

CANADIAN JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY
Supplementary Volume 13

AFTERWORD: FEMINIST THEORY—SOME TWISTINGS AND TURNINGS

KAI NIELSEN
The University of Calgary
Calgary, AB
Canada T2N 1N4

I

Feminist philosophy, along with, and as a part of, feminist thought more generally, is rapidly developing and will, and rightly, become an increasing force in our cultural life. The essays in this rich and varied volume contribute to this.¹ They have a cluster of salient features in common that is generally characteristic of feminist philosophy and contrasts markedly with most other philosophy as presently practiced. I refer here to the fact that feminist philosophy is more receptive than more traditional modes of philosophizing to currents of thought coming from a very considerable number of often quite different sources, less defensively adversarial and more tolerant of a lack of closure in philosophical thought.

¹ Pages, references and titles to the essays in this volume are not given. Where the author of these essays is mentioned in the text it is to be assumed, unless otherwise indicated, that the reference is to the author's essay in this volume. Other references will be given in the standard way.

I do not intend here extensively to review the arguments or probe the narratives or indeed try to sort out all of the various strands of thought to be found in this volume. I shall instead take two general themes, one arising from the philosophy of science and from the more methodological essays, the other from some of the essays on ethics. The two themes I shall discuss are, I believe, important themes, but surely not the only important themes in this volume that need further investigation and reflection. (I pass over without comment essays of equal importance to the ones I discuss which do not abut so directly on the themes I wish to pursue.)

The first theme, entering from a distinctive angle the modernity/post-modernity debate, has to do with the scope, nature and authority of a critical and emancipatory theory and the second has to do with what kind of account we should give of the moral life. I shall, in the next section, start with the second theme and then move on to the first in sections V and VI. I proceed in this way because the question about the moral life raises with some urgency questions about the nature, role and point of moral theory and its relation to moral ideology. These questions in turn raise in a focussed way problems about the design of a proper emancipatory theory which, in turn, lead us naturally to a more general consideration of the scope and proper claims to justifiability of feminist theory.

Feminist accounts of morality with their stress on caring, sensitivity to context, the social determination of our moral standpoints, the use of empathetic imagination in moral reflection, the recognition of the importance of the moral emotions and the avoidance of a severe intellectualism in thinking about morality, link quite naturally with a cluster of beliefs characteristic of feminist thinking about the philosophy of science and epistemology. Such thinking is here well represented by Lorraine Code, Sandra Harding and Alison Wylie in their critiques of foundationalist epistemology, traditional philosophy of science and in their conceptualization of the modernity/post-modernity debate. This thinking in turn lends support to feminist accounts of both morality and politics.

Feminists stress that science is through and through a social enterprise. They challenge the received ideas of objectivity and rationality and the deeply embedded belief that the scientific method is a self-corrective method. They challenge the belief that science either

is or ought to be a value-free enterprise; they ferret out the way science tends to be androcentric and, as Alison Jaggar neatly concretizes, how it not infrequently has an ideological bias.

They argue that social science in particular needs to incorporate a reflective component, become sensitive to the pervasiveness of gender considerations and that it must come to recognize the need to make clear the standpoint from which it proceeds. Moreover, and connectedly, scientists need to gain a critical moral, socio-political and historical self-consciousness. This is vital if they are to overcome a variety of ideological blinkers. In coming to grips with this, as Harding makes particularly clear, we need to take to heart the post-modernist insight that our accounts cannot but be culturally specific.

Feminist theory has also reinforced the argument of critical theory—indeed I think of it as a distinctive species of critical theory—about the pervasiveness in our culture of scientific ideology. It is one thing to appreciate the impressiveness of scientific knowledge, to acknowledge the not infrequent efficiency of scientific method and even to accept the pragmatist claim that it ought to be extended to areas where it is not presently utilized; it is, however, another thing again to accept the hegemony of science and to attempt to award to the scientific method the sole right to fix the whole range of our various and context dependent beliefs. It is this that is scientific ideology and it is, as Herbert Marcuse and Jürgen Habermas have argued, a pervasive and beguiling ideology in our societies.

