class readings and original research from the library (which means not just the Internet)
- Due on or before the due date in class
- The essay must have an original thesis; the thesis should appear somewhere in the first paragraph of the essay and begin with the sentence “In this essay, I argue that...” Formulate a position and subsequently

defend it with reasons. (Be sure that you are writing an ethics essay, not just a newsy report.)

- **Not meeting these requirements will result in an automatic grade of D.**

In addition, each class deliberates as a whole group to devise grading standards which characterize an excellent essay. These are the *standards of excellence* (as written by my “Ethics” class this term):

- Excellent use of class readings
- Clearly defined thesis that is spicy and original
- Grammar, spelling, and syntax are error-free; good flow to the essay
- Uses variety of resources and cites them correctly
- Strong introduction and conclusion
- Compelling arguments that are thought-provoking and have real reasons.

Obviously any essay which met my minimum requirements (top) as well as the class’s standards of excellence (below) would be an “A” essay. We do two sets of essay requirements—mine and the class’s—so that the students can take ownership of their learning, even as I get to set the instructions and minimum standards of acceptability. This shifts the “balance of power” in the class so that I “share decision making with students.”⁴

I freely admit my minimum requirements are persnickety. First, research shows that “learners appreciate teachers making the fullest possible disclosure of their teaching intentions and the criteria they use to evaluate learning. Wherever students experience ambiguity or confusion regarding teachers’ expectations, resistance is the predictable consequence.”⁵ In addition, such specificity in instruction helps take the guesswork out of essay-writing so that students can concentrate on the difficult matter of becoming philosophers. In this way students will not have to be “clairvoyant” to discern what the professor requires.⁶ Students will feel reassured that their essays are graded on a uniform standard. Finally, I believe that learning to follow clear instructions is a valuable life skill, handy long after the categorical imperative is banished to oblivion from students’ short-term memories.

Understandably, many students do not achieve the standard of excellence set by the class. College-appropriate writing is frequently a problem, as is defending a thesis with original reasons. This is to be expected, of course, because writing philosophy well is so very difficult.

To my complete mystification, however, each term several students fail to follow the instructions in the *minimum requirements*. Tearful students come to my office cajoling for higher grades. The explanations for their failure to follow explicit instructions are endless: “I didn’t see these requirements,” “I didn’t know we had to cite references,” “My computer won’t let me do it this way,” “I thought the cover page counted as one of the pages,” or “I have never written a thesis like that.” These explanations might be reasonable, except that I had reviewed the minimum requirements tirelessly in class on several occasions.

Invariably the unhappy grades remain in my grade book, and I tell students that they are learning important writing and life-skills that will stand them in good stead going forward. Learning to follow instructions to the letter is important, as is learning to ask questions when one is in need of guidance. For students preparing to go into our workforce, learning to conscientiously complete the mundane tasks your boss assigns you (so long as those tasks break no moral or legal rules), is actually quite important, even if it is un-Marxist and un-chic to say so.

As an instructor I am not naive. I am not surprised at bad writing, at overt plagiarism, or at assignments forgotten entirely. I also understand that sometimes life gets in the way of philosophy class, and during these times there are legitimate excuses which instructors must accept. Yet I am stumped as to how a student ignores perfectly clear instructions constituting minimum requirements—by handing in a *late* essay that is pages *short* of the required length, an essay which has *no discernable thesis*—and expects to get anything besides the promised grade of D.

Conclusion

My knitting catastrophes resemble my students’ failures to follow instructions to a T. In both cases, clear and explicit directions, given by a responsible and competent authority, specified for the purpose of promoting individual success, are ignored.

Based on my knitting and teaching experiences, I hypothesize that we sometimes do not follow instructions because we have beliefs that compete with, or override entirely, the generally held belief that one ought to follow given instructions. (Here I discard cases of total carelessness and cases where legitimate excuses are acceptable.) These “interfering” beliefs might include:

- (1) The instructions are only a rough guideline that need not be followed precisely.
- (2) The instructions are not trustworthy.
- (3) The instructions can be improved upon with creative improvising.

In my own knitting case, such beliefs are unfounded. Indeed, they are so wholly without merit that my adherence to them is hopeless, making me “incorrigible.”

The same cannot be said of my students because I can envision circumstances where holding beliefs 1-3 would be perfectly rational. For example, a knitter knows (or ought to know) that the pattern is precise. But brand-new college students, adult returning students, or others might not *interpret* even explicit directions *as* explicit. Such students are exactly the ones who might not have the confidence to ask a professor to clarify. As to belief no. 2 some students might legitimately believe that instructions are not trustworthy if those students have had experiences with untrustworthy professors—professors who failed to keep their compacts with students. In such cases, ignoring instructions is perfectly rational because one has no expectation that the professor would keep up her end of the assignment-bargain, either. And although there is a whiff of arrogance in belief no. 3 surely there are instances where the finished product (be it a novice’s sweater or an undergraduate’s essay) would be improved with improvisation that deviates from instructions (even if such cases, I believe, are unusual).

Every time I endeavor to stray from a knitting pattern I do what my hapless students sometimes do at eleven p.m. the night before an essay is due: we pay no mind to the instructions. However, now that I understand the beliefs which might interfere with instruction-following I can consciously direct myself towards a frank classroom discussion of these beliefs before that eleven p.m. breakdown.

For example, I now take care to note that the minimum requirements for assignments are not suggested starting points, but are a precise blueprint, just like what a builder and her architect might sign. I stress that if the architect specifies a certain sort of window, the builder must use precisely that model, for doing otherwise might make the building unstable. I also ask students to trust me—with just those words. They must trust that I know what success requires in the class, and trust that I will keep any promises that I make to them. Trust

can be hard to win in the classroom. If I have given any reason for students to distrust me (e.g., being late returning grades or changing deadlines) a class dialogue to set it right might be in order. Finally, I tell students that (as with other arts) one must learn to master some technical skills in philosophy before becoming a pioneer. One writes sonnets before free-form poems, does realistic portraits before abstract ones, and one has a clear thesis before “deconstructing the concept of thesis”—as one of my students confusingly claimed when defending his sub-par essay.

I think we fail our students if we don't empathize with their struggles as learners. As I observed in my first paragraph we are inundated by instructions, and perhaps our students are even more so than we. (Imagine how many “Click here!” and “Press #” instructions they will hear in their lifetimes!) It can be burdensome to heed this onslaught of instructions, particularly in the philosophy classroom, where students might have anticipated an “anything goes” learning atmosphere. Yet I do believe that giving careful instructions is important. We can learn tremendously from instructions—perhaps even when we do not heed them.

It is a mistake to cultivate student irresponsibility by excessively excusing their real failures, such as the failure to follow basic instructions in the minimum essay requirements. We do our students no favors by sending them the message that carelessness and hastiness are excusable when accompanied by feigned innocence and charm. My solution is to (a) understand that students will, at times, thwart themselves by holding beliefs that override instruction-following, (b) try to prevent such mistakes by discussing the minimum essay requirements and the concept of instruction-following ahead of time, and (c) reassure students that “this is only a fraction of your grade” and “I don't judge you as a person” if grades are poor.

As I write this essay my knitting project bag glares accusingly at me amongst stacked cans of old paint and dusty exercise equipment. I am thinking of making myself a light sweater for spring, in black, something to keep the chill away. I haven't yet researched a pattern. When I do I know I will be faced with the choice of taking care to follow it or incorrigibly going my own way.

Endnotes

1. A search of the online database “The Philosopher's Index” turns up surprisingly little. The major stream of discussion indexed there is about the nature of rationality.
2. Dee L. Fink. *Creating Significant Learning Experiences: An Integrated Approach to Designing College Courses* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003).
3. *Ibid.*, 120.
4. Maryellen Weimer. “Focus on Teaching, Transforming Learning.” *Change* 35:5 (2003).
5. Stephen D. Brookfield. *The Skillful Teacher: On Technique, Trust, and Responsiveness in the Classroom* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 203.
6. Eric H. Hobson. “Designing and Grading Written Assignments.” *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* 74 (1998): 52.

Hegel Knits¹

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In chapter 4 of my dissertation, I wrote:

According to Hegel, activities are not valuable in terms of their efficacy in realizing ends. Rather, their value is that they are both constitutive and formative of our personalities. They transform our identities and, consequently, our self-conception. To see Hegel's point, consider how our interests are affected by our actions. Before we act, we have a certain conception of ourselves—who we are, our evaluation of our personality, and we have a set of goals chosen in light of that self-conception. It is with this self-conception that we act. But the activity undertaken throws new light on our chosen ends and, as a result, on our self-conception. Suppose I consider myself a fairly modern woman and eschew activities that I regard as traditional womanly pastimes. But a friend of mine, who has no such biases, is an avid knitter and enjoys having an afternoon tea and a chat while knitting. So, for the sake of a friendly conversation and a shared experience, I agree to give knitting a try. At first, I find knitting to be clumsy and strange. I don't “get it.” It is not, simply put, *me*. Nonetheless, I spend many pleasant afternoons knitting, which necessitates encountering difficulties and frustrations which, in turn, require that I adjust, readjust, and plan anew. As I make (and remake) plans in light of unexpected events, I come to have an entirely new conception of the particular thing I knit, knitting as an activity, and of myself as a knitter. In short, as I knit, I change.²

This was the first and (until now) last time I wrote about knitting in a philosophy paper. Although I could say that this is because knitting was not relevant to any of the papers that I have written, if I am honest I should say that the primary reason is because I did not think that knitting would be regarded as an activity worthy of philosophical discussion. Not only is knitting typically regarded as an idle woman's pastime and, therefore, something void of real intellectual significance, it is thought of as an activity most appropriate for *elderly* women. Therefore, knitting is dismissed as being not only mindless but also obsolete and irrelevant as well. I have come to think of the activity of knitting, if properly undertaken, as neither mindless nor archaic but can be, to return to the Hegelian discussion introduced above, formative of our personality and the knitwear produced a material embodiment of our freedom. Before explaining this claim, I wish to first discuss three common justifications for knitting that I find in knitting books and magazines. The first, which I refer to as “knitting as useful,” justifies the activity of knitting in terms of it being the most cost-effective way to have access to well-designed *necessary* knitted clothing. The second justification for knitting, which I refer to as “knitting as therapy,” justifies knitting for its therapeutic value. Knitting, advocates promise, will soothe and enrich your soul. The final justification, which I refer to as “knitting as funky,” justifies knitting in terms of its enabling the knitter entry into the latest lifestyle craze. On this account, to fail to knit is to miss out on what everyone hip is doing and, at some level, to fail to be a part of the “latest thing.” I think all three justifications are, for different reasons, wrong-headed and fail to capture what I think are very important reasons to knit. After briefly examining these accounts, I will lay out my Hegelian analysis of knitting.

Knitting as Useful

I spent my undergraduate junior year in Tübingen, West Germany (as it was known then). Before I went to Tübingen, I had never seen anyone knit. Of course I knew that there was such a thing as knitting. But I had no idea how it worked or what it was about. My grandma always wore tiny booties knit for her by her (very elderly) mother, but they seemed utterly foreign to me: thick, dowdy, and dangerously slippery (a bit like the woman who knit them, except for the slippery part). So to me, knitting was about making things that I did not want. It held no interest for me.

It did not take me long after arriving in Tübingen to notice that every female of every age was knitting. They knit while waiting at the bus stops, while waiting between university classes, and while chatting in the evenings in our shared student housing kitchen. Then I was really amazed when on the first day of my philosophy seminar I arrived at one of the oldest university buildings in Tübingen. The classroom was tall, with one wall covered with floor-to ceiling windows overlooking the Neckar, and a series of wide, dark oak tables of gently curving semi-circles, leading higher and farther away from the front of the room. The professor, small, elderly, and very frail, was, I was told, lecturing on aesthetics. I could not understand a word he said since I had only arrived a few weeks earlier and my German was terrible. But even if I could, I would have had a hard time concentrating on his lecture because I was so distracted by the sight of the women students knitting during the class. Not one took notes; they just sat and knitted, needles clicking as he spoke.

When I got back to the communal kitchen that I shared with German students, I announced, “They were KNITTING during the lecture!” or, more accurately, *conveyed* given how ungrammatical my German was. “So what?” was the response. I think I gaped for more than a few seconds, trying to process what I was hearing. One student, whom I later learned was a very accomplished knitter, patiently explained, “It makes perfect sense to knit in seminar. I can listen to what the professor is saying and get something accomplished at the same time. What is wrong with that?” There was a general murmuring of agreement from the other German women.³ It was then that I found out that all the German women with whom I was living knit. Each said she wore only hand knit sweaters. “Why buy something made by a machine that is not what you really want when you can make exactly what you want yourself?” The logic was so crystal clear to them that they must have thought that I was very simple for never having realized it myself.

And so, though I did not know it at the time, I was being introduced to the “Knitting as Useful” justification. I find this justification featured in many knitting books. Susanne Pagoldh, in her book on the history and techniques of traditional Nordic knitting, states that “[m]achines produce clothes more cheaply and quickly. But machines can’t copy human handwork or create one-of-a-kind colors and patterns.”⁴ Prior to the industrial revolution, many women and children in Europe knit to earn extra money. Pagoldh tells of Susanna Johansen who, living in Lamba of the Faroe Islands at age seven in 1906, was required to knit her share of rows on a fisherman sweater every day before being allowed to play.⁵ Ann Feitelson interviewed Shetland women who as young girls in the 1920s knit to earn extra money. One woman said, “The more you could knit, the more you could eat.” According to another, “knitters were up half the night and not for the love of it.” A third boasted knitting a 45-inch Fair Isle patterned sweater in three days.⁶ Yet the argument Pagoldh is offering contemporary readers is not that knitting is a means to earn a living. Indeed, no contemporary knitting books or magazines present such an argument to their

readers because it would strike any experienced knitter as patently absurd.⁷ Rather, she is arguing that knitting is the way to have knitwear that is utterly unlike any other, and better than any made by a machine. The value of knitting is its usefulness in acquiring unique and tailored clothing perfectly suited to one’s individual tastes.

At one level this line of reasoning is plausible. Certainly a knitter can make a sweater longer or shorter, or slimmer or wider than any store bought garment. And one can choose from a wider range of colors and fibers (new ecoyarns include: hemp, bamboo, soy, buffalo, milk, corn, and chitin yarn) than typically found in off-the-rack clothing. Yet, in fact, this argument overstates the openness of knitting. First, unless one farms, spins, and dyes one’s own yarn, yarn manufacturers provide a relatively limited selection of colors, and these choices are determined by fashion. Thus, one often finds the yarn selections mirroring the very colors one finds in clothing stores. Yarn manufacturers also change their fiber blends and weights; the knitter may find what she wants but then again she may not. Therefore, selecting yarn for a project is more often an experience in disappointing compromise than wish fulfillment. Second, the skill level required to make the knitwear of one’s dreams is extremely high. Although Susanne Pagoldh begins her book with the reassuring claim that “knitting isn’t difficult,”⁸ the fact is that it is. It can take years if not decades to develop the skills necessary to knit a wearable item of clothing; even experienced knitters regularly produce products that fall far short of their intentions. If knitting can only be justified in terms of the outcomes produced, then most knitting is not justifiable.

Knitting as Therapy

Knitting books and magazines regularly declare that knitting soothes, refreshes, and relaxes. We’re told that the subtle and repetitive movements ease the mind, and the feel of the silk, alpaca, or merino wool brings comfort to our bodies. Pagoldh writes:

Time slips by, and the knitter forms stitch after stitch, row after row, in colors and patterns as she pleases. A knitter can knit while the world news flashes by or a passionate drama is played out on the TV screen. Knitting can calm you while you wait for your name to be called in the waiting room or airport. As long as the stitch count is correct and the pattern develops regularly, at least one thing is under control.⁹

Such promises are not new. In the early 1900s, *Stitches* magazine suggested that “nervous” women knit simple pieces, “nothing with an elaborate pattern to tax the brain.” Steel needles were suggested since “the quick movement and the tiny click of the needles have a soothing, hypnotic influence that is restful to the overwrought woman.”¹⁰ Another knitting magazine told their readers that “Knitting was once every woman’s duty. Now it is her pleasure, her relaxation, her nerve-smoothing occupation for leisure moments in a busy life.”¹¹

It would be wonderful if inner peace were as near to hand as two needles and a skein of yarn. Yet, in my experience, knitting anything, let alone something intended to be worn in public or to be given to another, is far from serene escapism. First of all, there is the matter of the sticker shock that accompanies any large yarn purchase. Second, designing, swatching (making that sample piece we are told will ensure accurate sizing but in fact never does), keeping track of the pattern, adjusting the pattern to accommodate alterations, ripping out the mistakes, running out of yarn in a dye lot—the whole experience can be fraught with nerve-wracking obstacles and frustrations. Knitting for long stretches can induce or aggravate carpal tunnel syndrome

pain and back ache. (Indeed, the necessary posture for knitting, being hunched over one's work, can cause serious back injury.) Suffragist Haryot Cahoon scoffed at the alleged soothing properties of knitting. She wrote, "Of all nerve-destroying occupations knitting takes the lead. The ceaseless click of the needles and the muscular exertion combine to produce an exhaustion equal to the most vigorous exercise."¹² Finally, I question the value of repetitive and mindless small movements or the implication that women are better off if they calm their "nervousness" by undertaking mindless busywork. What good am I adding to my life if I eschew taxing my brain and instead mindlessly K1, P2 during my precious "leisure moments"? Fortunately, I believe knitting, if properly undertaken, is anything but mindless and the more mindfully one knits, the more value there is to the activity.

Knitting as Funky

Apparently knitting is all the rage right now. Debbie Stoller, author of *Stitch 'N Bitch* (the "essential guide for chicks with sticks"), *Stitch 'N Bitch Nation* (with fifty "even funkier" knits), and *Son of Stitch 'N Bitch* (an "attitude-packed guide to knitting"), is touted as the "knitting superstar" of the nation.¹³ Knitting has attained a level of popularity so great that it is described as a "movement" that women are being encouraged to join. ("Everywhere chicks are gathering in groups to get their knit on."¹⁴) And it seems they are: according to a 2000 survey by the Yarn Craft Council, almost one third of all American women knit. And the fastest group of new knitters are aged forty-five and under.¹⁵ This knitting wave may be a part of the larger, recent interest in creating 'zines and blogs, do-it-yourself and craftiness which in turn may be a response to unrest caused by economic and political anxieties. Young women claim that knitting allows them not only to reconcile their low budgets with their desire for high (or at least "funky") fashion, but it allows them to remain "girly" while at the same time retaining their feminist individuality. It seems that a variety of seemingly disparate needs are all met by (or, at least, are being sold to consumers as being met by) knitting.

This is not the first knitting craze to sweep this nation. During the depression of the 1930s a knitting craze was launched. Knitting magazines encouraged women to knit their own clothes so that they could be economical yet still "look smart."¹⁶ Bernat, a leading yarn manufacturer, posed this question to women in their 1933 Winter/Spring *Handicrafter* magazine: "What better way is there for you to be in style than wearing a garment that is knitted with your hands and designed in the current fashion?"¹⁷ To make certain that knitting was completely disassociated from dowdiness or poverty, knitting magazines such as *Motion Picture Classic Hand Knit Patterns* provided their readers with knitting patterns for outfits worn by actors in popular movies. Movie stars such as Bette Davis, Joan Blondell, Maureen O'Sullivan, Ronald Reagan, and Shirley Temple were featured in knitting magazines during the '30s. In 1938, the photo of a young and beautiful Katharine Hepburn knitting while on a movie set must have very effectively conveyed the message that knitting was glamorous. The depression may have ended, but the knitting craze did not. Saks Fifth Avenue declared 1941 "The Year of Hand-Knit Fever." Sixty-odd years later movie stars and celebrities are again being used to market the funkiness of knitting. The best-selling *Celebrity Scarves* (followed by *Celebrity Scarves 2*) promises to "give age-old craft twenty-first-century glamour."¹⁸ Dozens of knitting books published in the past few years promise "hip," "stylish," "sexy," "sensual," or "couture" knit patterns. And for those fed up with the fad and funk of mainstream knitting, there is available: *Punk Knits: 26 Hot New Designs for Anarchistic Souls and Independent Spirits*; *Pretty in Punk: 25 Punk, Rock*

and Goth Designs; *Domiknitrix and AntiCraft: Knitting, Beading and Stitching for the Slightly Sinister*. Each of these promises its readers patterns one can follow to better express one's rejection of mainstream culture.