There are a number of matters related to this critique of scientific ideology that feminists bring to the forefront. Feminist theory is anti-foundationalist. It is sceptical of autonomous claims for philosophy and of claims on the part of philosophy to timeless truth. Without taking an irrationalist or nihilist turn, it is sceptical of the Man of Reason. That is to say, it is critical of any attempt to make a sharp separation of reason and the emotions or to discount the emotions. It is critical, as well, of attempts to conceptualize rationality in utterly value-neutral terms and to articulate a substantive ideal of rationality that applies across cultures, classes and historical epochs.

II

Feminists examining and attempting to articulate a feminist account of morality tend to work from such conceptions. This is plainly exemplified in the perceptive cluster of writings in and about ethics in this volume. Again there is no purist separation of moral theory from the human and social sciences and from historical and culturally specific considerations. There is no attempt to do moral theory in the grand manner of Bentham, Kant or Sidgwick or (coming down to our time) even in the manner of Brandt or Gewirth. And there is no attempt to do a Foot or Hare meta-ethical thing. Feminist moral theorizing works with thick descriptions in integral relation to all sorts of contingent considerations: psychological, social, historical and economic. Code, for example, stresses that in thinking about morality, we need to think very carefully about the essential arts of personhood and Ann Ferguson similarly stresses the importance of gaining a more adequate conception of the self. With different theories of the self we get different conceptions of politics and different conceptions of the moral life.

There is something like a mild transvaluation of values in feminist moral theory. In traditional moral theory, particularly modern and contemporary moral theory, there is a stress on rights, autonomy, justice, impartiality and universalizability. All of these values or conceptions, if they can be justifiably held at all, are typically thought to require a rational foundation. Much of the feminist moral theory represented in this volume, and indeed feminist theory found elsewhere, resists this as being at the very least a one-sided account. Code speaks of an autonomy-obsession and the critiques of other of these conceptions in this volume would, if sound, justify speaking of a universalizability-obsession, impartiality-obsession and a rationality-obsession. Related to this is a challenge to rights-based moralities, to contractarianism, to Rawls's and Kohlberg's taking justice to be primary in delineating the moral domain and to Rawls's claim that justice is the first virtue of institutions.

Code, who criticizes what she calls the autonomy-obsession, makes it perfectly clear right at the beginning of her critique that she is not denying that the achievement of autonomy has a central place amongst feminist goals. What she is objecting to is some one-

sided philosophical interpretations of autonomy and its placement in the moral domain. It is the individualism of current conceptions of autonomy she is resisting such as is found in the work of Robert Nozick or in a less crude form in David Gauthier. To be autonomous, for such individualists, is to be 'self-sufficient, independent and self-reliant, a self-realizing individual whose efforts are directed toward maximizing his personal gains.' With such an ideal of autonomy *such* autonomous individuals are constantly living under the threat of the other, i.e. other equally self-serving individuals. Where the individuals are thoroughly rational, at best we will get constrained maximization. Individuals on such a world-view are obsessed, as is Nozick, with 'boundary crossings.' 'Keep off my turf' is the watchword. Such individuals will be constantly on guard against intrusion, will be untrusting of others and will have at centre stage in their moral views conceptions of individual rights jealously defended, rational self-interest, expediency, efficiency and there will be a persistent worry about being made a sucker by free-riders. These, on such an individualistic view of the world, will be the elements that will pervade moral and political discourse. It is not, of course, true that we can become wholly autonomous, even on this conception of autonomy, but this is the character ideal: the heuristic, given such an individualism, that we should strive to approximate.