I have already expressed my skepticism of the claim that most knitters have the skill or experience to produce clothing that is wearable, but to claim that they will produce glamorous knitwear borders on the laughable. Especially absurd is the idea that following their patterns and yarn choices is the means to becoming funky, hip, or anarchistic. Since many knitting books are subsidized by a yarn manufacturer, the reader is often advised to use the yarn they recommend. Warnings against yarn substitutions are common, and stories of the grisly horrors that can occur (incorrect sizing, misshapen monstrosities, pilling, dyes running) when knitters don't use their preferred yarn are included. In some instances the connection between the designer and yarn manufacturer is so close they are one and the same. (The dozens of Debbie Bliss books all recommend using only Debbie Bliss yarns. And both Rowan and Lopi pattern books feature only their own yarn.) Given the high cost of knitting, in terms of both time and money, these threats effectively ensure that many knitters, especially new knitters, support large yarn manufacturer interests.¹⁹

The unlikelihood of following a pattern or joining the latest craze in order to achieve genuine individuality is obvious. (And is not the essence of funkiness individuality?) Elizabeth Hart, a 1931 Wellesley graduate, writes about her memories of the knitting craze of the 1930s:

By my Senior year most of us were knitting Brooks sweaters. I made so many of those sweaters, I still don't need to look at the directions. I cast on 232 stitches on a #2 circular needle knit for 3 inches and then changed to #4. Or course, everything we made was exactly the same—just different colors. And we probably all looked the same; but I suppose that was the whole point!"²⁰

Knitting may produce useful knitwear, therapeutic escapism, and funkitude. Then again, it may not. Whatever the outcome, I think there is value to knitting that none of the justifications so far discussed, and most typically found in the hottest selling knitting books and magazines, have touched on.

Hegelian Knitting

In the quotation at the start of this paper, I wrote that "as I knit, I change." Now I want to explain what I mean. To knit anything is to make many thousands of decisions. The first decision may concern the intended object—a scarf, sweater, stuffy, or cat toy. Then one must decide which materials to use, a decision which requires confronting the nature of these materials: natural or man-made? If natural, animal or plant fiber (or a blend)? Organic? Fair trade? Manufactured by local growers and spinners? These decisions concern more than aesthetics, and embody one's political and moral commitments. Then there is the matter of design. Although yarn is, in a way, like a one-dimensional Euclidean line, once knitted it can be transformed into a two-dimensional plane or sculpted into any three-dimensional structure. Consideration of the material nature of the fiber is essential since each fiber behaves very differently when knit (every kind of fiber has different stretch and "tooth"—some are very stretchy, some have no stretch, some are "toothy," and some have "no tooth".) But within a framework provided by the nature of the fiber, the question to ask is, What characteristics do you want your yarn sculpture (which is what I think of knitted objects to be, whether intended to be worn or not) to have? Understanding how knitting works

gives the knitter the freedom to make whatever she wills to make. Anna Zilboorg, one of my favorite knitting authors, writes:

In knitting, more than in many areas, understanding gives us power. Through understanding we become able to control our knitting and make it do what we want. Without understanding, we are doomed to do what we are told. Anarchists generally do not like to do what they are told.²¹

Zilboorg, a self-professed knitting anarchist, encourages knitters to throw away patterns, discard directions, and instead focus your complete attention on your knitting—the stitches you have made and the movements of your fingers when you make them—for only then will you really be free.

I agree with Zilboorg's claim that the knitter should free herself from imitating another design and blindly following another's set of instructions. But I am also arguing that knitting, when done mindfully, changes the knitter's conceptions of her projects, her abilities, indeed, her very nature. To be mindful is to reflect on the nature of the materials used, the means by which those materials were produced and obtained, the moral and political implications of these choices, the design and production of the knitted object and, finally, on the final project and its role in producing and impacting one's self-conceptions.

Dave Cole, a multimedia artist, has knit with lead, electric cord, fiberglass, steelwool, license plates cut into spiral strands, and shredded dollar bills.²² A giant fiberglass teddy bear, featured in the DeCordova Museum's 2003 Annual Exhibition, was made with 362 rolls of Owens Corning fiber glass, 350 feet of Kraft paper, nine gallons of neoprene rubber contact adhesive, and two gallons of urethane sealant. The gauge was 1 st/2' wide and 2.5' high. Cole knit the bear, wearing protective goggles and a respirator, by using his arms as needles to make the stitches. Cole claims that his sculptures are not about performance or spectacle. Instead, as someone who has spent much of his later childhood and early adult life coming to terms with an early-childhood diagnosis of ADHD, he grew up regarding himself (based on the claims of others) as incapable of concentrating, or of being productive or creative. As a college student, he began questioning the conceptions of "productive" and "creative" that he had so far accepted. Through knitting, Cole realized that, when done on his terms, using atypical materials to create highly unlikely products, he is both creative and productive. In a manner, Cole knit himself into being a productive and creative person.

Like the semi-autobiographical person described in the quote with which I began this paper, I began knitting with deeply conflicted feelings. On the one hand, I could not shake the suspicion that knitting was antiquated (and therefore ridiculous) and anti-feminist (and therefore wrong). Yet, at the same time, I found the science of knitting, the lore that one needed to learn before one could really be in control of one's knitting, intriguing. When I was a beginner knitter, my knitting was clumsy. I was not ashamed of my knitting, but I was always disappointed. Perhaps this is part of the reason I was so secretive about my knitting. Very few people knew I knit and I always downplayed its significance to the few who did. Almost twenty years after learning to knit, when I had children who made an enthusiastic and appreciative (and, admittedly, captive) audience for my quirky experiments, I came to appreciate how much creative and intellectual energy could be explored and expended through knitting. Now I knit not because I want to have an object, but because I want to explore an idea, or determine whether or not I can successfully embody that idea within my knitted objects.²³

I genuinely believe that knitting can play a life-changing part in the creation of a person's self. I am not arguing that knitting should be valued above other activities. But neither should it be dismissed as so much busywork or silliness merely because of its associations with elderly ladies or funky chicks getting their "knit on." Knitting can be a genuinely powerful activity, one worthy of respect and admiration.

Endnotes

1. Writing this has inspired me to toy with the idea of designing a line of knit-wear with Hegelian themes: a scarf with the words "thesis + antithesis = synthesis" in a repeat pattern of intarsia stitch, an Owl of Minerva shawl, with the owl's body in the middle and the outspread wings creating the sides, and mittens with "being in itself" knitted on one and "being for itself" on the other.
2. "Annulling Crimes: A Hegelian Theory of Retribution," Jami L. Anderson, defended August 1995.
3. In retrospect, I don't remember the German men contributing to this conversation. I was later told that all German boys were taught to knit in school, but the German men I lived with did not show any signs of knitting.
4. Susanne Pagoldh. *Nordic Knitting* (Loveland, CO: Interweave Press, 1987), 7.
5. *Ibid.*, 24.
6. Ann Feitelson. *The Art of Fair Isle Knitting* (Loveland, CO: Interweave Press, 1996), 6, 28.
7. I knit half a dozen or so sweaters for my oldest son every winter, each to his specifications. The yarn for each sweater, depending on what kind it is, costs between \$50 to \$75. I then spend between thirty and forty hours making the sweater. Given the costs of the yarn and the investment of one's time, it would be completely impracticable to hand knit sweaters to earn a living—or even extra spending money.
8. Pagoldh 1987, 8. She claims that its inherent simplicity lay in the fact that one needs only simple tools to knit, just two needles and some yarn. Indeed, one doesn't even *really* need needles since, apparently, one can use bicycle spokes instead! I have not tested this claim myself, but my curiosity is piqued.
9. Pagoldh 1987, 7.
10. Anne L. Macdonald. *No Idle Hands: The Social History of Knitting* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), 180.
11. *Ibid.*, 181.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *San Francisco Chronicle* review, excerpted on back of *Son of Stitch 'N Bitch*.
14. Debbie Stoller. *Stitch 'N Bitch Nation* (New York: Workman Publishing, 2004), back cover.
15. *Ibid.*, 10.
16. Anne L. Macdonald. *No Idle Hands: The Social History of Knitting* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), chapter 13, "The Thirties Knitting Craze."
17. *Ibid.*, 260.
18. Abra Edelman. *Celebrity Scarves* (New York: Sixth & Spring Books, 2005).
19. Many yarn stores do their part by packaging up the yarns and needles recommended by a hot-selling book into kits. Knitters therefore do not have to contend with choosing yarn brand, fiber, weight, blend, or color.
20. Macdonald 1988, 278.
21. Anna Zilboorg. *Knitting for Anarchists* (Petaluma, CA: Unicorn Books, 2002), 2.
22. Sabrina Gschwandtner. *KnitKnit* (New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 2007), 38-43.
23. Most happily, I have discovered that I am not alone in thinking that knitting can be a medium through which one can explore and create ideas. My mother-in-law, a very experienced and

knowledgeable knitter, was visiting during the recent winter holidays. She and I have spent hundreds of hours (really!) talking about and knitting together. At one point in her visit, she stopped her knitting and said, “You know, we are the same, really.” I must have had an enquiring look on my face (contemplating not only the generational difference but the cultural and nationality differences between us) as she continued, “Because we knit for the same reasons.”

The Wit of Knitting: A Philosophical Reflection on Knitting Things Aright

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Seeing a pattern in a medium of yarn emerge on a pair of needles, initially from a single row of loops, and grow to become an article of clothing, is immensely satisfying. Indeed, every moment of knitting provides immediate gratification. This is perhaps why knitting, like many other occupations of the hands, is so calming to the soulful organism, at once delivering analgesic relief from stress in the form of an endorphin cocktail, and simultaneously aligning the mind with the movements of the spheres. And so knitting soothes the Animal soul as it simultaneously stimulates the distinctively Human one.

A philosopher’s rationale for knitting, however, cannot appeal to the effects of knitting on the Animal soul—or, at any rate, not on paper. The Animal rationale, it seems, is still too closely allied in many minds with being Woman—or, at any rate, Domestic and Lowly. And being Woman (or Domestic or Lowly) has not yet been entirely rehabilitated in the academy. This is thoroughly regrettable. Because obviously the Animal and the Human are overlapping—affectations to the contrary notwithstanding. And so it seems that if I would bring my knitting into the departmental and senate meetings—as I indeed would—then I am obliged to offer reasons for its loftiness—reasons for its being more on the Human side than on the Animal side of the equation. So here, for the record, are some distinctively philosophical reasons for knitting.

First, and most attractively: a knitter bears the characteristic mark of the divine, because at every moment a knitter is bringing forth something out of nothing. (Nine out of ten times, the knitter is also trying to keep warm in the crib another thing that was also brought forth out of (nearly) nothing.) Next, the knitter is intimately acquainted with the Mobius strip, the Klein bottle, and all the other subversions, diversions, and perversions of mundane earthbound topology. The Knitter thus ponders the perplexities of space, time, and how the whole universe might be wrought from string—and thus fabricates (what else?) that luminously high-dimensional Yarn Theory of Everything, so purl-plexing to the non-knit wit. The questions knitters have examined are profound and wide ranging, from logic to metaphysics to morals, and include: (1) Why is it the case that the negation of nothing is knot, but the negation of knot is not nothing?; (2) How does the occupation of three-dimensional space by a strict sequence of (roughly) one-dimensional vibrating loops, connected in a two-dimensional array, result in the look and feel of exactly three dimensions?; and, of course, (3) How does one cast off one’s chains?

But, unlike the mathematician, not only can the knitter bring the perversions and other oddities into being, but the knitter can also (this is my own specialty) help them to pass away. We knitters have created knots like nobody’s business—knots that only a chosen few outside our fellowship have been privileged to behold, let alone hold in the palm of the hand and

allow to rest warmly in the lap. This is the source of intense power. And with power comes an equally intense obligation of putting things right.

Which brings me to my major point—the major reason for philosophical knitting: knitting is about putting things right, and so reflecting upon knitting is reflecting upon this important duty and activity. And for both these things we knitters have special insights, because we knitters just see the right way of things. We who knit keep knitting because, when we look at our handiwork, we can see what to do next (like Wittgenstein said). And this manifesto comes apart into two theses for defense: first, that the British empiricists were in egregious error when they propounded their reductionist views on the evidence of the senses; and second, that seeing how to go next is just good sense (good observation, if you will)—if you’re a knit-wit, anyway. But once you see this, you will see your way clear to Empiricism without Kant. These are the philosophical theses I will propound in the space that falls to me here. These are twin Aristotelian doctrines that a Knitter (well, this one anyway) will be proud to submit for your approval.

Three Cheers for Aristotle, Part 1: Seeing and Believing

The Knitter, like the Philosopher, knows that observation and judgment lie on a continuum. True: the world presents us with a richly structured array, in unrelentingly continuous flux, of multimodal stimulation to all of our senses simultaneously. Entities can be seen, heard, smelled, felt, and tasted, sometimes all at once. And as we engage with the objects in our environment we ourselves contribute to the continuous fluxion in proprioceptive and visual feedback to our own sensory systems. How could a naïve observer—a newborn, for instance—perceive anything but unrelated patterns of visual, acoustic, and tactile stimulation, in William James’s (1890) famous phrase a “blooming, buzzing confusion”? Modern thinkers proposed that perceivers must learn to interpret and integrate sensations before meaningful perception of objects and events could happen for them. This so-called “constructionist” approach, which dominated the perception psychology of the twentieth century, presupposed that the different forms of stimulation from the various senses must be integrated or organized in the brain and therefore posed a “binding problem” for perception—the thought (still exercising many) is that sensory stimulation has to be united by a separate mechanism that somehow achieves a meeting of differently coded information from different channels on some common ground.¹ (Some of us knitters are familiar with another binding problem, this one in the kitchen; and often the solution to this one is just more eggs.)

It was not until J.J. Gibson pioneered what is now referred to as the “ecological” view of perception that integrationist presuppositions vis-à-vis perceptual development were seriously questioned. Gibson held that different streams of information, as such, posed no special problem for unitary perception because multiple processing of input is a norm in cognition. In fact, the senses are highly interactive and cooperate in the detection of invariant aspects of stimulus arrays—so much so that we should recognize only one “perceptual system.” What Gibson did was focus psychologists’ attention upon invariants in stimulus arrays. And he taught psychology that the first things of which an organism becomes perceptually aware and upon which anchored, may well not lie as content in any one sensory modality, but may instead lie in the higher-order invariants in the blooming and buzzing array. This is an Aristotelian idea.

Aristotle had postulated a “sensus communis”—an *amodal* or *common* sense—which he thought was responsible for

perceiving the qualities of things that were more general and not specific to single senses (“common sensibles”). According to Aristotle, common sensibles included motion, rest, number, form, magnitude, and unity. This inventory has a strong resemblance to lists of the amodal by contemporary perceptual theorists following Gibson’s lead.²

The conceptual keys to unlocking how detection of such qualities is achieved are overlap and redundancy. As Aristotle observed long ago, amodal information is not specific to a particular sensory modality but is information common to several senses. Such things as temporal and spatial features of a scene are typically conveyed in multiple senses: the rhythm or rate of a ball bouncing or hands clapping are good examples. Rhythm in both cases can be picked up visually and acoustically. And when it is conveyed in overlapping media (as in these examples), the redundancy makes the temporal features highly salient. And so understanding the pickup of amodal information involves understanding the production of salience—a topic that is still in its infancy.

A vast body of research conducted over the last twenty-five years of the twentieth century confirms that even young infants are adept perceivers of amodal stimulation.³ Infants detect the temporal aspects of stimulation such as synchrony, rhythm, tempo, and prosody common to visual and acoustic information that proceeds from single events, as well as spatial collocation of objects and their sound sources, and changes in intensity across the senses. “These competencies,” as Bahrck and Lickliter write, “provide the foundation for the perception of meaningful and relevant aspects of stimulation in social and nonsocial events....In our view, detection of amodal information in early development provides a radical and efficacious solution to the so-called ‘binding’ problem...The task of development becomes to differentiate increasingly more specific information from the global array through detecting invariant patterns of both multimodal and unimodal stimulation.”⁴

This is a lesson that philosophy has had a much harder time learning. And this is due entirely to the profound influence that British Empiricist dogma has exercised on modern philosophical sensibilities—not common sense. This dogma goes against the grain of knitting. The British epistemological tradition, to Hume himself, consistently drew a categorical distinction between sensing/observing, on the one side, and judging, on the other. But common parlance does not draw any such firm line. So, for example, it is unremarkable to hear it said: “I see that the glasses are missing from his face in the photo,” where of course the sense data do not go as far as the utterer says. Today’s empiricists draw the seductive conclusion that something—something much more in the way of judgment and much less present in the stimulus—has been superadded to sensation in between the time I look at the photo and the time I make the utterance. But this is deceptive. For not since I was a neonate (and for that matter long before that still) has my experience been anything but a matter of “superadding” (if the name is apt, which it probably is not). I notice that I can make it through this doorway, he observes that they can make it up the mountain pass, I see that the picture on the wall needs adjusting. And all these things happen automatically, effortlessly. Better and better judgment is what normal human development—and knitting, too—is all about.

What transpires over the developmental interval is expertise, as the organism acts upon its environment to bring about changes to it and, thereby, to its own organismic states. Feedback is the key. Now, expertise consists of a series of (typically incremental) achievements that make the critical features of my environment ever more prominent in my perception, so that they can effectively guide my behavior. As I

grow up, it becomes more and more true that certain features of my environment have a more and more direct and regularized bearing on my behavior, as I learn to respond in more and more regularly effective ways. I become an increasingly more reliable channel through which certain environmental cues get transformed into certain human behaviors.

The phenomenon of expertise (sometimes referred to as “flow”) is interesting in its own right. In expert performance—for such things as, for example, walking, riding a bicycle, playing tennis, performing on a musical instrument, driving a car, skilled typing, and, of course, knitting—the body, rather than the mind, seems to be the locus of control over the behavior. J. Jastrow’s description (penned in 1906) of this phenomenon is still the most evocative: “At the outset each step of the performance is separately and distinctly the object of attention and effort; and as practice proceeds and expertness is gained...the separate portions thereof become fused into larger units, which in turn make a constantly diminishing demand upon consciousness.”⁵ Expert performance is, as I have put it elsewhere, the phenomenon of molarization of behavior. Expert performance comes in yards rather than in inches. Just as knitting comes in patches, rather than in stitches.

Equally, learning to see something as requiring handling a certain way—a loop on my needle, for example, as requiring knitting a particular way—is not only possible and desirable, but also even necessary. So let’s turn to my second thesis: it is possible to “observe” our reasons for doing something—for doing the right thing (for example, seeing what stitch or stretch of stitches should come next), and that a learning process makes this possible (for example, seeing a twist of yarn as a stitch within a particular context is seeing a reason to knit it, and moreover to knit it in a particular way).

Three Cheers for Aristotle, Part 2: The Knitter Is Not a Lawgiver but a Lawreceiver

Let’s take that point more slowly. I want to make a sweater—that sweater. I secure the pattern, and yarn, and accessories accordingly, adopting the pattern as (roughly) my plan of action. My desire to make that sweater provides me reason to follow the pattern. But I also have reasons to depart from the pattern—to modify, improvise, or personalize it. I am skilled at such improvisation, and have been pleased with my results. And I also have reasons to do what I can to make my execution of the project as easy—and even as pleasurable—as possible. Who doesn’t? So obviously I don’t undertake to follow a pattern too difficult for my skill level, though I might want to challenge myself a bit, to develop my knitting skills. My reasons vis-à-vis this sweater project are thus very complex. But they get somehow focused upon and embodied by the pattern. The pattern summarizes what I need/intend to do, if somewhat imperfectly.

One view of the matter, centered upon Harvard, is the view that a norm—in my case, the knitting pattern—is rather like a law that I give to myself. But this view harmonizes ill with the experience of the knitter. Here’s why:

A norm is an itinerary—a kind of script of what I need to do. That I experience myself as *needing* or *intending* to perform it (however imperfectly) is what makes it a script, rather than a story or simply a pleasing pattern of marks or sounds. (The fact that I can inscribe, transcribe, or read my itinerary is a testament to my ability to use tools as aids to memory and cognition—to extend my functioning by adding to my repertoire elements of the world—as well as communicate and receive communications that facilitate my cognition.) A norm is something that is cognized as *to be reproduced*, in some fashion, by me, in my present circumstances.

Similarly, when I am in the middle of making the sleeve of the sweater, say, I view a particular loop upon my needles as needing knitting in a particular way, rather than another way, and rather than simply being ignored or dropped. A loop appears to inherit or acquire that quality of needing-to-be-knit-thus-and-so from the pattern. (And if I'm mistaken about a particular loop, my sweater will suffer for it. It will not be executed according to the pattern, or even according to a modified, improvised, or personalized vision of that pattern.)

But how do I manage to arrive at the place where such loops elicit from me the "they need knitting in a particular way rather than another" response? How do I learn to "see what needs to come next" (to put the question Wittgenstein's way)?

Perhaps I consult an inscription of the chosen pattern. This is less than ideal. Remember, I have reasons to make execution of my sweater as easy and as fun as possible, and unremitting consultations with inscriptions of the pattern stand in the way of that. I need to implement the pattern in a more "direct" way—a way that bypasses the constant intrusion of the pattern inscription in a micromanagerial way. I need to *learn* the pattern rather than *follow* it in a tedious step-by-step way. Just as I learned to knit properly, rather than follow an exhaustive set of step-by-step instructions for looping, hooking, and shaping yarn on fingers and needles. (Patterns that gave instructions in these terms would be unspeakably tiresome tomes rather than succinct single pages.)

So once more: How do I manage to arrive at the place where I simply and directly "see" such loops as needing-knitting in a particular way rather than another? How do I learn to "see what needs to come next"? Here is my answer: I manage to adopt (perhaps even create) concepts of what I'm doing in small enough chunks that a brief inspection (after a period of training) will allow me to apply the concepts to the loop. Acquiring the seeing-as skill is a conceptual achievement, in addition to all the other conceptual achievements I already (at my advanced age) have to my credit. Here is a somewhat more detailed account of this matter.

Suppose the sweater pattern calls for fifty rows of knitting a rather complex lace stitch that repeat every six rows and over a stretch of ten stitches: the same sort of loops recur, but in different configurations over that stretch, but the whole configuration will repeat itself both vertically (every six rows) and horizontally (every ten stitches). There might be more than one way of breaking up the sixty-stitch configuration so as to "know where I am in it" at any given moment. I might decide to break it up for myself as follows: the first two rows do X, the second do Y, and the third do Z. While along the first two rows the first three stitches do A, the second do B, and the third do C, with a "separating" stitch before repeating. Perhaps you will see the pattern slightly differently. No matter: your way might work better for you, given your training and other cognitive economies, while mine might work better for me. (Obviously, I might well have no knowledge of how you will see fit to do it, so as to compare. I simply devise a way for myself, and I might well miss a simpler way.)

Once I've grasped this way of "articulating" the pattern—and this way might well come only once I've actually practiced the stitch for a while—I will come to "see" my position in the configuration whilst in the process of knitting a loop, and I will "see" that loop as requiring knitting a particular way. It takes some skill as well as some practice—and some confidence that the practice will take me where I want to go. Once I've achieved this, I can leave the pattern inscription behind, at least while I work the fifty rows. (The fifty-first row might require me to modify things, for example, so as to shape the armhole

and shoulder seams, and I will need to reconceptualize what I am doing so as to work that span of the pattern easily and enjoyably.)

Taking onboard the concepts X/Y/Z and A/B/C is a kind of learning. The achievement of these concepts is my way of not having to consult the pattern inscription repeatedly, and in that way actually internalizing the norms it contains. When I achieve my network of concepts, I become less dependent upon the pattern inscription, all the while in some sense having formed a substitute for it internal to myself. This process, as I'm arguing in a larger project, is an achievement of the cognitive learning strategy—which happens to be a dual-process strategy—that evolution has endowed many organisms and not just humans. And it's special to practical skills, with observation being one of them.

Now, how does this kind of learning differ from the (more theoretical) variety that I enjoy when I find things out about, say, the civil war or Peano's axioms or the laws governing the trajectories of projectiles or the natural history of amphibians? Or the language we speak and the various cultures we navigate? This is a fundamental philosophical question. And my point has been that practical learning is very distinctive, and that learning norms falls into the category of practical learning. Learning a norm involves acclimating oneself to and thereby internalizing norms that are initially external to oneself, just as I acclimatize myself to an unfamiliar knitting pattern. And unless I can expose my cognitive machinery to the norm as an Other (as it were, outside of myself), I cannot begin to internalize it—I cannot begin to learn it. This is a very important feature about learning.

But if this is the case, then it is not at all clear that any sense can be made of the idea that norm-learning is appropriately characterized as "giving a law to oneself." It is much more like receiving a law than like giving one. But I will leave the details of this argument for another occasion.

Finally, if learning to "see-as" in knitting is in any way characteristic of developing a range of skills and learning one's way around norms more generally, then it is clear why at least some norms embody or are constituted by judgments: at least these norms can be articulated in conceptual terms. Following them is, at least in part, a conceptual achievement.

And so it turns out that at least some learning involves the acquisition of concepts, just as some seeing involves the acquisition of concepts. And therefore it is clear that seeing and believing are not the mutually exclusive categories supposed by modern empiricism.

Putting it down

Like God, the knitter knows the time to stop. It coincides with bedtime.

Endnotes

1. See, for example, H. Birch & A. Lefford, "Intersensory Development in Children," *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development* 25 (1963); D. Friedes, "Human Information Processing and Sensory Modality: Cross-modal Functions, Information Complexity, Memory, and Deficit," *Psychological Bulletin* 8 (1974): 284-310; J. Piaget, *The Construction of Reality in the Child* (New York: Basic Books, 1954).
2. J.J. Gibson. *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979); E.J. Gibson. *Principles of Perceptual Learning and Development* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts 1969); L.E. Bahrack & J. Pickens. "Amodal Relations: The Basis for Intermodal Perception and Learning in Infancy." In *Development of Intersensory Perception: Comparative Perspectives*, edited by D.J. Lewkowicz & R. Lickliter (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1994), 205-33; L.E. Marks. *The*

Unity of the Senses (New York: Academic Press, 1978); T.A. Stoffregen & B.G. Bardy. "On Specification and the Senses." *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 24 (2001): 195-261.

3. Bahrck and Pickens, 1994; D.J. Lewkowicz. "The Development of Intersensory Temporal Perception: An Epigenetic Systems/Limitations View." *Psychological Bulletin* 26 (2000): 281-308; R. Lickliter & L.E. Bahrck. "The Development of Infant Intersensory Perception: Advantages of a Comparative Convergent-operations Approach." *Psychological Bulletin* 126 (2000): 260-80; A.S. Walker-Andrews. "Infants' Perception of Expressive Behaviors: Differentiation of Multimodal Information." *Psychological Bulletin* 121 (1997): 437-56; Walker-Andrews & Bahrck. "Perceiving the Real World: Infants' Detection of and Memory for Social Information." *Infancy* 2 (2001): 469-81.
4. L.E. Bahrck & R. Lickliter. "Intersensory Redundancy Guides Early Perceptual and Cognitive Development." In *Advances in Child Development and Behavior*, edited by R. Kail (New York: Academic Press, 2002), 153-87.
5. Quoted in Daniel Wegner, *Illusion of Conscious Will* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 106.

Thinking Gardening as Dwelling

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My garden is not an exemplary one. Our home sits on a long and narrow city lot with an alley and garage in the back and neighboring lots on each side. Indeed, there are three lots that abut ours on one of the sides. I garden all of the space that I have, but my garden is shaped as much by the work and actions of my neighbors as by my own. Because of the walnut tree right next to the fence, I grow raspberries there mixed with comfrey. Together they tend to flourish.

As I cultivate my garden, I think about many things, but most frequently about philosophical questions. I find myself asking Heidegger's question: What is it to dwell? I am often mindful of his caution that we tend to overlook, or not heed, that which is closest to us, the deepest possibilities of human life. When I garden, I am more attentive to dwelling and so I learn about what it is to dwell. These reflections are about what I have learned.

Gardening is an activity of tending. Some plants need to be nursed along. Each year I carefully cover the basil plants with plastic jugs until they are strong enough to thrive in the sometimes heavy spring rains. Other plants need to be left alone. Don't trim the forsythia too much in summer or it will not show its yellow beauty in the spring. Let the green of the daffodil fade to brown to feed the bulbs. Over the years, I have come to step back from trying to control every aspect of the garden. Instead of trying to dominate it, I take joy in the surprises and gifts that appear. I have a red cedar tree that is now sixteen or eighteen feet tall, planted as a seed one year by a bird who came to eat at our feeders. Now that tree often shelters flocks of sparrows and finches. A neighborhood squirrel planted snowdrops for me in the front ivy. After the surprise of the first year, I anticipate their blooms and keep the ivy free of deep leaves so that they can pop through more easily. Heidegger notes that dwelling is fundamentally a sparing and preserving. I have learned to be more mindful of my own tendencies to dominate and the delight that is possible when control is loosened.

Gardening is a healing activity. Sometimes that means helping plants to heal. I take some of my plants inside for the winter to preserve them. The hibiscus would not survive outside through the snow and freezing temperature, but it also

does not really thrive inside. As a gardener, of course I long for the ideal greenhouse where it could thrive all year. But that is not the condition given to me or to this particular hibiscus. So, as soon as weather permits, I take it to the spot it loves, cut it back as needed, and let the location heal it. Often gardening is also healing for me. I have ivy that covers a good part of the front yard and all the way down one side of the house. It started twenty some years ago from one small pot that I brought back from the yard of a dear friend, further south—so I wondered if it could thrive. She died suddenly many years ago now. When I trim the ivy back from the walk and when I clean the old vines, I think of her with fondness, and I think about her children and how delighted she would be in them. I come to understand that to dwell as a mortal is to love and so to both grieve and remember, to have the possibility of being healed.

Gardening teaches me about waiting. Heidegger says we need to learn how to await the divinities as divinities. I think I learn something more mundane about waiting, although it touches on the spiritual possibilities of human life. Right now I am waiting for the one trillium that I have in the ivy to show itself so that I can place a wire ring around it so the mail carrier, who walks through the ivy each day, will not step on it before it blooms. Waiting is not simply hoping. It is about being attentive to what is right before me. Some years the trillium manages to be ready to flower before I find it. To dwell is an attentive waiting. Again, I learn that I am not in control, but that if I wait well I can spare the flower and preserve it for yet another season.

The attentiveness practiced in gardening is also a listening. When I garden I hear the birds and recognize their songs: the Carolina wren, the chickadee, the house finch, the cardinals that nest in my yard each year. I am aware of the connectedness of my life with these others who live in my garden. I also hear my neighbors and come to learn about them. Sometimes it is an overhearing of troubles, of songs. Sometimes the activity of gardening gives rise to a conversation. We talk of the plants over the fence and then of other things. The garden that I cultivate helps me be a part of the neighborhood, hearing about it in ways that, as a professor in an urban neighborhood, I would probably not otherwise hear. I develop connections with my neighbors.

Heidegger writes that when we dwell we initiate our own nature. For him that means that we become capable of a good death. While I sometimes reflect on death, my garden thinking about what it is to initiate is probably more influenced by Hannah Arendt. I think about human natality and the constant possibility of newness coming into the world. A couple years ago, I planted a small spice bush. One of my colleagues, who is a biologist and a naturalist, told me that they are the native plant for our area that should be planted instead of the invasive honeysuckle. I placed it on the grave of a dog that was part of our home for thirteen years. I grow many native flowers and they attract a wide range of butterflies, but after planting this bush, I began seeing a lovely new butterfly—the Spicebush Swallowtail.

This is certainly not a complete philosophy of gardening, nor is it a full phenomenology of the lived experience of human dwelling. I garden because I enjoy the dirt and the outdoors. But I cannot not be a philosopher. When I garden, I think about dwelling, and when I think about dwelling, I garden differently. I dominate less; I am mindful of being healed and of listening; I take joy in new possibilities.

Ode to a Pot

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“Beauty is truth, truth beauty,”— that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know”

- George Keats

“Being is *what requires creation of us* for us to experience it.”¹ I wish I could say that such lofty aspirations guided my decision to register for a class on ceramics the very semester I began my graduate work in philosophy. This enigmatic, often cited quote from Maurice Merleau-Ponty forms the centerpiece of much aesthetic philosophy by Merleau-Ponty scholars. My decision to pursue ceramics did not arise from an awareness of my ontological requirements. I have practiced some form of visual art most of my life, from drawing, painting in watercolors and oils, to sculpture. This interest in practicing art has never exhibited itself in my philosophical writing because the urgency of political concerns has preoccupied my philosophical thinking. This is my first attempt to philosophically explain this separate part of myself.²

Art as Practice

I expose myself as grounded in Aristotelian ideas for I decided in my college years that the meaning of life centers on the practices of life. Acknowledging that I cannot control whether my goals will be reached (because fate is whimsical and even my goals may change), I understand that the only thing I can control lies in how I choose to live everyday life. This decision leads me into philosophy because I need to read and think philosophy every day. Likewise, I need to work inside a studio and participate in art-making regularly. I need to practice both.

Ceramics Contra Philosophy

Why ceramics? Three reasons guide my choice into ceramics. I like the contrast with philosophy. For ceramics is *immediately* useful. Bowls, mugs, teapots, platters, and even vases, these items can be put immediately to use. Philosophical ideas, although arguably useful at some point in time, do not provide this experience of immediate practical, material utility. There is something incredibly satisfying in this immediate utility. Marx is profoundly correct that seeing one’s work materially present in the world serves as a source of incredible and deep satisfaction. This exhilarating feeling is difficult to experience in the practice of philosophy. The feeling arises perhaps when participating in conferences, perhaps when seeing one’s article in print, or perhaps when noticing an idea touch a student. But these experiences of utility with philosophy lack the material manifestation in the world and the opportunity to concretely locate the exact utility. Philosophy’s utility lies in a variety of realms—thought, emotion, psychology—but not in a physical realm. This physical lack feels quite unsatisfying. The tactility of the experience of seeing and holding one’s pots, of using one’s pots, or of seeing others use them provides the materially satisfying sense of being useful in the world.

The satisfying feeling of utility perhaps arises from seeing a finished product, a product that I cannot further tweak, modify, add upon, or edit. Writing philosophy, one constantly faces questions that rise from within oneself and others about aspects of the work where one can clarify an idea, where one can continue to think through the further ramifications of an idea, where one can consider the application of another idea. Even when the work is finally published, one cannot help but consider further questions that arise from within oneself and, with luck,

from the criticisms of other philosophers and theorists. The notion of a finished paper is an oxymoron. A pot is different. One cannot fix the pot, once it is glaze-fired. If something feels unsatisfying about this piece, the only consolation lies in avoiding the particular practice in future pots. If one finds the pot satisfying, one learns to appreciate it because hand-made pots cannot be completely replicated. Glaze firing is subject to the uniqueness of the circumstances within the kiln in each firing. One encounters this particular pot as a unique, finished product. Consequently, one experiences the still moment between the finished product and all the decisions to make about the next pot. In writing philosophy papers, I do not feel this still moment because of the never ending quality of writing philosophy.

Lastly, ceramics provides an opportunity to think and act without or outside of words and the weight of the linguistic system. In the ceramics studio, I replace the demand to be more and more articulate through words with thoughts about three-dimensionality: shapes, curves, lines, texture, and design. I still do not understand why certain curves and shapes appeal to the eye. I have been instructed that certain curves “naturally” appeal to human sight. I have heard similar theories in music in regard to overtones, and the order of certain chords that “naturally” appeal to human hearing. But as a political philosopher with specializations in feminist and race theory, such assurances on the “naturalness” of human attraction to curves and order of musical chords do not lie beyond some suspicion. The interstices between nature and culture are far more complex to unquestionably accept the notion of “natural” attractions. Nevertheless, thinking outside of words and instead within the framework of three-dimensionality is both freeing and illusive. In the three-dimensional framework, the seepage of meanings and the affective influences of shapes, curves, lines, etc. are much too clear. I am aware that I do not understand all the ways in which shapes and curves influence me and others who see and hold my pots. I remain persistently surprised at how the feel of a bowl changes with the slightest modifications in its curve. In the persistent effort to achieve clarity that is demanded by the use of language, philosophy forgets the inevitable seepage of ideas, that something necessarily escapes conveying and grasping. Philosophers forget that at any one moment complete understanding is not possible. Perhaps because I work in phenomenology, I have come to be aware in the horizon of pots, how much I cannot control and do not understand the affective influences of shapes, curves, lines, etc. This seepage of meaning both frustrates and inspires.

The Zen of Bowls

I do not practice ceramics making solely as a nice contrast to philosophy. Ceramics making in itself influences the subject I am, the person I am becoming. I locate three influences the practice of ceramics making has upon my subjectivity. First, I love the feel of mud in my hands. In other art mediums a brush, a pencil (in philosophy, the entire structure of language) lies between me and the product; in ceramics, my hands contact and work with mud directly. I touch clay in the palm of my hands, between my fingers, and feel it ooze under the remnants of fingernails and into the crevices of any cuts in my skin. Surprisingly, mud has soothed my cuts and sores. Every potter I speak to shares this pleasure. Nothing quite compares to this sensual feeling that at once evokes play and childhood and still holds forth the promise of yielding utility or/and art.

Second, the temporality of making pots is very different from other forms of art and philosophy. Both motivate being in the present, but in a distinct sense. In painting, sculpture, and philosophy, one must learn patience in attending to the work at hand because of the never-ending quality of the product. Hence a painting or a philosophy paper can take months, if not years, to

finish. One remains forever uncertain if these works are finished. Because the subject decides on the status of the object, a level of uncertainty about the status of the work as finished persists. Such a state inspires, indeed demands, the cultivation of great patience and forever tempts perfectionism. Such temporality requires dwelling in the infinity of the present; in three senses. This present is very difficult to experience; when painting or writing, I must constantly force my attention to return to the process at hand. Writing requires great attention; yet it is difficult to maintain such attention. Second, the present of painting and writing has a repetitive quality, in the attending again and again to the expression of an idea. Finally, the present of painting and writing can at times feel suffocating because the future in which the piece exists as finished feels as if it may never arrive.

Pots motivate a distinguishably different temporality of the present. When throwing pots, one must learn to let go of the piece. Over-handling clay leads to exhausting the clay-body, resulting in the collapse of the piece. Even in glazing, one must learn not to under-apply or over-apply the glaze. One must learn to let go, even when one yearns to touch up a corner or finger a curve. The work decides that it is finished. This temporality emphasizes release, discourages over-attachment to any one piece, and forces one not to focus on the piece as a finished product. This discouragement of over-attachment to any one piece has influenced my temperament profoundly. Such discouragement of attachment encourages accepting, however painfully, that no matter how much care and attention I devote to a single piece, I may never hold it as a finished product. I accept, however reluctantly, that with all the time I dedicate to one piece, this piece may collapse or, after the final firing, still end up on the heap of broken pots. Instead of investing all my expectations in one piece, I have developed an appreciation for the process. Only upon accepting the process of pottery-making, I find peace with such chaos regarding individual pieces, with such consequences beyond my control. Such a demand to let go of control—such a temporality—forces me to dwell in the present and not to focus on a future in which this particular end-product exists. This experience of the present is distinctly different from that of painting and writing. This experience of the present is not repetitive; the present flees by. Because of the demands of the spinning wheel, one must concentrate on the clay, on steadily holding one's fingers, on evenly exerting pressure on the clay while pulling up or shaping the piece. Any distraction during this period de-centers the piece, creates a wobble, or otherwise exhibits the uneven attention. Because of the speed with which the whole process occurs, one must focus one's attention on the throwing. Maintaining attention during this process does not present a challenge. A pot, no matter what size, can be thrown within thirty minutes, depending on one's skill level. With such speed, I experience the flow of time. In concentrating on the present, in going into the present of throwing pots, one feels the infinity of the present. This infinite feel of the present is far from suffocating because when one finally looks up from the wheel, the present has too easily slipped away.