Values of community and fraternity that grow out of our interdependence and connectedness with their stress on caring are seen as at least potential intrusions upon our autonomy. Such individualism does not see that anything like a rich individuality would actually be integrally linked to our connectedness. Rather than to be so obsessed with autonomy, we should recognize, given the way we human beings have to be nurtured, that our very humanness and individuality are tied to our connectedness and interdependence. We should not only have equality and liberty but as well a non-sexist equivalent of fraternity as central values.

Annette Baier and Code both start with communality and interdependence and develop a conception of autonomy-ininterdependence as distinct from autonomy as self-sufficiency and independence. With an autonomy with interdependence we see ourselves as a community of interconnected and interdependent hu-

man beings whose very humanness is dependent on being so interdependent. But still as autonomous beings in such a community we are beings who have our own standpoints, our own say and we remain our own centres of action and conception. Autonomy is one central value in a commonwealth of values and not the supreme value. It is not even evident that it is the leading value in that commonwealth. Indeed it is doubtful if there is any one value which has such pride of place. But as autonomy properly understood is compatible with equality properly understood and indeed requires it, so autonomy properly understood is compatible with and similarly requires fraternity.

Feminist moral philosophers are also critical of the emphasis placed on impartiality and universalizability in moral theory. Arguing for justice is, no doubt, arguing for principles and practices which are to be justified on the basis of disinterested or impartial considerations. But justice is not the whole of morals. However, some think, to insist on impartiality and disinterestedness in some contexts is hurtful to the moral life. We should not, they argue, claim that it is something the moral point of view invariably requires.

This contra-impartiality claim will seem to some deeply counter-intuitive. Let us have a look at its rationale. We are, as Baier and Code put it, second persons. Persons are the creation of other persons and our interdependence is continuous throughout our lives. The 'good and helpful aspects of our condition, as much as the evils, stem from the fact of interdependence.' Because of this, they claim, much of our moral life cannot properly be seen in impersonal and disinterested terms. The modes of such moral interaction can hardly be impersonal. Friendship or parent/child relationships and what these relationships require can hardly be understood in such terms. And with it come to the forefront such key moral notions as trust, caring, commitment and morally sustaining relations. But they are conceptions which cannot be understood in terms of a disinterested impartiality. Here persons cannot be treated as being indistinguishable and interchangeable as impartiality and disinterestedness seem at least to require. Code tells us that 'fairness and justice, impartially adjudicated, often blind one to the specific needs of particular persons.' Because of this, Code gives us to understand, there is no even prima facie reason to give even prima facie priority to

considerations of justice and fairness over concerns about the quality of human relationships.

If this is taken to mean that concerns over the specific needs of particular persons standing in distinctive and intimate relations with one override considerations of justice and fairness, then it seems to me to be mistaken. If I know a friend wants and needs a certain scholarship and I also know there is a stranger who wants it and needs it too and I am in a position to grant the scholarship I cannot rightly give it to my friend if the stranger is clearly more qualified and equally in need.

At least in such circumstances, impartiality and considerations of fairness and justice have priority over considerations of friendship and care and concern about a particular person's needs. What needs to be faced by people who would argue as Code and Marilyn Friedman do is, where considerations of justice *collide* with considerations of a *particular* caring rooted in a knowledge of the needs of some persons standing in particular relations with one, whether the considerations of justice and fairness are not always (or at least almost always) overriding.

However, the above claims about justice being overriding is one thing and it is another thing again to say, as Sara Ruddick and Carol Gilligan (among others) have, that when women reflect on the values embedded in their experience of being primary caretakers of children that they will be led to develop a more care-oriented ethic than males who have little experience of such caretaking. Males, differently socialized than women, will, Gilligan maintains, tend to stress rights and principles. By contrast, women are more care-oriented. Whatever the truth of this psychological claim, this care-oriented part of morality is also essential to morality. Indeed it may not be an exaggeration to say that if there were not such caring, such concern with human suffering, the meeting of human needs and the establishing of certain human relationships, there would be little need for justice or for a concern for rights. But the other side of the coin is that sometimes caring is one-sided, love is blind and friendship leads to unfairness. And this in turn will lead to it being the case that others (sometimes a not inconsiderable number of others), who are not part of this web of personalized caring, will suffer or be harmed in ways that are quite unnecessary. We need