Third, pottery making is a feminist endeavor. Perhaps because ceramics is historically associated with women, ceramics is considered usually low art, or "craft" and not high art. Much like cooking, although women constitute the majority of potters in studios, the professionals (chefs) consist primarily of men. Perhaps the association with low art arises because pots can have utility and do not simply have aesthetic value. But coming to ceramics from drawing, painting, and sculpture, I must insist that only the practice of ceramics has forced me to think abstractly. With the other mediums I was allowed to wallow in realist, representational art. To learn the high art mediums, students usually initially re-create the "real" world

by drawing or painting from reality. As such, I was not initially forced to think abstractly. This may also partly be a result of my disposition, which tends towards structure. With ceramics, even making a simple bowl immediately demands awareness of curvature and shape; immediately demands an abstract sensibility. Three dimensionality, shapes, curves, forms, etc. are, in their fundamentalness and simplicity, abstract. I do not know the history of pottery making and I do not know exactly when this art-form was associated with women. But I want to challenge its status as low art, as just craft. That numerous women practice this art demonstrates that women engage in much abstract creative activity. I practice this art form in defiance of its status as low art and to question the socially constructed designations of low and high art. In making pots, I participate in a feminist engagement. In these three ways, I appreciate how practicing ceramics affects my subjectivity.

Conclusion

As a Merleau-Ponty scholar, I have considered his work on creativity in writing this piece. He writes that the artist creates meaning by uniquely expressing resolutions of certain dualities. I list six dualities of creating here: 1. the expression of what is internal to the artist, while simultaneously reflecting the external world; 2. the relation between the individual and the social; 3. the relation between the real and the imaginary; 4. the relation between matter and form; 5. the relation between the visible and the invisible; and 6. the relation between pure repetition and pure innovation. In creating, the artist brings meaning into the world by depicting a new resolution to these dualities. These enigmatic descriptions of the process of creating do not reflect the actual lived experience of working with clay and glaze, of cultivating strength and habitual movement in my fingers, of developing specific corporeal positions, or just being in the studio. I cannot argue here that perhaps the phenomenologist who endeavored to portray lived experiences does not successfully portray lived aesthetic experiences. Nevertheless, however preliminarily, this position invites speculation. Being in a ceramics studio experientially feels quite removed from these theoretical concepts. Indeed, these theoretical concepts are far from my mind. In the studio, I am simply and only responding to the demands of my pieces and the immediate surroundings of the studio. Sometimes I do not feel even like a thinking being in the studio—but no, I do not want to say quite that. I overwhelmingly feel the call of the piece, an urgent call that does not feel conceptual but rather intuitive and sensual. There must be a relation between the conceptual and the sensual but perhaps the philosopher in me is just beginning to understand it.

Although I concentrate on the contrasts between philosophy and ceramics here, much between the two is similar. Most importantly, there is the impression that there is so much more to philosophy and to ceramics and hence so much more to attempt; they both emanate the distinct feeling of the infinity of possibilities. This open-endedness is at times scary, daunting, and frustrating. But such open-endedness offers the exciting prospect of infinite growth, education, and creative possibility.

Endnotes

1. Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 197.
2. I want to thank Sally Scholz for inviting me to express why I continue to throw pots while making a living as a philosopher.

Feminism, Food, and the Politics of Home Cookin'

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When I was a child—of indeterminate age but roughly four feet high—I made the mashed potatoes for a family dinner. My mother made whatever meat there was and my father made the salad. I washed the potatoes, I peeled them, I dropped them in the water. After they'd been drained, I put them in a mixing bowl with the mixer and added salt and butter. Why do I remember this so vividly? Because those mashed potatoes, one of my first contributions to the family welfare by food, were terrible, being too salty to eat with any pleasure. That my family ate any at all was clearly an act of love. And I have forgotten neither that act nor the sin of cookery—too much salt—that precipitated it. Indeed, the cookery, itself, was an act of love, though poorly done. This is no less true when I cook for my own family today. I enjoy feeding people, all the more so when they enjoy it as well, and I enjoy the craft of constructing something complex and tasty out of bits and pieces that are themselves not particularly spectacular. There is pleasure in a job well done. Cooking is thus a task I perform for our heterotypical family of four and generally enjoy, finding it fulfilling in more ways than just a full belly at the end. I write here to explore two of the key aspects of the prior statement: that I find cooking fulfilling and enjoyable, and that it is a task that I perform for our family.

Given my feminist principles and a bed-rock commitment to justice as fairness, I often feel conflicted about this gendered division of household labor, infusing an unpleasant *frisson* into most acts of cookery. I strive here to understand why I have these conflicted feelings. How does cooking stand in the gendered division of household labor generally and in our household? Ought I to be conflicted about it? Is cooking fraught for feminists? How do the politics of home cooking bear on my life? These are some of the issues I address. Ultimately, I conclude that I am conflicted largely because home cooking is a loaded activity in Western cultures and around the world, often heavily gendered, and that this sub-text is read even in households like my own where other labor doesn't always divide along traditional lines. After all, even when women don't do all of the women's work in the household, the work they do is still women's work. And so is the women's work that men do.

Let me address first how our household breaks a number of traditional gender lines in division of labor. It's necessary to understand this to see why I am not at all sure that I should be conflicted about cooking. I am the primary wage-earner, having a job that promises decent future wages so long as I can retain employment, and quite good benefits. This has been the case throughout graduate school and now as I begin my career as a professor. My husband, Bert, left two good jobs to move to be with me, first in Milwaukee and then in Lansing. He left the best of those jobs to go with me to Lansing for my Ph.D. studies, where we quickly found that the job market offered only inferior employment. In our household, Bert does yeoman's duty on a front normally reserved for the woman of the house: he is primary caregiver at home for our seven-month-old son just as he did with our now three-year-old son until he turned one. On weekends and evenings when I have to work, he cares for both the boys. The burdens of such caregiving fall on Bert as they have on generations of middle-class women: the longer you stay out of the workforce, the harder it is to get back in at anything like the level you had reached before even if the economy is good. In addition to such caregiving, Bert puts away

the dishes and takes the garbage out. But his housecleaning and provision of breakfast, lunch (including packed lunch for Robbie's school day), and dinner is the exception that proves the rule: I do the cooking and the cleaning. Nonetheless, it seems fairly clear that I am, by no means, stuck with the same level of "double burden" faced by many working mothers who carry both the burden of paid market work and unpaid household labor. So why is cooking a fraught activity for me despite the unusual, and unusually fair, way that my husband I have divvied up household labor such as childcare?

Consider the following facts about gendered division of household labor in America. According to a 2000 article by Bianchi et al., a number of studies support the claim that married American women spend more time on housework compared to women who are not married, while most studies report little or no difference in household labor time between married and unmarried American men. In fact, men living in couples—one presumes heterosexual couples but the research was not explicit—reduced their time in housework.¹ In their original research, Bianchi et al. found that "almost two-thirds of total housework hours are spent doing the core housework tasks of cooking and cleaning," which "all continue to be much more often the purview of women than men."² Some equality in this gendered division of labor is being observed as women's hours and men's hours converge on certain tasks. In fact, "[c]ooking, more than any of the cleaning tasks, is an area in which women and men have shown great convergence, with women's reported hours 8.8 times men's in 1965 but only 2.8 times men's in 1995."³ Though this may seem promising, consider that in household labor in general, women's labor in 1995 was only 1.8 times that of men.⁴ Though cooking may show more convergence in men's and women's time spent than the cleaning tasks, it still shows more divergence than household work in general.

What's more, even where male partners do undertake food preparation, surveys indicate that women are still responsible—feel responsible and are held responsible—for ensuring that food preparation occurs even when they are not doing the preparation themselves. In 1992, the British Social Attitudes Survey showed a barely perceptible change over time in gendered division of food preparation: in 70 percent of households, women prepare the evening meal, in 20 percent it is shared, while in only 9 percent is it prepared by the man. Grocery shopping demonstrates a similar division.⁵ The persistence of domestic labor—and, for our purposes, cooking in particular—being performed by employed wives in the face of their rising wages and participation in the labor market has been dubbed "the stalled revolution." Such patterns have been observed in many studies and many developed countries including the Anglo-heritage countries such as Australia, the U.K., and the U.S.A.⁶ Why this "stalled revolution"? Richard Breen and Lynn Prince Cook explain it this way: "as wives become the primary breadwinners, they do more of the domestic tasks to reinforce traditional gender identities."⁷ These domestic tasks have traditionally been associated not only with women, but with being a good woman. Many women view such tasks, especially cooking, as a "fundamental part of women's roles as wives and mothers."⁸ I myself long-ago subconsciously adopted this view from mainstream American culture as demonstrated by the long hours I put in cleaning the house, rearranging the cabinets, and doing laundry, all the moreso in penance after attending a conference or a few busy weeks of writing and grading late into the night and on weekends.

How traditional is this association between being a good woman and performing domestic labor? This is an important question as it has moral implications for the fulfillment of duties

and for moral blame and praise. The history of “traditional” American views of domestic labor and women’s work is illuminating: “in 1800 women’s unpaid labor on behalf of their families was considered productive, but by 1900 most women were no longer defined as productive workers in the eyes of the government who put women in the census category of ‘dependents’.”⁹ Yet unpaid productive labor is exactly what most housework is, no less so for cooking, which is perhaps best conceived within the Marxian frame of references as a specific kind of work: the unpaid production of use-values.¹⁰ Like much work—paid or unpaid—household labor was conceived of as tedious and boring but not valuable. Why? Partially because the work was not market work and capitalist economies consider value as market value¹¹ and partially because, traditionally, only male activities are recognized as activities.¹² That is, up until the 1950s. Only then did domestic labor such as cooking and cleaning come to be seen as a civic virtue, a matter of morality and femininity and a so-called “convenient social virtue” that served to convince women that unattractive jobs were virtuous: “For the first time in history, the crummy job of scrubbing the floor was suddenly an honor—and a test of femininity.”¹³ In a large survey of British women, the results indicate that “the proper meal” confirms the family as a “proper family” and is, by definition, made by the wife.¹⁴ As a wife, there are certainly fewer things more guaranteed to earn the disapprobation of others than an inability to keep a clean house and put an edible meal on the table. Put another way, rarely is an unclean house and recourse to fast food taken to reflect as poorly on men as it is on women, a disapprobatory judgment that takes the form of moral blame.

We have seen that the status of domestic labors as feminine virtues is fairly new, though it must be said that the gendered division of that labor has a much older pedigree. Are such divisions confined to countries such as the U.S.A., the U.K., and Australia, which share an Anglo cultural heritage? And if not, how do they show up in cooking, in particular? I find these questions relevant for they explain a great deal about pervasive conflicts between feminist ideals and the “joy of cooking.” Food, itself, is surprisingly gender-laden in some cultures. In France, fish is traditionally not regarded as food appropriate to French males because the flaky texture of fish must be eaten in small mouthfuls and chewed gently in a way that “totally contradicts the masculine way of eating.”¹⁵ O’Laughlin reported that in many non-Western societies with undeveloped economies, men did not do the cooking and had never learned to cook because doing women’s work was considered shameful. One African culture defined cooking so explicitly as women’s work that men who used the cooking pots were viewed as equivalent to what American culture would call transvestites. And in rural Norway, women doing men’s work have historically received recognition whereas men doing such work receive ridicule.¹⁶ Such devaluation of woman-gendered food and domestic labor clearly appears in a number of cultures and traditions.

Because of the modern and historical trends in gendered division of household labor and cooking described above, cooking is a terrifically loaded activity with strong normative value. Doing it well is a virtue and a duty, but a specifically feminine one. Men who do it are either considered feminine, or to be going above and beyond the call of duty. A woman who cooks poorly or “passes it off” to someone else may thus be seen as shirking her duty or at best as somehow “improper.” This goes a long way toward explaining why I am conflicted, and why other women may also have a complex relationship with cookery. There is reason to believe this is the case. Writing about nutritional programs designed to teach healthy cooking and eating skills in the face of rising obesity, Rachael Dixey cautions program designers who intend to target women and

girls with opportunities to learn how to provide healthy food, insisting that they take into account such complex relationships when targeting anyone, but especially when targeting women of any age or marital status: “Cooking can clearly be enjoyable, sociable, great fun, and can give enormous satisfaction, as well as providing food that is good to eat. There is clearly a caveat here however. Cooking skills for women must not be seen as part of the attempt to re-create traditional gender roles.”¹⁷ It appears I am not the only one who feels conflicted about cooking despite its obvious merits and my household’s unusual division of other domestic labor. Now, at least, I better understand how feminism, food, and the politics of home cooking create this uneasy mix.

Endnotes

1. Suzanne M. Bianchi, Melissa A. Milkie, Liana C. Sayer, and John P. Robinson. “Is Anyone Doing the Housework? Trends in the Gender Division of Household Labor.” *Social Forces* 79:1 (2000): 197.
2. *Ibid.*, 206.
3. *Ibid.*, 206-7.
4. This 1995 figure of women’s household labor being 1.8 times greater than men’s household labor was down from a whopping six times more hours than men in 1965. However, this is less a function of how much more labor men are doing than much less labor is getting done in toto: 34.9 hours of work in 1965 and 27.5 in 1995 (Bianchi et al. 207). Bianchi et al. refer to this as a “stalled increase” on the part of men (214). In addition, even as more labor is being done by men, the trends in composition of labor have not substantially changed. Women are still responsible for meals, dishes, housework, shopping, and laundry, tasks which cannot be scheduled at one’s convenience. Men still perform yard work, automotive maintenance, and bill paying, tasks which can be scheduled at one’s convenience (Lynn Prince Cooke. “Policy Pathways to Gender Power: State-Level Effects on the US Division of Household Labor.” *Journal of Social Policy* 36:2 (2007): 246-47).
5. Rachael Dixey. “Gender Perspectives on Food and Cooking Skills.” *British Food Journal* 98:10 (1996): 38.
6. Richard Breen and Lynn Prince Cooke. “The Persistence of the Gendered Division of Domestic Labor.” *European Sociological Review* 21:1 (2005): 43.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Elisabeth L’orange Furst. “Cooking and Femininity.” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 20:3 (1997): 442.
9. Pamela J. Riley and Gary Kriger. “Moral Discourse on Domestic Labor: Gender, Power, and Identity in Families.” *The Social Science Journal* 36:3 (1999): 544.
10. Furst 1997, 444.
11. Riley and Kriger 1999, 544.
12. Furst 1997, 445.
13. Barnett and Rivers cited in Riley and Kriger 1999, 543.
14. Furst 1997, 442.
15. Bourdieu cited in Furst 1997, 441.
16. Furst 1997, 442.
17. Dixey 1996, 40.

Singing Out: Making Music as a Leftist Feminist Philosopher

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When I was ten, I got my first guitar and Tracy Chapman’s first album (on cassette!). A few of us took guitar lessons with our vaguely hip fifth class teacher, who taught us songs from the

Carpenters and Beatles. Thus began my adventures in music-making. It was the tail end of the 1980s; the Berlin Wall would soon come down, there was immense public pressure for the release of Nelson Mandela, and everyone was worried about acid rain and CFC gases. I followed it all avidly; my favorite television program was *Today Tonight*, Ireland's answer to *Sixty Minutes*. Almost inevitably, then, my first songwriting efforts had political themes, and they were really, really bad. Quite unexpectedly, I had stumbled upon an artistic conundrum that has come back to haunt me two decades later: How do you write music that addresses political and social themes you care about without sounding silly, pompous, presumptuous, insensitive?

By the start of my teens, I had learned the difference between Billy Bragg's "Between the Wars"¹ and the Scorpions' toe-curling "Winds of Change,"² and, sensing my inadequacy to the task of avoiding the latter and emulating the former, I changed tack. Right at that moment, on the cusp of a stereotypically unhappy adolescence, I left Tracy Chapman in the dust and discovered Jimi Hendrix and The Cure. I had seen a television clip of Hendrix setting fire to his white Stratocaster at the Monterey Pop Festival, and I was enchanted. I decided to save up for my own white Stratocaster, and I stacked grocery store shelves for three years to achieve my dream. The Jimi Hendrix persona—never mind his chops—proved harder to achieve. He seemed effortlessly cool, charismatic, confident; all the things I wasn't. He was also a heterosexual man, and could adopt the regulation rock star poses without contradiction; they made me cringe (when I wasn't laughing!). I took guitar lessons, but after a while, I ran out of guitar solos I wanted to copy. Indeed, the rock guitar solo itself seemed a flawed idea to me: a frequently aesthetically redundant outburst of sexualized straight-boy showing-off. Guitar wanking, my friends and I rudely called it. Neither showing off nor straight-boy sexuality were very interesting to me: I needed a new way to think of myself as a musician.

Indie (independent) or alternative music provided the model I found most useful, if still problematic. "Indie," especially before the 1990s, when grunge and Britpop brought it into the commercial mainstream and essentially eliminated it as a meaningful category, denoted music released on independent (non-major) record labels, or self-released music. It was an outgrowth of punk and post-punk, movements that had prized individual expression over commercial compromise, and often encouraged a "do it yourself" ethos. Indie artists also offered new ways of thinking about one's musical persona: Morrissey and Robert Smith challenged stereotypical images of the male rock star (Smith wore lots of make-up and exuded vulnerability; Morrissey favored gladioli and exuded edgy homoeroticism), and there were female voices too, presenting even greater challenges to the usual image, among them Cocteau Twins' Elizabeth Frazer, PJ Harvey, and explicitly feminist groups like L7 and Huggy Bear. Accordingly, my next major musical passion was The Cure (and then similar groups like The Smiths, Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, Cocteau Twins, and Joy Division). They matched my darkening, more introspective mood as I trudged through the purgatory of adolescence. Their (largely) melancholic lyrics and the stark, reverb-drenched soundscapes of my favored albums became the basis for my own style: my aim was to make music with so much space you would feel lonely in it.

This was, essentially, my artistic model for the next several years, and it served me well as I used music to express my feelings about personal experiences of love, loss, and the search for identity. Music was, and remains, an essential escape from overthinking, from philosophy. The sound of a distorted

power chord, innocent of argument, making and needing no sense, is a wonderful relief after a day spent digging in Kantian texts or grading business ethics papers. I think it is enormously important to me—as a philosopher and a human being—to be regularly removed from the academic bubble. Most of what is important in life goes on outside it, after all. Still, unavoidably, music has not gone unreflected-upon in my life. Over time, then, I developed a rough, half-articulated "theory" of my approach to making music. My mode of musical production—written, produced, and performed entirely by me, in my room—fitted with the private, personal themes of my songs, and with the independent, non-commercial, DIY (do-it-yourself) ethos I admired. Gradually, my increasing political radicalization and decreasing sense of personal crisis led me to think of turning outward for musical inspiration. Indeed, it seemed bizarrely inappropriate to be singing love songs when there was an unjust war going on, when the facade of democracy seemed to be slipping with each new expansion of the security state, when the gap between rich and poor was growing, when being openly gay at school could get you shot in the head.

My usual musical style seemed to fit uneasily with these political themes. I began listening to music that addressed the urgent questions of class struggle and war: I started, as an indie kid would, with Bob Dylan, and worked my way back to Woody Guthrie. From Woody Guthrie I rediscovered Planxty, an Irish folk "supergroup" of the 1970s that drew much inspiration from him, and then others in the tradition, like Joe Heaney, the legendary *sean nós*³ singer. I had never understood or had a feeling for Irish folk music before I moved to New York, read Marx, and listened to Woody Guthrie; growing up in suburban 1980s and 1990s Ireland, I had found it quite alien to my experience and sensibilities. I listened to blues singers like Skip James, who, like Woody Guthrie, documented in song the hard times of the 1930s. I listened to a lot of sixties rock and folk, from Dylan to Phil Ochs, "Fortunate Son"⁴ to "There's Something in the Air."⁵ I discovered the rich tradition of left-wing and labor songs, from "Solidarity Forever"⁶ to "The Internationale."⁷

Listening to 1960s rock, especially the more political songs, I felt a sense of nostalgia for music that seemed to capture and express the feelings of a broad youth culture, of a Movement. Of course, such nostalgia is easy decades after the fact: it is easy to forget that that "broad culture" was rightly challenged for ignoring the differences within. Nobody these days is going to be proclaimed the voice of a generation, as Bob Dylan was. This is a loss, of course, in some ways, and shows increasing fragmentation in youth culture (and indeed in culture at large), but it is also a sign of progress, a growing beyond the perhaps childish determination to build a movement where "we" are all as one. It really isn't that simple, and pretending that it is will do no good. That was one reason to turn from rock as a means of political expression. Rock is also a notoriously difficult medium in which to express political sentiments without sounding foolish. Examples include the aforementioned "Winds of Change" and, latterly, "Zombie,"⁸ the Cranberries' embarrassing attempt to deal with the Northern Ireland conflict. Moreover, rock and pop are big business: although hardly anybody living and working in a capitalist society is "pure" and aloof from involvement in the system, there seemed to me to be an uncomfortable contradiction involved in rock artists attempting to address political themes, especially from an anti-capitalist perspective. All of this made it seem difficult for me to imagine using rock as a means of moving thematically beyond the strictly personal.

Politically, folk music fitted my beliefs most closely: folk music is people's music, and I wanted to write about people and for people (where previously I'd been happy to write

music largely about myself and for myself). What does folk music mean? It has become, for me, an increasingly complex question. If folk music is people's music—music of and for "the people"—who are "the people"? Folk music thus understood always lends itself to questions of belonging; first, belonging to a tradition, usually rural. This raises difficult questions. To which traditions do I belong? Can I choose which ones to align myself with? How can I belong to a tradition that has been exclusionary? Can feminists and queers easily embrace tradition? Perhaps only uneasily. Growing up globalized, so to speak, I felt as much identified with music and youth culture from the U.S. or Britain as with Irish traditional forms.

Folk music is also about belonging to a community. This, too, raises questions. What is my community? If folk singers strive to speak for their community, which then can identify with and come to adopt their songs, then we must ask who their community includes and under what circumstances they have a right to speak for it. Communities and identities seem more and more fragmented, more specialized. What would mine be, for example? It is not clear. Workers? Academic workers? New Yorkers? Brooklynites? Irish people? Irish immigrants? Women? Irish women? Lesbians? Queer women? Irish lesbians? People born in the late 1970s? I don't want to be confined to singing about and for thirty-something Irish expatriate feminist queer academic workers in Brooklyn, but neither do I want to appear arrogant by assuming I can sing about or for everyone.

Perhaps, these days, we can reimagine community as a matter of choice: there are communities based on common interests, who may not live together, who may not meet except online or simply imaginatively, in the sense that they share a commitment. If that is so, folk music may be a more elastic idea than we might have previously thought. Indeed, the barriers between "folk" and other kinds of music may not be clear. DIY recording artists have a hard time with notions of community, since our *modus operandi* is largely to work alone, preserving individuality and eschewing compromise on artistic ideals, but that shared commitment may make us a community of sorts. What the original indie ethos shared with traditional ideas of folk music is that the music was not commercial, but an expression of real people's feelings and experiences. Of course, in both camps, this ideal has been compromised: both "indie" or "alternative" artists and "folk" artists regularly sign deals with major labels and sell millions of albums, concert tickets, and merchandise. It is a long way from Woody Guthrie, and from *The Desperate Bicycles*.⁹ The "indie" ethos, unlike folk, emphasized personal, individual expression; in that respect, it reached back to Keats and Shelley as much as to mainstream rock. Both indie and folk, as ideas at least, opposed mainstream rock and pop's assembly-line commercialism in favor of a more "grassroots" approach. Traditional folk music was distributed in a non-proprietary manner, songs and tunes being handed from musician to musician and being changed and reshaped along the way. "Indie" and, specifically, DIY music has been more connected to the individual who created it, and in that respect there is more similarity to the mode of distribution of commercial rock, but the burgeoning possibilities of home recording and online music sharing—all of which anyone can do with a standard laptop and Internet connection—have brought new questions: the DIY recording artist uninterested in commercial success can reach large numbers of people without compromise, simply by putting music online for free streaming or download.

The field is growing more and more crowded as thousands of people put their music online; it is harder to garner attention, to be sure. I don't want to overstate the decline of the mainstream music business, but there are new possibilities for musicians, although these developments have made it less

and less feasible for them to earn money from recorded music, since online music sharing has undermined the expectation that recorded music is to be paid for. But perhaps that is precisely the point: the old rock model of stars and fans, participants and observers, may be under pressure. In place of the old model, or at least alongside it, there might be developing a new model of greater participation on a noncommercial or less commercial basis; fewer global stars, and more musicians reaching smaller communities. Virginia Held has suggested that feminist models of culture would emphasize participation and locally based cultural production rather than the commercialized and alienating "star" model.¹⁰ These developments in home recording and online distribution have made it easier to realize the DIY ethos of the original "indie" artists—the DIY punks who pressed runs of a couple of hundred records or asked fans to send a blank tape on which their copy of the band's single would be recorded.¹¹ The possibility of a return to that DIY punk ethos, now given new possibility by technology, may bring with it new possibilities of political music-making. Its method of production and distribution is (more or less directly) political; its content, not necessarily. After all, many of the best DIY punk and indie songs have been about the personal and particular. There is no reason, of course, that this would preclude political content: for one thing, as feminists should know, politics is present in the most personal and particular moments. My own everyday life, for example, is filled with such moments: my girlfriend and I pause before holding hands on this street, or in this bar, fearing homophobic reactions; at the grocery store, I'm angered that rBGH-free milk is double the price of "ordinary" milk, safe food made a luxury for the better-off; walking in my rapidly gentrifying neighborhood of Crown Heights, Brooklyn, I notice another local business has closed its doors and am uncomfortably reminded that I'm a cog in the wheel of this process. It's hardly the stuff of punch-the-air anthems, but bringing these moments into the realm of political music—or, perhaps, blurring the boundary between political and nonpolitical music—offers a creative path that seems to "fit" me better.

It is possible to reimagine and bring together aspects of musical traditions that are politically progressive. One example is the English folk-punk singer Billy Bragg. Inspired by Woody Guthrie and other folk artists, but knowing that, having grown up in Barking in the 1970s, he could not authentically write and sing about their struggles or in the rural, traditional folk music style, Bragg combined their political spirit with the style that was more his own: punk. The result is a body of work that is utterly Bragg's own, a music of his people, of his time, that also connects with the traditions that have inspired it.

This, I think, is the crucial idea: to inherit the spirit and attitude without imitating the style and content. To keep on trying, writing, not forcing it. Authenticity is a difficult concept, as are the folk music ideals of tradition and community. Depending on one's interpretation of them, they may lead a musician in many different stylistic directions—folk, or punk, or indie, or a hundred others. It is almost impossible, then, to set out any reliable guidelines for the appropriate approach to making political, people-centered music. I can think of only two rules that seem important: first, whatever you write and sing, mean it, and second, don't be rubbish. After that, a tradition and community may well find you.

Endnotes

1. Billy Bragg. "Between the Wars." *Between the Wars E.P.* GO! Records, 1985.
2. The Scorpions. "Winds of Change." Alex Records, 1991.
3. "Sean nós" means "old way" or "old style" in Irish, and refers to a traditional *a capella* singing style.

4. Creedence Clearwater Revival. "Fortunate Son" (single). Fantasy Records, 1969.
5. Thunderclap Newman. "Something in the Air" (single). Track Records, 1969.
6. Ralph Chaplin. "Solidarity Forever" (1915). Notable recordings include Utah Phillips, "Solidarity Forever," *We Have Fed You All A Thousand Years*, Philo Records, 1983.
7. Eugene Pottier. "L'internationale" (lyrics) (1871); music Pierre Degeyter, 1888. Notable recordings include Billy Bragg, "The Internationale," *The Internationale*, Utility Records, 1990. Bragg's version features substantially reworked lyrics, by Bragg himself.
8. Cranberries. "Zombie." Island Records, 1994.
9. A DIY punk band who released their second single, "The Medium Was Tedium"/"Don't Back the Front," for 153 pounds and on the sleeve asked "why you haven't made your single yet...now it's your turn." Desperate Bicycles, *The Medium Was Tedium/Don't Back the Front*, Refill Records, 1977. The single's B-side, "Don't Back the Front," an anti-fascist song, is an example of political themes in DIY punk music of the period.
10. Virginia Held. *Feminist Morality: Transforming Culture, Society, Politics* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 109-10.
11. Bob Stanley. "Birth of the Uncool." *The Guardian* (March 31, 2006).

BOOK REVIEWS

Blind Date: Sex and Philosophy

Anne Dufourmantelle, trans. Catherine Porter. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007). 144 pages. \$19.95. ISBN 978-0252074882.

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Blind Date is a book on the "meeting" of philosophy and sex: a meeting the author fancies as a date between two relative strangers, each of whom shows up at the appointed time and place with nervous trepidation, and also excitement: Who is this person I am already jealous of, and how will our first misunderstandings right themselves?

Blind Date offers more in the way of thoughtful observations and discussions of historical texts than it does in the way of reasoned arguments toward particular conclusions. I found this frustrating, and sometimes infuriating; in some parts of the book I felt I couldn't understand what the author was saying. At its best, *Blind Date* offers some original and surprising ideas about the relationship between sex and philosophy. Let me discuss a few of these ideas here.

One reason the date is blind, Dufourmantelle says, is that sex and philosophy have never known one another; philosophy has not encountered sex. There's a sense in which this doesn't seem quite right, since philosophers have written about sex regularly, if not frequently, over the centuries, and certainly there is plenty of contemporary philosophical writing about sex. In another sense, though, Dufourmantelle is onto something: philosophy, concerning itself with the eternal and the deep, sometimes implicitly treats sex as a kind of detail; a "special case" of the more general problems of emotion, desire, drive, action, and ethics. And Dufourmantelle is right, I think, to point out that historically, philosophers of the past had little to say

about sex, and certainly very little to say about their own sexual lives. It is striking, given how much attention people pay to sex in ordinary life.

Although they haven't been together much, philosophy and sex have a lot in common, Dufourmantelle says. For example, sex and philosophy are both obsessed, in ways that make each jealous of the other. One obsession they share is with "essence." Here, sex is confident of its advantage. Dufourmantelle explains:

Sex believes it attains the essence that philosophy seeks...if *jouissance* is one of the words that expresses the moment in which something is given to you that you can neither want nor subjugate...the moment in which it appears to you without a shadow of a doubt that it is better to be alive than dead...then sex accedes to the essence of every existent better than any philosophy. (36)

I take this to mean, in part, that in sex one can experience an overpowering certainty in feeling of self—a kind of removal of emotive doubt—that philosophical reflection will never attain. In sex, certainty washes over us. In philosophy we claw our way toward it, always looking down at the shores of doubt and uncertainty. The immediate sexual self, then, would be a kind of true self.

If this is right, it seems to me to bear interestingly on debates about personhood, identity, and the nature of the human self. We often wonder: Are our identities manifested in those things we care about upon reflection, or to those things we find ourselves unable to do without? On one kind of "Frankfurtian" view, to identify with something is, in a sense, to reflectively choose it, to stand behind and endorse one's own feeling. On an alternative kind of view, we may see our true "selves" through those passions we cannot deny. The idea that sex is a window into essence seems to me to align with the second picture over the first; if Dufourmantelle is right about essence, you are who you are when you are in the heat of a moment, not in the cold of your study.

In a different line of thought centered on political engagement, Dufourmantelle juxtaposes Immanuel Kant and the Marquis de Sade:

Sade interrupts his pamphlet with the exhortation, "Frenchmen, yet another effort if you want to be republicans,"...Let us say that Sade's proposition reverses Kant's universal morality point for point, in the following terms: I have the right to enjoy your body, anyone may say to me, and I shall exercise that right, without any limit that might stop me, according to the whim of the demands that my tastes lead me to make. (48-49)

Those familiar with Kant and Sade on sex will not be surprised to see them set here in opposition. Kant famously worried that to have sex with another person involved using them in a morally troubling way, treating them as a means rather than an end; Sade infamously claimed that only in selfishness and self-absorption could one experience true sexual pleasure, and so we must be selfish. Here we see those two opposing pictures presented as inversions.

Further, these are offered not only as opposing views about sex, but as opposing views about the way one ought to interact with one's fellows, generally. In situating this as a political idea, tied to revolution, Dufourmantelle suggests that sexuality undermines our comfortable acceptance of enlightenment values and humanism.

In several discussions of historical philosophers, I wished Dufourmantelle's discussion offered more analysis. She offers Spinoza as the first instance of a thinker who knew that desire was connected not to a lack—to something missing—but rather to joy. She speculates that an understanding of Spinoza's sexual life would shed light on his philosophy, helping us to see why Spinoza "spent his life trying to understand in what way desire, nature, and God are all one" (77). But desires come in many varieties; what makes sexual desires especially interesting here? And why must we know Spinoza's personal life to understand his thoughts?

Dufourmantelle cites a lively series of excerpts from letters and diaries concerning the complex relationship among Nietzsche, Lou-Andréas-Salomé, and Paul Rée. She says that in the "official story," there is "no question of sex." About the letters, she says, "There is no way to comment on these letters except by borrowing George Steiner's Lacanian wordplay—once does not make a habit—*comment taire*, how to silence/keep silent" (96).

Perhaps this refers to the verbal silence surrounding sexuality itself. Or perhaps it refers to the sexual silence imposed on the participants while they navigate these tumultuous passions. Or perhaps it refers to the effort the reader makes to say nothing of the passages. Certainly the excerpts offer a striking insight into the nature of the internal passionate lives of the participants.

I was left wondering, though, why exactly the sex lives of philosophers would be of interest to understanding the relationship between sex and philosophy. Not that it wouldn't be, but I'm just not sure how. We do have one example of a kind of philosopher who had a public sex life, and that is Foucault. But aside from a couple of brief references, and a discussion of Foucault's work, Dufourmantelle does not discuss this case.

At the end, Dufourmantelle tells us that the meeting as planned cannot take place because philosophy and sex have already met, loved one another, left one another, and forgiven one another. In the legacy of this meeting, she says, we have literature. What this means for the future of philosophy and sex, I am not sure.

Philosophy in Multiple Voices

George Yancy, editor (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007). 304 pages. \$29.95/\$80.00. ISBN 978-0-7425-4955-5/978-0-7425-4954-8.

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In his introduction to this collection of eight essays on diversity issues, "No Philosophical Oracular Voices," George Yancy takes on a role of philosopher as "troublemaker," ready to raise challenges to philosophical tradition (1). He and the authors of the essays in this collection question the traditional boundaries of philosophy as being too limited, and stress the necessity of considering the "sociological, historical, and material conditions that impact the emergence of styles of reflective thought" (11). This is best done, Yancy claims, by engaging in a kind of "world travelling" in exploring the different "philosophies" considered in the collection (15).

Authors of the essays include Nancy Tuana ("What is Feminist Philosophy?"), Sarah Lucia Hoagland ("What is Lesbian

Philosophy?"), Randall Halle ("What is Queer Philosophy?"), Lucius T. Outlaw, Jr. ("What is Africana Philosophy?"), Lewis R. Gordon ("What is Afro-Caribbean Philosophy?"), Jorge J. E. Gracia ("What is Latin American Philosophy?"), Dale Turner ("What is American Indian Philosophy?"), and David Haekwon Kim ("What is Asian American Philosophy?").

Each of the groups covered is one with a history of dealing with oppression. That this is so is not questioned, and the wrongness of it and need for change is a given in the book. There is much attention to metaphilosophical issues in the collection. Many of the essays point out how categories like gender, race, and sexuality have been ignored in much of the Western philosophical tradition. In addition, many Western philosophers' theories have presupposed without reflection limiting and harmful views related to these categories. An additional aspect of social reality that has received less attention in philosophy than it has received in other fields is colonialism. The influence of colonialism is something which must be considered in understanding various kinds of "philosophies," such as American Indian, Asian American, Africana, Afro-Caribbean and Latin American. Generally the colonialism is political and economic, carried out by the United States, Western European nations, and Japan. One cannot understand the philosophy that has developed in these various contexts without considering its effect. But another form of colonialism noted is that of philosophy itself, which can operate from an imperialistic and conquering perspective (16), particularly in terms of Western philosophy seeing itself as neutral and operating from the point of view of eternity (8). Several of the essays stress the tension of having to use the tools of Western philosophy that most of us have been trained to use to seek to understand systems of thought and perspectives that do not fit its structure and concepts very well (especially the essays on Feminist, Lesbian, Queer, Africana, American Indian, and Asian American Philosophy).

The essays vary in style and focus. Several could well be articles in an encyclopedia on diversity issues, surveying the history and topics focused on in their areas, including the essays on Feminist Philosophy, Africana Philosophy, and Afro-Caribbean Philosophy. For instance, Outlaw's "What is Africana Philosophy?" gives an informative detailed history of the development of Africana Philosophy and identifies many of the people associated with it.

Other essays are less encyclopedic in nature, and focus on understanding the definition and focus of the "philosophy" the author is discussing. In "What is Latin American Philosophy?" Jorge Gracia discusses how defining Latin American Philosophy and determining which thinkers to include in it depends on one's purpose, which could be, for instance, pedagogical (what to include in a course), historiographical, or ideological. He argues for a particular understanding of Latin American Philosophy as an "ethnic philosophy" (183).

Randall Halle makes a case for Queer Philosophy as an "emergent project," not yet realized, based on recognition that "queerness constitutes a universal experience of being" (81). The gay liberation movement led to gay and lesbian studies. From gay and lesbian studies, there emerged a focus on other forms of variations in sexuality (such as bisexuality, transgenderism, and sadomasochism) and "queer studies" became a way of collecting all these together (83). Queer theory developed as a way of dealing with abstract, theoretical issues arising out of queer studies. Halle sees queer philosophy as currently emerging from queer theory as a "second order of abstraction investigating the universality of queerness" (81).

In characterizing Asian American Philosophy, David Kim sees as his task to show how it is distinct from Asian Philosophy,

understood in the academy to include classical views such as Buddhism and Confucianism. Asian American Philosophy arises from reflections on, first of all, the effects of Western and Japanese colonialism on Asia, and then the experiences of Asians in America and the racism they have faced. So it requires consideration of the West's views and attitudes toward Asians in modern times, colonialism, global capitalism, and the Asian diaspora.

There are some particular challenges in understanding American Indian Philosophy identified by Dale Turner. He sees American Indian Philosophy as basically a “way of knowing the world” (197). But it is a way of knowing the world rooted in American Indian indigenous spirituality, a “form of life” that involves a distinctive way of living one's life. This spirituality is embedded in communities and related to homelands (198). “Indigenous philosophy” arises as an attempt to explain indigenous ways of knowing to the dominant culture in its language, English (198). Since American Indians live as colonials within the United States, what he calls “critical indigenous philosophy” is necessary, where the tools of Western philosophy are used to deal with the political and legal issues indigenous communities face. The centrality of spirituality to American Indian Philosophy that Turner emphasizes presents a challenge to traditional Western philosophy, which is uncomfortable with embracing as philosophical something which eludes description in the traditional concepts of philosophy. Given that there is little available on American Indian Philosophy, Turner's essay is a particularly valuable contribution to philosophical literature on diversity.