a stress on a justice-perspective to keep it from being the case that we will invest care on those close to ourselves while we allow social services and the like to wither. The helping and privileging of one's friends may stand in the way of a realization of a greater human flourishing in the society at large and a greater and more extensive meeting of human needs and the like than would obtain if one were to be through and through impartial. Given the background assumption of a moral world in which there are in place caring relations, where a particular caring runs afoul of justice, are not the considerations of justice, where they are clear and pronounced, overriding? Is not the stress on impartiality, principles and disinterestedness, rooted in that recognition? Is this something a caring-perspective can justifiably set aside?

Kathryn Morgan, to shift perspective a little, has persuasively argued that the traditional relegation of morality into a 'public sphere' where the men are the principal actors and into a 'private sphere' where the women are the principal actors has the effect of upholding oppressive human relations where it is women who are clearly the oppressed and indeed oppressed by men. The relegation of women's moral competency to a sphere of a personal, emotionbased, 'private morality' rather than to the impersonal public morality rooted in (supposedly rooted in) reason is an ideological device which functions to keep women in their place.

The reflection of this sexist moral mythology is, however, compatible with continuing to believe that moral claims are universalizable. To recognize that *my* friends have a special claim on me that others do not is to recognize, for someone who understands what morality is, that *your* friends also have a similar claim on you (no matter who you are), unless there is some morally relevant and in turn universalizable difference between you, your friends or your situation and me. It also involves believing that the moral point of view at crucial junctures requires impartiality. But again such a commitment to impartiality and universalizability does not require, and indeed should not require, moral agents to seek to be, what they cannot be anyway, to wit, detached, identityless atomic individuals. And there is no justification at all for identifying morality with public morality or treating 'personal morality' as a poor country cousin.

Morgan also rightly casts scorn on the idea that morality requires a hyper-detachment and an intellectualism that would maintain that rational moral reflection capable of justifying moral claims is incompatible with a 'finely developed empathetic imagination,' the ability to connect and to be persons of extensive sympathy toward a whole range of beings human and non-human. Such moral rationalism does not realize how much sympathy is an essential ingredient of morality. But again impartiality, a certain sense of detachment and a developed sense of fairness can go perfectly well with having the ability to connect and to sympathize utilizing a finely honed ability to empathetically put one's self in another's shoes and to take their situation and aspirations to heart.

To defend the universalizability of moral claims as I have is not to claim what feminist moral theorists, with their stress on contextuality and historical specificity, are rightly keen to *deny*, namely that genuine moral principles must be *universalizable over contexts*. If an American during the Vietnam war claimed she was justified in refusing to pay that portion of her taxes that would go into the war effort she is, given my understanding of universalizability, committed to saying that any person in the relevant senses like her and in a relevantly similar situation is likewise justified in so acting, but she is not committed to saying, what would be absurd to say anyway, namely that anyone in any context is justified in refusing to pay that portion of her taxes that would be used for any war effort that might be pursued by any country for any reason. The war against Hitler was one thing as was the Soviet Union's defense of its revolution against foreign invaders. But the American invasion of Vietnam was another thing again and the American support of the Contras still another. Moral principles should be universalizable—indeed, I would argue they could not fail to be universalizable—but few if any are universalizable over all contexts. Universalizable principles are not typically universal. A commitment to impartiality and to the objectivity (reflective and informed intersubjectivity) of wide reflective equilibrium is one thing and a commitment to an absolutism or universalism where correct moral principles are taken to be principles of pure practical reason available to 'the man of reason' is another. What I have been concerned to show in my above twistings and turnings is that this feminist standpoint, including the

heuristic for a radical feminist ethic given at the end of Morgan's essay, does not in reality stand in conflict with a proper reading of what a commitment to autonomy, equality, justice, universalizability and impartiality would come to. These conceptions and the feminist ones are in reality not clashing conceptions but complementary. There is no need to choose, for example, between the radical feminist ethic Morgan speaks of and a commitment to impartiality. The great value of the feminist perspective in this domain is that it fills a very big gap in our understanding of and our appreciation for the moral life that preoccupation with the traditional concerns of moral philosophers tend to blind us to.