This collection should be of great value to philosophers interested in diversity issues. Several of the essays focus on areas that will be new to many, such as Lesbian Philosophy, Queer Philosophy, and Afro-Caribbean philosophy. Given the way in which the essays show how traditional Western philosophy has such limited boundaries and operates in ruts, the collection raises helpful questions for all of us trained in the field. But these challenging questions are often discomfiting, and many philosophers will likely avoid them.

A value of the collection is in its showing how these different “philosophies” speak in different “voices,” voices often not understood by mainstream philosophy. This presents those interested in including diversity issues in the curriculum with a challenge. A popular way of doing this is to incorporate diversity issues into courses in the philosophy curriculum, such as introduction to philosophy, or ethics. There is a danger of this method becoming akin to dealing with diversity as a “sideshow.” Yancy notes that while philosophers will often say they welcome alternative views and approaches, often “...instead of challenging the philosophical status quo, such alterative philosophical voices are treated as sideshow performances in philosophical exotica....” (10). Realistically, it is not likely that many universities have or will develop courses entirely devoted to diversity issues, outside of feminism. So if diversity issues are to be covered, it will likely be in existing courses that incorporate some materials on diversity. How to do this while earnestly listening to the “voices” and not treating them as “sideshows” is an important challenge.

In terms of teaching, a limitation of the collection is that the essays are written at a level requiring that readers have a prior background in philosophy. It would be difficult for anyone who had taken fewer than several courses in philosophy to read the essays with much comprehension. The collection would work well for a graduate level course or an upper division undergraduate course dealing with the nature of philosophy. It would also work well for an upper division course on diversity issues.

Advance book information supplied by Rowman & Littlefield lists as subject category for the book “Introduction to Philosophy.” This is at least misleading and more likely simply wrong. Using the text in an undergraduate 101 type course in philosophy would be a disaster. I believe none of the essays in the collection would be suitable for use in undergraduate courses where students have not already taken some philosophy.

All of the essays have bibliographies which will be useful for people working on diversity issues. The book has no index. An index would be useful for those interested in pursuing particular issues addressed in the essays, as well as for readers who would like to return to certain ideas or issues in an essay without having to search through the whole essay.

Philosophy in Multiple Voices is a valuable addition to the philosophical literature on diversity and thanks are owed to George Yancy for producing this collection.

Feminist Thinkers and the Demands of Femininity: The Lives and Work of Intellectual Women

Lori Jo Marso (New York: Routledge, 2006). 240 pages. \$26.95. ISBN 978-0415979269.

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One of the strategies frequently and effectively used to dismiss women intellectuals entails focusing on their often unconventional and conflicted lives, rather than their ideas; their philosophy is supposed to fade away as their unusual lives are laid bare and ridiculed. Perhaps it is surprising, then, that in a sympathetic study of women thinkers Lori Jo Marso also turns to their lives, with special focus on their “pain, longing, frustration, demands unmet, [and] expectations dashed” (23). She does so, however, for different ends—ones that require their stories to be read not in isolation from but side-by-side their ideas. For feminist intellectuals are not only in the position of “living within the demands of femininity while trying to undo them” (14), but also seek “to understand and theorize the relationship between the dictates of conventional femininity...and what they identified as their own desires as women” (12).

“What do we learn from discovering that our feminist mothers were not always able to create and inhabit feminist ways of living” (viii)? Marso sees reading of their battles as an “opportunity to learn about, and be inspired by, the historical struggles of feminists to define alternative ways of living...[and] to appreciate the enormous obstacles placed in the path of such feminists” (viii). Appreciating these obstacles is “a first step toward loosening the grip these demands make on our lives” (3), a move away from complacency or acceptance. In particular, reading many and diverse stories supplies us with both a political task and “strategic coalitions” capable of tackling it, for they “provide[] the possibility for critical comparisons...[that] reveal[] that women's lives are linked by interlocking systems of oppression” (7). This coalition is what Marso wants most to encourage.

Marso nicely employs a feminist theorist—Simone de Beauvoir—to help define and frame her own project. She turns to intellectual women for this investigation into the “demands of femininity” in the first place following Beauvoir's assertion that they feel the demands “particularly keenly” and “think about their situation as free subjects” (77). More centrally, like

Beauvoir, Marso treats femininity as a “situation” against which these women struggle in “existential experiments” (27), and reads each woman’s life as “demonstrating what Beauvoir identifies as claiming freedom within situation” (59). Further, Marso claims she “extends Beauvoir’s theory of the eternal feminine” by showing “how standards of femininity vary for women in terms of race, class, and historical and cultural location” (30). Finally, she pursues what she says is Beauvoir’s “pressing existential concern: How might we women come together to speak and act politically” (xi)?

The early chapters develop these ideas from Beauvoir, and also look at “the difficulty of creating ties of women’s solidarity across class boundaries in the French Revolution and across race and class boundaries in early twentieth-century American politics” (60). While I found these discussions interesting, I became a little impatient, wishing that it did not take almost half the book to begin the combined analyses of the lives/works that I thought the book was really about (or at least that the book was longer so that more space could be dedicated to that central task). This allotment of space ultimately means that Marso cuts short what she is best at and what is most unique about her book—framing and telling stories that link lives and theories. Given her facility with history, and her knowledge of feminist theory past and present, she should have let herself fly.

The text turns then to Wollstonecraft’s story, fairly well-known due to multiple biographies and even a novelized version of her life. Marso contrasts “the melancholy Wollstonecraft” with “Wollstonecraft the feminist theorist,” and focuses on “the continuing conflict she experienced between what we might call feminist authority...[and] the demands of femininity” (87). A fascinating part of the less well-known Germaine de Staël’s story is the way she “took on the role of suffering heroine...not only as a way to draw attention to her own situation but also to connect her experience to the greater dangers of political tyranny” (99). With Goldman we hear about some of the “connections” between “sexuality, love, and feminist politics,” and not just the “tensions” (110), though what is emphasized is what she can “teach us about shortcomings in our contemporary understandings of intimacy, both in what is possible and what is hoped for” (112). Next comes Beauvoir again, this time looking at her experience of “the competing demands of love and independence” (140) and “her rejection of the life trajectory of her conventional mother” (145). Her positive value is that she “showed us how to perceive ourselves as women in the company of the experiences of other women” (149), and “returned us to a paradigm of seeking freedom on women’s own terms rather than seeking equality on male terms” (150). Finally, Marso turns to a fascinating array of contemporary feminists, especially Gioconda Belli, Azar Nafisi, and Ana Castillo, with Drucilla Cornell, Carolyn Steedman, Audre Lorde, and Uma Narayan brought in. She finds that “[m]any of the struggles articulated are quite similar, and in some cases eerily reminiscent, to those [she] identified in the work of earlier feminists,” which is where “overarching themes emerge” (157). As the earlier memoirs linked personal change to political change, the recent ones tie “transnational organizing and a politics of solidarity to...critical multicultural feminist practice” (158).

The central “conflict” experienced shifts a bit throughout the text. One stress is between feminists’ ideas and their lives. Wollstonecraft, for example, was both “a canonical woman thinker who advocated a vision of women as strong, independent, and potentially rights-bearing individuals” and “sometimes a dependent, needy, and despondent woman” (11). A second tension is “between the dictates of conventional femininity—specific to their race and class or as identified for

other women in different locations—and what they identified as their own desires as women” (12). A third opposition is between “stay[ing] committed to political change” and “emotional and financial insecurity, disillusionment, despair, imprisonment, exile, and abandonment by family and lovers” (15). I also wonder about characterizing the tension Goldman felt between “a beautiful love life and...a great cause” as a “tug of war between the emotional and the political” (120), since there is passion and politics in both love and anarchy for Goldman. Not unrelated, I would have benefitted from more attention to the positive. What enabled them to dream of and work for alternatives? What sustained them in the face of criticism and self-doubt? How did they decide what compromises to make? Yes, that is to say, Wollstonecraft’s relationship with Imlay “ended in betrayal” (92), but what was this “domestic counterpart to revolutionary politics” she “experimented with” in that relationship (87), which “contained the possibility for infinite transformation” (105)? How did she imagine it would work? I would find as much inspiration in those moments as from reading about the “contradictions and dilemmas” (93). Finally, I’m not sure about Marso’s basis for saying that “until society undergoes fundamental change...intellectual, and especially feminist, women might be the most persecuted and unhappy members of the second sex” (106). For one thing, this may underestimate the “wrenching choices” in the lives of non-feminists.

It really is remarkable how many women thinkers past and present have written autobiographies, from Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Jane Addams to Ding Ling and Nawal El Saadawi. Marso is on to something when she reads their personal lives along with their essays, just as they were written. Their life stories gave birth to and tested their theories, and provided evidence and models of the struggles and visions dissected in their philosophies. The autobiographies are part of a feminist political epistemology that links theory and knowledge to experience, and that expects shared stories to lead to knowledge and action.

We do indeed remain “at the heart of an unfinished revolution, with all the frustrations and disappointment that entails” (x), and if “feminist genealogy” (78) can help “raise feminist consciousness” (81), allow us to “articulate links between women’s lives...illuminate our common struggles, forge communities of solidarity with other women, and muster the strength to avoid living in accordance to what femininity requires of us in our specific locations” (181), the authors studied here would surely be thrilled.

Women, Philosophy and Literature

Jane Duran (Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2007). 225 pages. \$99.95. ISBN 978-0-7546-5785-9.

Reviewed by Chielozona Eze

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Even in the times of Plato, the relationship between literature and philosophy has been contentious. There is, though, no denying their relationship, as no other than Aristotle went on to demonstrate. While most interests have been in the area of ethics, such as Martha Nussbaum and Wayne Booth have undertaken, and especially Marjorie Garber et al, *The Turn to Ethics*,¹ Jane Duran’s *Women, Philosophy and Literature* expands our understanding of this connection in its examination of five of the pivotal twentieth-century women writers.

The problem involved in establishing the relationship between literature and philosophy, according to Duran, has to do with the “difficulty of saying what it is that is philosophical about a given work” of literature (4). Literature, she argues, introduces us to the lifeworld of the other and allows us to ask questions about it. She suggests that we might “be tempted to call the activity of life questioning philosophy” (14). This, of course, is philosophy at its elemental level. It might as well be what philosophy is all about if we believe Albert Camus’ formulation: “Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy.”²

On the example of the works of five women writers, Margaret Drabble, Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Toni Cade Bambara, and Elena Poniatowska, Jane Duran shows how to tease “out the philosophical in literature” (4). She couches this job in issues of feminist importance. But her discussions are not restricted to feminist issues in these works—in fact, feminist issues are just part of the many approaches to teasing out the philosophical in literature. It is safe to say that she considers these texts as far as they address existential, ethical, epistemological, and cultural issues.

Duran celebrates Margaret Drabble’s “interiority of voice” (23) as a forceful means through which Drabble expresses her philosophy. By interiority of voice, Duran means the characters’ ability to question their worlds in ways that move the reader to also adopt philosophical perspectives. In this regard, it is no cliché to recall the words Socrates spoke to the jury in the court of Athens, which for many is the beginning of philosophy: an unexamined life is not worth living. The questioning stance of Drabble’s characters, according to Duran, has “philosophical ring insofar as traditional great questions are concerned” (25). Duran provides good examples of philosophical perspectives such as the nature of self-consciousness and how master narratives affect individual lives—arguably the major concern of postmodernist thoughts. Though Duran made a strong case for Drabble’s fictions as capable of “teasing out the philosophical,” Drabble as a feminist writer sounds more convincing, and perhaps even more rewarding as an intellectual exercise. Duran, though, recognizes that (41). It is worthy to note how Drabble draws attention to women-specific experiences such as menstruation and lactation not necessarily for their own sake but to highlight the human condition from those angles. “Drabble writes of a sort of instinctive knowledge—born of the body and things bodily—that trumps, in certain situations, rational knowledge” (52). Drabble, of course, does not discount the importance of rationality. For her, however, meaning is no longer sought in disembodied speculations. Simply stated, she seeks to incarnate or, perhaps, tame rationality in those bodily things.

The section on Virginia Woolf is aptly called “Woolf, Metaphysics and Life.” Like Drabble, “Woolf is the interrogator in most of her work, framing scenes in such a way that the questions are indeed asked and stand out from the text” (59). Duran highlights one of Woolf’s strengths as a philosopher in a novelist’s clothing, by arguing that it is Woolf’s ability to limn the reality we felt but never talked about, and the questions we anticipated but never asked. Woolf’s skillful depiction of time is acute both for the ontological and phenomenological stances it takes, and in such a depiction, Duran argues, Woolf “presents an account of rationality” (61).

Again, like in Drabble, it is evident that Woolf’s strengths lie more in her contributions to feminist discourses than in philosophy as it is traditionally practiced and discoursed in academia. Duran’s discussions of Woolf, to me, sound more convincing when she deals with issues that have defined Woolf as a foundational figure in feminist and modernist discourses.

But Duran is very correct to point out that even when Woolf is highly feminist, she is still philosophically so. In a way, therefore, the feminist and philosophical strands of Woolf’s work intertwine. It is thus possible and quite correct to read *A Room of One’s Own* as a feminist as well as an existentialist statement. Equally convincing is when Woolf is seen from the French feminist perspective, especially through Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous.

If Drabble was somewhat philosophical and Woolf a bit more, Simone de Beauvoir could be said to be the superlative. This is clear in Duran’s discussions of Beauvoir’s philosophical and literary texts. It is no accident then that even stylistically Duran’s writing and arguments seem more fluid and more convincing in this section. One of the keys to understanding Beauvoir’s literary oeuvre is to examine what she has done in *Ethics of Ambiguity*. Beauvoir’s literary work, according to Duran, is concerned with the problem of the “Other.” “If the other’s reflection for me of myself is negative, or certainly less than positive, how does this change my own opinion of my projects?” (96). Duran’s discussion of the novel *She Came to Stay*, against the backdrop of *Ethics of Ambiguity*, for example, allows us to understand the intricate web of ethical issues raised in the meeting of the four main characters of the said novel: Pierre, Françoise, Xavier, and Gerbert. The presence of Xavier notably becomes a catalyst that highlights the ethical and existential worlds of these other characters; we grasp what they possess or lack. Seeing the richness and the incipient flaws of their lifeworld allows us to respond and complement. Compelled by Duran’s rigorous discussion of Beauvoir, I think that a reading of *Ethics of Ambiguity* as a theoretical grounding of her other works, and, indeed, of works of other authors, will prove rewarding in any literature and ethics class. Putting her finger on Beauvoir’s main concern, Duran argues that “the triad of problems—the solipsistic puzzle, the existence of others as consciousnesses, and one’s own existence qua object of the other—is a grouping with which Beauvoir will continue to be concerned in all of her work” (100).

Duran pays rich attention to women writers and thinkers outside the mainstream Western philosophical tradition: Toni Cade Bambara and Elena Poniatowska. Bambara creates “an African atmosphere in a New World space” (151). Specifically, Bambara explores the limits of Afrocentric womanism. Elena Poniatowska, on the other hand, working within Latin American discourse world, creates a political philosophy “presented in the form of utopia” (169). Poniatowska not only gives her female characters voice but also allows them to undercut the traditional, patriarchal notions of their world by their “round condemnation of the abuse” they suffer at the hands of men.

Some might argue that Bambara and Poniatowska fit better into cultural studies. But this perhaps might be a question of degrees; no philosophy is without cultural influence, nor is any discussion of culture without a touch of philosophy. What all these women writers have in common, as Duran argues, is their talent to have their characters raise questions about our lifeworld and perhaps in doing so allow us to frame discourses around ethical, epistemological, or existential issues. I find the section on Beauvoir invaluable in my understanding not only of existentialist thoughts but also of the relationship between literature and philosophy. I have no doubt that this and the other sections will be of high interest to cultural philosophers, feminists, and literary theorists.

Endnotes

1. Marjorie Garber, Beatrice Hanssen, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, eds. *The Turn to Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 2000).
2. Albert Camus. *The Myth of Sisyphus* (London: Penguin Books, 1975), 11.

Does Feminism Discriminate Against Men?: A Debate

Warren Farrell and James P. Sterba (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). 158 pages. ISBN 978-0-19-531283-6.

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In *Does Feminism Discriminate Against Men?: A Debate*, authors Warren Farrell and James P. Sterba take opposing viewpoints on whether feminism leads to discrimination against men. Farrell passionately argues that feminism introduces social limitations for men, while Sterba opposes this position, and states that when feminism is done “appropriately” (130), it does not discriminate against men. Presented in a point/counterpoint format, the book opens with Farrell’s charges against feminism. Next, Sterba presents a very different account of feminism, and places emphasis on breaking down Farrell’s claims and showing problems in the studies Farrell cites. I briefly provide a synopsis of both arguments and then present a few of the problematic assumptions upon which both these lines of argument rest.

Farrell argues that feminism discriminates against men by first presenting his history with feminism and the underlying belief “that the male-female roles that were functional for the species for millions of years have become dysfunctional in an evolutionary instant” (1). He then moves toward a critique of the development of women’s studies programs, asserting that academia focuses too exclusively on feminist perspectives on men, and that these classes, programs, and departments are too quick to entitle women as victims and men as villains. Men, Farrell claims, also experience feelings of powerlessness and are victims of social practices that benefit women. He argues that the studies showing, on average, women outlive men are evidence of this male powerlessness. Similarly, he argues that barring women from military combat sufficiently treats men as disposable.

The neglect of men’s health issues is also, Farrell claims, evidence of feminism’s discrimination against men. More problematic, for Farrell, is the invisibility of and inattention to domestic violence against males by females. Violence continues to be a theme in Farrell’s argument as he turns his discussion to rape. It is here Farrell makes statements such as, “If a man ignoring a woman’s verbal ‘no’ is committing date rape, then a woman who says ‘no’ with her verbal language but ‘yes’ with her body language is committing *date fraud*” (41, emphasis his) and “it means confronting advertising that reinforces heterosexual men’s natural addiction to young and beautiful women and then deprives them of access until they perform, pursue, and pay” (48). Farrell scrutinizes the legal system, claiming the legal system favors women, fails to punish women who commit murder, and accepts defenses based on spousal abuse that are unable to be claimed by male defendants.

In the final pages of Farrell’s argument, he addresses what are, in his view, problematic conceptions of inequality between men and women in regard to the social roles of husbands and wives, particularly related to working and child care. He claims that several well supported assertions by feminists—such as that women do more housework and thus have a “second shift”—simply ignore the contributions that men make to the home. He similarly attacks what he perceives as an unfair advantage women have as being predisposed by society as better at raising children. Farrell even argues that abortion,

child custody, and child support laws all benefit women. This understanding leads Farrell to claim “a woman’s biology is a man’s destiny” (77).

Very late in his argument Farrell explicitly summarizes the conception of feminism with which he is working. He writes that feminism has a “holy trinity” of political agendas. He describes them as: “1. Always open options for women. 2. Never close options for women. 3. When something goes wrong, never hold women responsible” (102). That Farrell waits so long before spelling out his understanding of feminism is telling—his arguments demonstrate his reduction of feminism to these three tenets, each of which is problematically associated with the blanket term of feminist, and which ignores the nuanced application of the term “feminist” to many different political theories, research methodologies, and social issues. Farrell paints feminism, and feminists in turn, as a movement of individuals advocating for the abolishment of personal and social accountability. Farrell faults feminism for not having “fought for an adult version of equality” (102) and claims “feminism reinforced this traditional heritage of women not having anything but their own standards of accountability” (103). In these statements, Farrell portrays an understanding of feminism as something childish, advocating double standards, and as something to which mature individuals would not subscribe.

A characterization of feminism as childish will, no doubt, raise many counterarguments against Farrell’s line of thinking. Indeed, there were several moments where Farrell’s arguments that feminism discriminated against men oddly mirrored feminist arguments against social practices which discriminate against women. For instance, Farrell argues women should be included by the military in combat situations, and that women should also be able to be drafted. He lays blame on feminism for the treatment of men as “disposable” when it is the social practices by both men and women, as Sterba points out in his argument against Farrell, that treat other men this way.

Sterba introduces his argument very differently than Farrell. In preparing his audience for a discussion about feminism, Sterba presents a more complete (but still problematic) view of feminism. Sterba discusses different waves of feminism, and provides a more complete picture as to how the term “feminism” came to be placed upon the social movements for suffrage, equality in work and pay, etc. Thus, taking Sterba’s conception of feminism, we see a corrective to Farrell’s reduction of feminism to childishness. This follows throughout Sterba’s oppositions to Farrell’s arguments. Unfortunately, Sterba often presents his arguments as solely attacking the arguments Farrell makes rather than attacking the underlying assumptions on which these arguments rest. For example, Sterba takes issue with Farrell’s use of specific cases of women killing their husbands as reflective of a broader acceptance of social violence toward men by women. Sterba ably argues that Farrell’s examples do not, in fact, make the rule: violence toward men by women has never been explicitly supported by laws of a governing body, but violence by men toward women has (Sterba points out Puritan law in early colonial periods as an example). Thus, Sterba never directly attracts attention to Farrell’s problematic notion of feminism. Although Sterba does note that feminism has a variety of forms, and meant different things during its history, he fails to address the many different philosophical positions within the feminist movement that seek to answer questions of men and masculinity differently.

The ongoing problems within this book, then, stem from too simplistic understandings of men, women, and feminism. While these authors do make mention of, and incorporate into their arguments, research that looks specifically at how women

and men are treated by society, both fail to call upon research that moves beyond assumptions about what constitutes our understanding of men and women. Farrell and Sterba would have done well to consider feminists and theories that challenge our conceptions of what is culturally considered the “natural,” embodied state of “men” and “women.” For example, research by communication scholar John M. Sloop¹ explicitly questions the “naturalness” we assume about gender. In his research, Sloop reminds us of the aspects of gender that are maintained through performances, and how these performances are turned to as a body of evidence for a person’s (or object’s) possession of a gendered essence, whether it be masculine or feminine.

The questioning by Farrell and Sterba as to whether feminism, as a whole, discriminates against men, then, is ultimately inadequately addressed. Unfortunately, both authors fall victim to limited visions of what feminism is, and both authors fail to address the multiplicity of philosophical approaches constituting the title “feminism.” Perhaps, instead of asking whether “feminism” sets into motion particular social practices which discriminate against men, we should ask questions as to how different feminist philosophies construct men as subjects, and, in turn, how these rhetorically created subjects are treated in social practice. While necessarily complicating the original question of discrimination posed by Farrell and Sterba, such questions would lead to projects which seriously inquire as to how femininity, masculinity, and assumptions about the world lead to gendered social practices.

Endnotes

1. John M. Sloop. “A Van with a Bar and a Bed”: Ritualized Gender Norms in the John/Joan Case.” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 20 (2000): 130-49; *Disciplining Gender: Rhetorics of Sex Identity in Contemporary U.S. Culture* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004); “Riding in Cars between Men,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 2 (2005): 191-213.

Feminist Interpretations of Augustine

Judith Chelius Stark, editor (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007). 326 pages. \$35 paper ISBN 978-0-271-03258-0.

Reviewed by James Wetzel

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At the beginning of book 8 of the *Confessions*, Augustine clues his readers into the crisis of resolve that was rendering his conversion an urgent necessity. He tells us that he was, at the time, already mercifully disillusioned with the secular perks of his rhetorical skills, dross in comparison with life in God’s house, “but still,” he confesses, “I was tightly knotted up in woman” (*Conf.* 8.1.2). Most translators understandably give his phrase, *ex femina*, agential force: some woman, perhaps the very idea of a woman, is tying him in knots, firmly enough to incapacitate his spirit. He has told us numerous times before about his weakness for women, his lust issues, and if his God is, as he sometimes seems to suggest, the most uncarneal of beings, it is not too hard to read into his crisis of resolve the baldest of struggles against carnal desire. For Augustine, it has apparently come down to this: either women or God.

I resist this reading of him, in part because it overlooks the inconvenient fact that his redeemer was born of a woman (*ex femina*), and in part (I confess) because I know all too well where this reading must end: Augustine will have used a crudely Platonic distinction between spirit and matter to concoct a

Christianity that is incarnational in name only; in reality, the Augustinian Christ will have come to free a lucky few for good from that universally awful tie to woman—the women among them will be glad, in their redeemed selves, to have become something else (vaguely male).

Of course, the desire not to see the misogyny in a revered philosophical ancestor, as Augustine is for me, is hardly a means for making it go away. And to be guilty of misogyny is not to make a simple mistake but to succumb to a corruption, one that does not spare point of view. When Augustine gives in to misogyny, he distorts his point of view in depressingly profound ways. If I still want to cling to the hope of gleaning wisdom from him (as I do), I will have to do more than quarantine his misogyny to the *ad hominem* and presume the innocence of the argument that is left. I will have to find a path from corruption to health, even while admitting that I may be, in this undertaking, as much patient as physician. A disposition to test all argument in the crucible of the affections can be a form of misogyny—a hatred of argument—but I have learned from Plato, Augustine, and some feminist philosophers that it doesn’t have to be, and that the exceptions are exceptionally important.

With regard to the essays that Judith Stark has assembled and fulsomely introduced in *Feminist Interpretations of Augustine*—a volume in the Penn State series, *Re-reading the Canon*—I note two virtues: an educated eye for Augustine’s misogynist inclinations (the essayists know his corpus and its history) and some disposition to think through his misogyny to a wisdom that his better angel might have owned. I say “some” disposition because not all of the essayists write out of this disposition and not all of them, I suspect, would consider the disposition virtuous. Why, after all, try to save Augustine from himself? It is arguably the living and not the dead that need redeeming from theologically sublimed sexism. Rosemary Radford Ruether, whose essay launches the collection, charts the course of Augustine’s sex-phobic sexism with devastating succinctness. In her last paragraph, she gives a hand-waving acknowledgment to “his brilliant mind” and “the profundity of his thought” and invites her readers “to salvage what is helpful in Augustine’s views” (p. 64). I should admit my bias here. If the account of his misogyny is not already an engagement with the profundity of his thought, then the misogyny ends the story. It is too much to expect a reader to dive into Augustine’s decomposed corpus to salvage a wisdom the reader is likely to have already.

The alternative is to free his core vision from the misogyny that distorts it; the illumination that allows us to get there, to the core, is Augustine’s philosophical offering—not a buried treasure but the grace that comes of engaging with a beloved enemy. It may seem like wishful thinking to presuppose that a core must be there, running deeper than misogyny, but it may also be true, as Augustine himself believed, that no conception of reality can finally begin with fear and hatred of what is real. Misogyny, like other forms of sin, is a non-starter. Still it is no easy task to outlast the misogyny and begin to hear Augustine speaking about himself, his God, and the women in his life from a more secreted, if better secured, place. The essays in Stark that attempt to catch Augustine at his core are met by the essays that remind us once again of the veil, maddeningly thick, of his misogyny.

In her own essay contribution, Stark situates Augustine’s notorious passage in *The Trinity* about women and the image of God (*De Trinitate* 12.7.10)—they bear the image, but not qua women—within the broader argument of books 12-15; she nurtures the hope that Augustine’s Trinitarian appreciation for diversity within unity offers an alternative to his exclusion of women’s bodies from divinity. She is countered in her hope by

Julie Miller, who sees in Augustine's perfectly self-relating God fear of self-loss in love and the sublimation of narcissism. Anne-Marie Bowery finds in Augustine's representation of his mother, Monica (or Monnica, to be less Roman and more African), a feminized Christ figure; Felecia McDuffie acknowledges Augustine's rich rhetoric of the feminine in the *Confessions* but underscores his disposition to assign a masculine origin to idealized femininity and to render real women—not exempla—into dangerous aliens. Add to this Rebecca Moore's sober estimate of what we can fairly claim to know about Monica from her son's representation of her (162): "...that she is a woman of faith whose family considerations keep her from choosing a completely ascetic life." No mother mystic here to fill out or redirect Augustine's vision. Margaret Miles brings a similar sobriety to Augustine's representation of the unnamed woman he dismisses from his life in book 6 of the *Confessions* (6.15.25). He represents *his* break with her, the mother of his child and his heart's partner, as his sacrifice to the heroic life of spirit; Miles reminds us that her choice of a chaste life, following her dismissal, was, in fact, the greater sacrifice given her social options. But beyond this hint of her courage, we have no window into her subjectivity. Joanne McWilliam turns her attention to Augustine's letters to women (relatively few given the voluminous corpus) and concludes, on the basis of that evidence, that "whatever Augustine thought of women's bodies, he did not discount their intellectual interests and powers" (201). The caveat to McWilliam's sanguine assessment is Ann Matter's more complex treatment of the letters. Matter does not deny Augustine's respect for his women correspondents, but she compares his epistolary generosity to the grumpy misogyny of his major treatises, particularly post 410, and surmises that the Pelagian sympathies of some high-born women, displaced from Rome to Africa, may be behind the contrast. In any case, Matter urges us to free the question of women in Augustine from fixation on "sex and his mother" (210).

Penelope Deutscher's essay, written in the thick of feminism's sex/gender debates (1992), offers an unwitting gloss on the rich but also frustrating counterpoint that I have just described. She contends that Augustine's theological framework makes it impossible for him to sustain a consistent opposition between masculine and feminine; if we bring to him an analytic perspective that assumes the stability of gendered oppositions (albeit valuing them differently), we are bound, she thinks, to breed confusion. Her interpretation is basically an elaboration through Augustine of this more general claim: that theologically grounded opposition between man and woman is based on man's greater nearness to God, but as this nearness presupposes as well an absolute difference (the ideal of masculinity can never be a man), the slippage of man into his female other is conceptually inevitable. A provocative thesis, to say the least.

I still have two items to mention, the most eccentric ones. The essay by Virginia Burrus and Catherine Keller is both dazzling and dizzying, and I cannot possibly do it justice within the confines of a quick review. Suffice it to say that they artfully tease from Augustine the lineaments of a theology of creation *ex femina*, as opposed to *ex nihilo*, and suggest along the way why Hannah Arendt was so right to emphasize Augustine's philosophical fascination with birth ("natality"). The last essay is not an essay at all, but a poem by Ann Lammers, a practicing psychotherapist, who invents the voice of Augustine's unnamed lover. Having duly registered Miles's caveat against self-referential projections, I was prepared to be indignant. But then it occurred to me that Lammers was giving voice not just to one particular woman but to any reader who would choose, under threat of self-alienation, to love an Augustine. "The story of our parting," Lammers writes (302), "has two sides." It has been

the burden of Stark's essayists to begin, without resentment or apology, to give the other side.

New Philosophy of Human Nature

Oliva Sabuco de Nantes Barrera. Translated and edited by Mary Ellen Waite, Maria Colomer Vintró, and C. Angel Zorita (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007). 340 pages. \$50.00. ISBN: 978-0-252-03111-3.

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"And may your Majesty receive this pledge from a woman, for I think it is of higher quality than any others by men, by vassals, or by Lords who had vowed to serve Your Majesty. And even if your Cesarean and Catholic Majesty has had many books dedicated to Him from men, only few and rare were from women, and none about this subject matter" (44). These words, published in 1587 in Madrid, Spain, are part of Oliva Sabuco's letter of dedication of her book to King Philip II of Spain. With this letter, Sabuco prefaces the book she calls her begotten son (44): *New Philosophy of Human Nature. Neither Known, nor Attained by the Great Ancient Philosophers, Which Will Improve Human Life and Health*.

The subject matter in question is a new theory of human nature that would serve as the foundation for medical theory. Sabuco argues in her work that a distorted notion of human nature underlies medicine's inaccuracies and its unsuccessful attempts to manage human disease, and results in significant harms to humans and their world. Using Pliny, Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Ibn Sina, Galen, and Plutarch, among many other sources, Sabuco wittily reminds her readers about the failure of traditional medicine: it "does not work at all" (45); it is "uncertain, inconsistent, and flawed and that its ends and outcomes are uncertain, false, and doubtful" (179); and lauds men and nations that do not consult physicians because "they have realized that physicians do not succeed even though they do promise a lot" (173). Consequently, she proposes self-knowledge as the way to enable human beings to prevent premature death and lead happy lives. Such self-knowledge results from an understanding of human emotions, knowledge of the causes of health and disease, recognition of the interactions between humans, their world, and the rest of the universe, and the practice of moral virtue.

Followed by a very helpful introduction by the translators, we find the seven treatises that make up Sabuco's *New Philosophy*. The first five were originally written in Spanish, and therefore were accessible to a wider audience, while the last two were written in Latin. These last treatises, "Brief Exposition of Human Nature" and "Proper Philosophy of the Nature of Composite Things, of Humans, and of the World, Unknown to the Ancients," both summarize and expand on the preceding five treatises. Indeed, some of the theoretical discussions present in these last two essays are not debated in the prior ones.

The first treatise, "Knowledge of One's Self: Three Solitary Shepherd-Philosophers, Antonio, Veronio, and Rodonio, Converse," lays the conceptual foundation for the rest of the work. As the title indicates, the treatise is written in a dialogue form between the three-named shepherd-philosophers. Antonio espouses Sabuco's theory about the importance of

the interconnection between mind and body, the relations between humans and the macrocosms, as well as her medical, ontological, and ethical theories. Half a century before Descartes' interactionist dualist proposal, Sabuco depicts body and mind as separate but intimately connected entities. She believes traditional medicine has ignored this interconnection, and subsequently the influence of human emotions on life and death. The unfortunate result is the failure of medicine to prevent disease and premature and painful death. She sets out to redress this state of affairs by ascertaining how the emotions affect life and death. Though humans share with other animals the sensitive soul, "only humans experience intellectual pain of the present, sorrow about the past, fear, distress, and dread of the hereafter" (49). Such emotions produce death and many diseases that animals do not have. She thus presents a psychosomatic account of many of the ailments that afflict humans. Emotions such as grief, rage, sadness, hopelessness, love, hatred, lust, and jealousy all can cause great harm and even death. But other emotions such as optimism, temperance, love of others, gratitude, prudence, and happiness can also bring health and vitality to those who experience them. Sabuco recapitulates her theory of medicine in the fifth treatise, "Proper Medicine Derived from Human Nature." Here, Antonio's interlocutor is a doctor who is clearly skeptical about Antonio's new theoretical approach to medicine. The wittiness of the shepherd-philosopher responses are, however, quite a match to such skepticism.

The second treatise, "Composition of the World as It Is," offers a discussion of the different elements that are part of the macrocosm as well as of a variety of geological and astronomical events such as lightening, the formation of clouds, the waxing and waning of the moon, and solar and lunar eclipses. She also addresses the magnitude of the earth and sun and the different "skies" that form the cosmos. This discussion takes up Sabuco's remarks in the first treatise about the interconnections between humans and the rest of the universe and hence attempts to present empirical evidence to support the theory of human nature presented there.

Having offered evidence for her theory of the relations between mind and body and between human beings and the universe, Sabuco proceeds in her third treatise, "Things that Will Improve This World and Its Nations," to propose a variety of solutions that will presumably do just that. Given her view on the interconnections between human beings and the world that surrounds them, it is unsurprising that Sabuco sees society's ills as influencing people's health and well-being. She embarks on a discussion of needed legal and social reforms, some of which are quite significant. For instance, she argues that children should not be judged by the vices or virtues of their parents because they might become better or worse than their parents. She proposes instead that honor be given according to individual's actions. Hence, "the poor could have hope and climb to the summit of honor, and neither their base lineage nor somebody else's vices and sins would be in their way" (154). Moreover, she bemoans the never-ending nature of lawsuits that "consume people's wealth and bring significant grief and anxiety, from which many die" (145). She argues that because there are so many laws and they are written in Latin only those who have the money and the time to attend university and learn Latin can make sense of the law. She thus proposes to have only a few laws written in the vernacular because in such a situation "a person would ascertain rightness and justice better than they do now due to so many differences of opinions and books" (147). Sabuco also recommends that legislation be passed to prevent confiscation of farmers' and peasants' livestock and crops, and she chastises parents for thinking it is best to marry their daughters to rich but injudicious men rather than to wise

but poor ones because "riches could be lost by this person due to his scant knowledge and her children could turn out to be brutes" (152).

In the fourth treatise, "Treatments and Remedies of Proper Medicine," Sabuco gives us advice to conserve our health. Her counsel is directed to ensure harmony and avoid discord between mind and body. Joy, optimism, and the "soothing and internal concord" of the stomach will help produce such harmony. She argues that words of joy and optimism are the best way to bring health to the ill. She discusses the use of plants, food, and medicines as remedies against disease.

Included in this critical edition are the letter of dedication mentioned at the beginning, another letter where Oliva Sabuco requests the protection of the President of Castilla, a levy, a document granting her the privilege of publishing *New Philosophy*, and two poems praising Oliva's ingenuity and theories. This material is significant because in spite of it, and despite the fact of many other historical references to Oliva Sabuco's authorship and her fame, libraries worldwide, following a 1970s revision of attribution by the Biblioteca Nacional de España, changed the authorship from Oliva Sabuco to her father, Miguel Sabuco y Alvarez. The reason for the change appears to have been a single document, also included here as an appendix. This document is the last will and testament of Miguel Sabuco, found in 1903, where Miguel Sabuco claims that he is the author of *New Philosophy*. Waithe and Vitró, two of the translators and editors of the present edition, have done considerable research to show that the change of attribution is unjustified.¹ Interestingly enough, *New Philosophy* is peppered with references to women and their roles, includes discussions about women's health, and—contra Aristotle—asserts that the female seed is essential for reproduction.

This first-ever translation of Oliva Sabuco's *New Philosophy of Human Nature* by Mary Ellen Waithe, Maria Colomer Vitró, and Angel Zorita unearths a text that has not received the scholarly attention it deserves. Hopefully, this mistake will now be amended. Moreover, philosophy teachers interested in bringing the work of more early modern women philosophers to their students are now in luck.

Endnotes

1. Mary Ellen Waithe and Maria Colomer Vitró. "Posthumously Plagiarizing Oliva Sabuco: An Appeal to Cataloging Librarians." *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 35 (2003): 525-40; Maria Colomer Vitró and Mary Ellen Waithe. "Fué Oliva o Fué Miguel: Reconsiderando el Caso Sabuco." *Boletín del Instituto de Investigaciones Bibliográficas* 1-2 (2000): 11-37.

True to our Feelings

Robert Solomon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). 286 pages. \$28.88. ISBN 0-19-530672-4.

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Robert C. Solomon died suddenly in January 2007, just before his book, *True to our Feelings*, was published. He suffered from a congenital heart disorder and was feeling poorly. His death was not expected, although, curiously, he was working on a book about death at the time. Solomon's fragile health accentuated his passion for life, and he often encouraged his students to not waste time, but to do what meant the most to them.

He was the Quincy Lee Centennial Professor of Business and Philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin, where he

was deeply loved and admired for his practical, humorous, down-to-earth style; he exemplified the ethics of daily living—that what you do makes a difference. In Richard Linklater’s 2001 film, *Waking Life*, Solomon, depicted in the classroom lecturing on existentialism, says, “I am afraid that we are losing the real virtues of living life passionately, the sense of taking responsibility for who you are, the ability to make something for yourself and feeling good about life.”

Solomon won many awards, including the Standard Oil Outstanding Teaching Award and the President’s Associates Teaching Award, which he won twice. He wrote more than forty books on such topics as existentialism, emotions, and business ethics, and was past president of the International Society for Research on Emotions. *True to Our Feelings* is a good introduction to both his work and his process—he shows the development of his thought and how, why, and when he sometimes changed his mind about things (144). He was a passionate and generous teacher, and examined the emotions minutely and with existentialist rigor.