III

There remain, the above notwithstanding, puzzling questions about the comparative weight to place, to put the matter at first crudely, on 'the care-perspective' and 'the justice-perspective.' Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* has taken a very considerable discussion, much of it favorable, some hostile and a significant amount ambivalent. In this volume Baier, Code, Ferguson, Sheila Mullett, Friedman and Barbara Houston direct a considerable amount of attention to Gilligan's work. In trying to begin a sorting out of the respective weights, spheres and roles of the care-perspective and the justiceperspective respectively, I want to return to some of this discussion.

Gilligan stressed that there are two pervasive moral orientations or outlooks at least in societies such as ours. One she called a justiceperspective and the other she called a care-perspective and while we all tend to alternate between these perspectives, nonetheless with men and women, at least as they are socialized in societies such as ours, the justice-perspective is the more dominant voice for men and the care-perspective for women. As John Exdell, Friedman and Morgan stress here and as Susan Moller Okin did in an important historical essay, this may tend to work in the service of a moral ideology which strengthens male domination.² This notwithstanding,

² Susan Moller Okin, 'Women and the Making of the Sentimental Family,'

(footnote continued on next page)

the difference in voice appears at least, whatever the causes, to be a more dominant voice with women than with men in societies such as our own.

In opposition to the rather Kantian conception of moral maturity, found in the work of Lawrence Kohlberg, who stressed the priority of the justice-perspective and found women tending not to be as morally mature as men, Gilligan articulated a care-perspective and found in her research done from that perspective that women tended to speak in a different voice than men about morality itself and, as well, about moral maturity. As Gilligan puts it: 'Since the reality of interconnection as experienced by women is given rather than freely contracted, they arrive at an understanding of life that reflects the limits of autonomy and control. As a result, women's development delineates the path not only to a less violent life but also to a maturity.'³

Our first experience of society, it should be noted in this connection, is in the mini-society of a family. It is there where we learn what it is to be a human being. Any kind of adequate morality requires, as Baier puts it, that it is insured 'that each new generation is made appropriately welcome and prepared for their adult lives.' And here in contrast with the stress given by the rationalism typical of the justice-perspective, we need to cultivate the moral emotions and not just stress that reason control our unruly passions. We need (to say the obvious) to love our children and to internalize a caring orientation and move beyond just worrying that we do not violate others' rights or fail to keep our contracts duly made.

There are around the care-perspective/justice-perspective division, as Friedman points out, two issues that it is useful to keep distinct. 1) There is the gender difference issue of whether 'the care-

(footnote continued from previous page)

Philosophy and Public Affairs 11 (Winter 1982) 65–88. See also her *Women in Western Political Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1979) and her 'Philosopher Queens and Private Wives: Plato on Women and the Family,' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 6 (1976) 345–69.

³ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1982) 172

perspective is typically or characteristically, a woman's moral voice, while the justice-perspective is typically or characteristically a man's moral voice.'²) There is the issue of whether 'the care-perspective is a distinct moral perspective from that which is centered on justice and rights.' I shall concentrate on the second issue. The literature about the first issue is considerable. Central facets of it, as we have seen, are characterized and interestingly assessed by Friedman. My own rather untutored hunch here is that if boys and girls were socialized in rather more similar ways than they are now, if there were extensive co-parenting, a genuinely non-sexist job market such that the sexual division of labor would be eroded, then, if these things happened, the different voices of women and men in moral matters would wither away.

Be that as it may, I set such considerations aside to consider the following related cluster of questions a) quite independently of whether they go along sexual lines, whether there really are two such distinct moral perspectives or orientations, b) to the extent there are, whether either can be thought to be a complete or adequate perspective without an incorporation of the other perspective and c) whether one or other of the perspectives (if there are such distinct or quasi-distinct perspectives) can rightly be thought to have priority.

I think several of the essays here give us good reasons for believing there are two distinct or at least quasi-distinct moral orientations. Baier's essay can be taken as paradigmatic. Robert Nozick and David Gauthier just do write and think about morality in a very different way than do Annette Baier and Iris Murdoch. If we reflect on the work of these people and others like them, it will be readily apparent that there is this difference between a Nozick-like orientation stressing rights, contracts, justice and tight argument and a Baierlike orientation stressing care, contextually given moral relations, conceptions of the good life for human beings and a narrative style.

What of the completeness or adequacy taken in themselves of either perspective? Again, I think it is evident enough from various discussions in this volume that either perspective taken by itself is radically incomplete and inadequate. Justice requires that in some fair way we answer to the needs of everyone as fully as we can. Commitments to *moral* equality—a central element in the justice-

perspective—come to the belief that the life of everyone matters and matters equally.⁴ A respect for rights comes to a respect for persons and their moral integrity. But without a background of caring, *empathetic* imagination and a relating specifically to particular people (not just a general caring for humanity as such but a concrete caring for specific people standing in specific relations to ourselves) little flesh can be given to the very notion of respect for persons and for as full and fair as possible an answering to their needs. Without some concrete understanding of specific people, young and old, sick and well, marginalized or mainstream, religious or secular, powerful or powerless, in their distinctive and importantly variable and changing circumstances, we can give very little substance to our belief that the life of everyone matters and matters equally.

To give substance to the justice-perspective's belief in *moral* equality some understanding of the varieties of ways of human flourishing is necessary. We also need to be caring persons ourselves and to have some understanding, as well, of the moral import of caring and with that the desire to see a world in which all human beings are cared about and a determination to bring such a world into existence, for surely this is not the world we live in now in spite of the fact that in all modernizing parts of the world there is this professed belief in moral equality. Without the sets of beliefs and commitments characterized above, a claimed belief in moral equality is little more than a pretense or ideological delusion. Kant was right in seeing that the very taking of the moral point of view requires a striving for a unity of theory and practice.⁵

However, as I have already argued, caring without justice and without respect for rights is as lopsided as Nozickianism. Much of moral relevance in a family or among friends or between colleagues

4 Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 1979) 106–27; Kai Nielsen, *Equality and Liberty* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld 1985) 15–35; and Kai Nielsen, 'Arguing for Equality,' *Philosophic Exchange* 17 (1986) 5–23

5 Immanuel Kant, 'Theory and Practice,' in *Kant's Political Writings*, Hans Reiss, ed., trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 1970) 62-72

should go beyond what justice requires and much has little to do with matters of justice and rights. But in a family an indiscriminate caring heedless of considerations of fairness is hardly something to be desired. Similarly, at a certain stage in a child's development a parental caring, if it were to take a very paternalistic turn, might override—and wrongly so—a child's right to privacy and, in effect, attack that child's moral integrity. These things are plainly wrong and in turn undermining of human flourishing. A parent could in certain circumstances be driven to distraction with worry about a child yet out of respect for the child's moral integrity refrain from intervention.

The relations between the caring-perspective and the justiceperspective are complicated and many faceted. What does seem tolerably evident is that both are radically incomplete without the other. Any adequate moral perspective must in some coherent way weave the two perspectives together into a single more complex perspective.