The book is divided into three sections: strategies, general theory, and ethics. He writes, “The theme of this book is that emotions can be cultivated, educated, and sometimes even willed, not just controlled. That is what emotional integrity is all about.” For Solomon, emotions are “ethical” in the old meaning, that is, how to live the good life (2). In the first section, Solomon parses moods and emotions such as fear, anger, love, and compassion, which he enlivens with everyday examples such as the different kinds of fears we experience facing an auditor from the IRS or a “three-hundred pound tackle...running toward” us (49). In a typically charming vignette, when examining laughter, he talks about a psychology workshop he attended in which the film of a mother is shown playing peek-a-boo with her baby. They are both laughing and having a high old time, convincing Solomon that laughter is a product of interpersonal bonding. Before seeing the film, he “thought that laughter was all about humor” (79). His conclusion is a bit too simple for me—I think laughter is about humor, aggression sometimes, and also about bonding.

In the second section Solomon debunks what he considers myths about emotions, that they are “ineffable,” “irrational, and “stupid” “overpowering forces.” He proves that emotions are not ineffable, and uses the (to me) ineffable experience of love to exemplify his thesis, although he mentions that we should be careful whose love experience we are talking about—a man’s or a woman’s. He interjects, “Simone de Beauvoir famously said that ‘men and women mean different things by ‘love’, and that is why they don’t understand one another” (135).

Perhaps Solomon and I mean different things when we talk about emotions, which I think are partly beyond our control, and should be. The heart’s veil can be lifted, but total exposure might destroy its sometimes irrational and lively vulnerability—better to look from a little ways off to appreciate its pulsing beauty, and spontaneity. Love is indefinable, and the human spirit is intangible, creative, and rich.

I am a psychoanalyst, someone involved in educating emotions, my own most of all, and tuning connections between people, and Solomon’s understanding of emotional responsibility is much like my own—indeed, it’s part of what psychotherapy moves toward—but fear and anger and sexual desire work faster than we can think; and not everyone is able to create an organically intelligent emotional life at all moments. Rationality is not always a virtue or even a possibility. And some emotions can be unconscious. Solomon’s work is scholarly and broad in range but biased towards cognitive emotional theories; it does not give due consideration to brain structure, human development, and the powerful irrational.

Solomon believes that we are responsible for our emotions, which have purposiveness and a strategic functionality. In other words, who we are is our decision, which I agree is partly true. He emphasizes that we are not passive to our emotions (125-26), and that to believe that we are victims of our own emotional life is bad faith. Sometimes, however, people can be high-jacked by their emotions; not only through bad faith, as Solomon writes (199), but also through “bad” biology—I am thinking about neuropsychanalytic brain research, and what it shows about right brain function.

Our emotional, relational history is written in our brain cells. It has been demonstrated that trauma affects right brain function¹; the right brain is concerned with the emotions, and early brain development is physiologically influenced by early attachment relationships.² Different attachment relationships are associated with particular kinds of emotional experience, particularly if those early attachment relationships were traumatic, or if one partner was unusually depressed, angry, or anxious. This sets the child’s thermostat to an increased emotional volatility, or to a predisposition to feelings of fear, grief, or anger, resulting in lifelong insecure attachment behaviors, which, fortunately, can be ameliorated by new, curative attachment relationships, such as psychotherapy or psychoanalysis. Solomon, too, finds that “emotions arise with other people” (158), but concludes that, therefore, introspecting about emotions is “looking in the wrong place,” a cavalier dismissal of psychotherapeutic, psychoanalytic, attachment, and some neurobiologic research as well, although he does add towards the end of his book, “I no longer say, as I did those many years ago, that feelings and physiology are irrelevant” (205).

Solomon writes that emotions are strategies for dealing with the world (104); habitual emotional responses can become characteristic of the individual. Envy, for example, turns into resentment: the envied object should, by rights, be mine. This is not an unusual strategy, although it is a losing one—what psychoanalysts call “feelings of entitlement.” Another tactic, such as presenting oneself as a weak and powerless child, may work for a while, but is maladaptive when you grow up. After a time you need to take another look at the landscape, know where you are and where you’re going, so you can appreciate the situation from a different perspective. Psychotherapists call this “reframing.”

“Understanding an emotion may well be instrumental in deepening it, or correcting it, or redirecting it toward a proper object. That is what Freudian therapy has always tried to do. That is what a good deal of art and literature and philosophy attempts to achieve,” Solomon writes (136). (Actually, this kind of understanding, known as *pratipaksha bhavana* in the Yoga Sutras, is an ancient technique, which, several millennia later, has been rediscovered and developed by philosophers and psychologists. It is a powerful practice.³)

In the third part of the book, “The Ethics of Emotion,” Solomon discusses cultivating these more satisfactory emotional responses, using techniques such as evaluative judgments. He writes, “emotional intelligence, in one of its most prominent meanings, requires that emotions are constituted or structured by judgments” (209). He ends by expressing “cosmic gratitude,” “being properly humble about one’s own modest place in the world” (270), and writes about opening one’s heart to the universe. Solomon concludes saying that spirituality is the “ultimate happiness, and it is an ideal expression of emotional integrity.”

Solomon’s lucid, comprehensive existential analysis of the many permutations of the emotions shows how the mature, developed human being is responsible for demonstrating emotional integrity in all aspects of life, but

I think that responsibility can only go so far. He writes with humor, intelligence, and grace, but, for me, the emotions are also mysterious and unknowable, and I like it that way.

I have to be true to my own feelings.

Endnotes

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2. P. Fonagy, M. Target, G. Rögely, J.G. Allen, and A.W. Bateman. "The Developmental Roots of Borderline Personality Disorder in Early Attachment Relationships: A Theory and Some Evidence." *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* 23 (2003): 412-59.
3. Swami Satchidananda, trans. *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* (Virginia: Integral Yoga Publications).

Phenomenal Concepts and Phenomenal Knowledge: New Essays on Consciousness and Physicalism

Torin Alter and Sven Walter, editors (Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 2007). 349 pages. ISBN 0-19-517165-9.

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The new anthology *Phenomenal Concepts and Phenomenal Knowledge* comprises thirteen original essays on topics relevant to the contemporary discussion of consciousness within analytic philosophy of mind. Most of these essays address, in particular, the question of the nature of *phenomenal* concepts—concepts in virtue of which we can think and know about the properties of our immediate phenomenal experience. Examples of such intuitively apparent but theoretically recalcitrant properties include the painfulness of my current sensation of having a toothache, or that discrete and particular shade of blue I experience when gazing at the sky on a cloudless day. Philosophers are especially interested in the status of the concepts covering them because a correct account of these concepts, they suppose, could help to settle the larger debate about whether consciousness can be explained in physical terms at all. The papers in this volume provide an accurate representation of the current state of the discussion, and will be of essential interest to anyone who is interested in pursuing it further. At the same time, however, they also bear witness to just how narrowly focused and methodologically ingrown the debate over consciousness has recently become. Collectively, they thus suggest the urgent need for a methodological reassessment of the implications of this specific debate for broader and longer-standing discussions of first-person experience, subjectivity, and the nature of explanation itself.

By now, everyone with any training in philosophy of mind knows how the game is played, at least in its initial stages. The first (though largely implicit) move is to isolate a coherent notion of *phenomenal* experience: such experience is understood as direct, immediate, and, as far as possible, removed from determination by language or (other) conceptual entities or processes. (Problematically, this move involves ignoring or

passing over the thought, elaborated with rigor by Husserl among others, that even very basic experiences are inextricably linked with intentional, conceptual, and discursive elements of reality as we encounter it, and so cannot coherently be discussed in abstraction from them.) The next move is to ask, of phenomenal experience so defined, whether its existence could *possibly* be explained wholly in physical terms. Since this question is not obviously an empirical one, philosophers since an early stage of the debate have employed various thought experiments and appeals to the imagination in order either to illustrate the basic intuitions involved or (more often) to undergird their own favored answers, pro or con, to the question of physicalism about consciousness. The subsequent discussion has (for better or worse) largely developed around the adumbration and investigation of the implications and variations, some extremely *recherché*, of these imaginative examples and scenarios.

One of them is the strange case of Mary, the genius color scientist who has grown up, since birth, in an entirely black-and-white room, and so has never had the experience of seeing blue (or any other color). Nevertheless, she manages to learn *all the physical information* about the way the brain processes colors (and every other physical fact relevant to color vision, perception, or experience). Now, remove her from the room and let her see blue for the first time: Does she *learn* some new information (viz., "what it's like" to see blue) that she did not know before? If so, as Frank Jackson argued in his original posing of the thought experiment in 1982, then physicalism about consciousness is false. For Mary knew *all* of the physical facts, but she, nevertheless, learned something new when she emerged from the room, so this "something new" was not part of the physical facts at all.

Since Jackson's initial article, discussion of the Mary case has generated dozens of articles and at least one full book; the first five articles of the current volume also focus centrally on it. Of course, there are ways to resist playing *this* game, and good reasons to doubt that its totalizing appeal to hypotheticals about the epistemic position of an agent in possession of "all the facts" can have any other purpose than that of illustrating the intuitions about consciousness that we already had going in. Daniel Dennett's contribution, "What RoboMary Knows," is a forceful example of such a "non-player" strategy; Dennett argues that we are in no position to say *anything* coherent about what someone in possession of the totality of physical facts would know, and so that the Mary case is capable only of delivering again to us the intuition, physicalist or anti-physicalist, with which we began. Dennett is, doubtless, right to point to the deep methodological problems that attend the theoretician's appeal to such notions as that of the totality of physical facts; nevertheless, his quarrel with the Jackson case, here expressed in dismissive and even sarcastic terms, is itself motivated by the physicalist position (certainly a totalizing one in its own way) that Dennett has long occupied.

The remaining four articles on the Mary case round out discussion, from various perspectives, of what it may be taken to show about phenomenal knowledge and the possibility of a physical explanation of it. In an interesting reversal which might be taken to say more about the tenuousness of reliance on such thought experiments than about the implications of the case itself, Jackson himself in the late 1990s repudiated the anti-physicalist position that the Mary case was supposed to illustrate in favor of a physicalist one, according to which phenomenal properties are (after all) physical because they are essentially representational. Jackson explains and defends his new position in the third essay of the current volume, and Torin Alter's essay responds to this defense, arguing that

Jackson's original argument (*contra* Jackson himself) in fact remains forceful even against such a representationalist view. The final essay in the section, written by the color-blind scientist Knut Nordby, provides some interesting speculations, perhaps relevant to the implications of the Mary case, about the status of the kind of knowledge about color that is accessible to someone who has never seen it.

Another thought-experiment that has shaped the current discussion is that of the *zombie world*. A *zombie* is an organism exactly similar to you or me biologically, anatomically, physiologically, and in every other physical respect, but entirely lacking phenomenal consciousness. Now, are zombies (metaphysically) possible? If so, then consciousness (as it occurs in our world) is non-physical, for fixing *all* of the physical facts does not determine that there is consciousness at all. Some physicalists have argued that although zombies are indeed *conceivable*, this is not sufficient to establish that they are, in fact, *possible*. Here, the discussion becomes intertwined with the involved analytic consideration of the metaphysics of necessity, reference, and identity that originally grew from reflection on modal logic in the 1960s and 70s. Most of the discussion in the current volume focuses on recent attempts to exploit what philosophers have seen as the special status of phenomenal concepts—for instance, their indexical or demonstrative qualities, or their supposed capacity to include the very phenomenal properties to which they refer—in order to explain why there might remain an “explanatory” gap between the physical world and consciousness even if there is no metaphysical gap and physicalism is still true. The essay “Phenomenal Concepts and the Explanatory Gap,” by David Chalmers, provides a useful summary of, and “master argument” against, this so-called “phenomenal concept strategy,” and so provides a helpful way in to the discussion as a whole. Essays by Janet Levin and David Papineau develop the phenomenal concept strategy in detail, while Joseph Levine joins Chalmers in criticizing it. Finally, contributions by Stephen White, Ned Block, and Martine Nida-Rumelin provide extremely detailed, although far from conclusive, analyses of the interrelated frameworks of epistemology, semantics, ontology, and modality that might provide (at least on a certain, highly theoretically loaded conception of their significance) insight into the real basis of reference to consciousness and physical states.

Whether or not the contemporary debate culminates in a decisive proof or refutation of physicalism (don't hold your breath), the issues under discussion bear great significance, at least implicitly, for our understanding of subjectivity, linguistic meaning, and the particular epistemological and ontological status of first-person experience. Especially in connection with the phenomenal concept strategy, the specific discussion represented here also suggests close and fascinating connections with issues of indexicality and objective reference that have proven decisive in the neighboring traditions of phenomenology and structuralism, as well as to some of the projects from which contemporary analytic philosophy itself originated, including the logical atomism of Wittgenstein and Russell and the logical empiricism of Carnap and Schlick. It is unfortunate that the contributors to this volume, in their zeal to defend “pro or con” positions on physicalism, almost wholly fail to consider these actual and potential historical and conceptual interconnections. But since this failure results, in large measure, from much more general and historically determined methodological features of discussion within the analytic tradition as it is currently pursued, it might usefully be taken to suggest further reflection on the provenance, future, and implications of the analytic conversation about consciousness in a way that builds on, rather than repudiates, the work collected here.

The Body Problematic—Political Imagination in Kant and Foucault

Laura Hengehold (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007). 327 pages. \$55.00. ISBN 978-0-271-03211-5.

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This remarkable book examines in detail the problematic aspects of imagination and the human body with particular attention to Kant and Foucault, and given the many themes examined by Laura Hengehold, it requires specific competences. The reader must not only pay close attention to the arguments of the text but also to the richness of the concepts that Hengehold presents. The main thesis of the book is that Kant considered the human body as appearance and not as a thing-in-itself; being, therefore, a problematic object, “the human body exists as much in the imagination as in the flesh” (5).

The book is divided into three parts. The first is entitled “The Political Topology of Kantian Reason.” The second, “Man and His Doubles: Two Ways to Problematize,” is an original, informative, and detailed analysis of Foucault's problematics and epistemic nominalism. The third, “Locked in the Market,” combines theoretical points, sociological considerations, and historical events, ending with the concept of a negative anthropology, analogous to negative theology.

Proceeding systematically, the most promising way to explain Kant's notions of body and of problematic concepts is to understand how his *Critique of Pure Reason* establishes the limits of reason itself. Also relevant for Hengehold's project are Kant's anthropology and the *Critique of Judgment*, with its theories on feelings and the sublime. In the intricate paths of Kantian philosophy (competently presented by the author) Hengehold sees in Kant's Third Critique a crucial step to the understanding of how from the “presence” of problematic objects to which nothing strictly empirical corresponds one can arrive at philosophical, epistemic, and politically viable actions. Short of a full systematization, the unity of the faculties itself is problematic, and imagination makes aesthetic judgment, although not cognitive, pivotal for communication.

From Kant's conception of imagination, Hengehold derives an open-endedness and purposiveness beyond the given and experience that must nevertheless limit itself; otherwise one would go beyond communicability, which (and Hengehold agrees with Kant) is an obligation, a duty (89), because we human beings need “a community of reason.”

Most interesting is the last section of the first part, entitled “The Kantian Body—Missing in Action.” Once it is recognized that the human body is only empirical appearance it becomes, in the author's language, a “proto-body” or a problematic object (90), situated between the transcendental and the empirical (115); and even mental states are contingent. Hengehold does not say explicitly that there is no transcendental body for Kant, but as she states with lucidity: “it is not clear that such a body belongs to anyone at all” (105); yet, bodily differences have social meaning. Developing these insights, a few more words from Hengehold on whether Kant considered medicine a science would have helped clarify the empirical knowledge of the human body.

But Hengehold conjectures that Kant did not develop a full-fledged theory of the body because he wanted to preserve human autonomy and self-legislation (92). A valid remark that,

however, gives imagination a somewhat intellectualistic quality. Hengehold could have also introduced, albeit briefly, Kant's *Opus Postumum*, in which he discusses the body in some detail. But this is not her itinerary that aims at preparing the transition, gradually, to Foucault's extensive writings on the body.

In the second part of the book, Foucault's heterotopia and the discourses that consider humans problematic objects are seen in all their facets: "Man," social spaces, externality, and morality intermingle to "produce" a body that is not a thing; it is, rather, an event, a situation (118), even "an illusory object of self-understanding" (127). The prevalence of discontinuities makes the discourses on madness, sexuality, and prison also problematic, since these "objects" cannot be seen in themselves but only thought of epistemologically from the effects they produce.

Analogies between Kant and Foucault are, in my view, the result of Kant's privileging epistemology over ontology. The advantage is that, as Hengehold writes, "a problematic object can unify multiple practices and discourses over time" (135), but never absolutely because different *epistemei* develop at different historical times. On the negative side, Hengehold is suspicious of Foucault's practices of exclusion because they can lead to unethical stands and to unacceptable types of communities.

For Foucault, the body, medicine included, is a discourse, a practice (139) that aims at social order and at efficient productivity. So Hengehold speaks of a "political anatomy," and she could have also considered a "political physiology" producing disciplined, normalized bodies. However, power itself, for Foucault, is both repressive and productive, leaving some margin for freedom.

Whereas for Kant aesthetic judgments unite the empirical and the transcendental, Foucault "retains from Kant...the critical gesture, not the transcendental one" (161), setting in motion the extremes of the sublime.

Since ontological discourse is precluded, bodies are like events whose materiality is linked to a discursivity that limits solipsistic practices. Hengehold identifies three forms of materiality: imagination (Kant), discourse, and relationships. There are ways of analogizing them to assure the transition from one to the other, keeping in mind—so Hengehold writes—the idea of limit, since some contexts are incompatible with some others. Analogizing is, in a way, a means of attenuating the negative impact of a fragmented, historical world and a reality unknown in itself. Hengehold's thesis is that internal and external perspectives with regard to embodiment are logically continuous (198), a point that is perhaps not easily reconciled with her description of a fragmented world, whose unity is questionable. But it is remarkable that she proceeds by analogizing, a practice not prevalent in philosophy nowadays and for which she must be praised.

In the third part of the book, Hengehold's sociological and historical discourses take precedence. Penetrating as they are, these debates are probably already familiar to today's readers. Hengehold takes such issues like poverty, disorder, civil rights, welfare, minorities, globalization, neoconservatism, and the state into consideration with authority and without fanaticism. Yet, conflicts do arise. Are they structural or contingent? Hengehold indicates that they originate in forms that are lived imaginatively because states or power are not entities with which citizens can have direct contact. It would have been useful had she developed some arguments concerning the idea of progress, which plays an important role in legitimizing biomedical research with means that are not always ethical. She does, however, raise a relevant point when she discusses how risks are also lived imaginatively. Hengehold warns: "law

invests bodies with freedom and risk unequally" (236), and so there are limits to freedom for the population (freedom is not a universal and, therefore, it must be used wisely; deviant behaviors are unacceptable).

One important conclusion to be drawn from *The Body Problematic* is that, given a liberal government that operates within the rule of law, and so obtains consensus, there remains room for problematic objects—the single mother being one example, poverty another.

"Negative Anthropology" is an invitation to consider how political imagination and public spaces can be used pragmatically and aesthetically, thus providing pleasure. However, since we are not completely transparent to ourselves, the problem of otherness and collectivity becomes crucial to identifying limits—what is obligatory and what is contingent. Hengehold accepts Foucault's theories only partially. She is, rather, inclined to side with common sense. But from Foucault she accepts the idea that the process of individuation is never complete and that resisting external power is at times necessary. She firmly rejects utopian and radical changes, although *mores* can change. From Kant's distinction of the empirical and the transcendental we learn an important lesson that "problematization is an exercise in freedom" (288), although "we are not free in a radical way."

By Hengehold's admission, her message is tainted with melancholy, and her final words indicate that the body, as a quasi-transcendental, still has a role to play in combining the aesthetic and the moral dimensions of life, both public and private. *The Body Problematic* could be described as an example of "micropolitics." Looking beyond the empirical body, also from a feminist viewpoint, she speaks of "a melancholic body," which, and this is my own interpretation, seems to point to a "desexualized" body. Foucault would have questioned such a middle-of-the-road conclusion, but it would probably have been welcomed by Kant.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

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