What would this look like and which, if either, perspective is to be taken to have *priority*? (Perhaps we do not need anything which has priority here anymore than we need a head of a family?) Feminist moral philosophers have generally criticized the claims made by Rawls and Kohlberg that justice should be taken as having priority. As Baier points out, feminist critics of the justice-perspective do not deny that 'justice is *a* social value of very great importance, and injustice an evil' and the Rawlsians and Kohlbergians in turn do not deny that other things matter besides justice. The issue is which, if either, has priority. Is Rawls right in claiming priority for justice? Is it the first virtue of social institutions? Baier makes effective criticisms of treating questions of the good for human beings as being 'optional' in a way that justice is not. The view she opposes claims that we can insist that people act in accordance with the principles of justice in a way that we cannot rightly insist they adhere to some conception of the good. The justice-perspective is authoritative in a way the care-perspective cannot be.

Rawls, arguing from a liberal perspective, and Chantal Mouffe, arguing from a Marxist perspective, both argue that in our complex and diversified societies with people having very different life plans and visions about how to live their lives we cannot rightly insist on

a single vision of the good which would be authoritative for all human beings.⁶ We can, however, have some hope that in a given civilization at a given time we can have some reasonable chance of gaining a rational conception of principles of justice which could be authoritative in that civilization and provide a minimal morality with such an authoritative presence. Baier and Friedman, in turn, will question whether that minimal morality is enough. How are we to decide, or is this one of the ambivalences Harding speaks of that we must, at least for now, just learn to live with? I am not going to try to resolve this issue here but to make a gesture at some of the difficulties and problems I see that need to be resolved if we are to do so.

It seems right on the side of the Rawlsians and some Marxists on this issue to remind ourselves that we do not agree about what constitutes human excellence and that there is not much prospect, at least in the foreseeable future, of our coming to agree about it. And we are surely not going to come to agree about the goal of human existence or about whether there is or even can be one. On the careperspective side it could be countered that we (that is people in modernizing societies) just might come in time to attain a reflective and informed consensus about what would be necessary to secure the dignity and most basic well-being of human beings. This, it is reasonable to argue against liberalism, would, if we could get such a consensus, not be an optional matter. It would then be something we could rightly insist to obtain in our society irrespective of whether some individuals want these conditions to obtain or not. (We need not ask for unanimity here.) If we can gain such a rational consensus about the conditions necessary to secure human dignity and basic well-being, then, where they can be secured, we as a society can rightly insist on them. They can be as authoritatively insisted on as the principles of justice and they would themselves be part of the content of certain principles of justice.

⁶ This is perhaps clearest in John Rawls, 'Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical,' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 14 (Summer 1985) 223–51; see Chantal Mouffe, 'What is the Crisis of Socialism?' *Symposium of Socialist Scholars Conference* (New York, April 11 1987).

Rawlsians could in turn reply that where we can do so justice requires that we secure them for everyone as far as possible. But then it can in turn be replied that at least some of what is necessary to secure human dignity and well-being is not determined by determining what is just. Rather what is just is to secure as equally as possible that dignity and well-being for everyone.

This, if it were to be secured, would still be a minimal ethic and would not constitute an answer to what is the best form of life for humankind or even for the members of our society. Some, rejecting the claim that the justice-perspective has priority, would want to argue that any adequate moral theory needs to be able to provide a persuasive sketch of an answer to that very fundamental question about human well-being, both for our alienated condition and for feasibly altered circumstances where our social world could be such that we could plausibly escape at least some of that alienation. Whether over this issue of priority we take the Rawlsian route or the care-perspective route may turn in part on whether we think that we can gain any even approximate consensus about what would, even under optimal conditions, be the best life for human beings. Rawls, for example, is doubly skeptical here. He doubts 1) whether there will be any philosophical establishment of such a conception and 2) doubts that, even if there were, whether there would in modern diversified societies such as ours be any general (public) acceptance of what is philosophically best established such that we could take it as a part of a *public* philosophy that could be authoritatively asserted.

Let us push this a little further by noting a set of claims by Alasdair MacIntyre touched on by Exdell which would (if well-taken) count for the care-perspective. To have a good society, indeed even to have a just society, MacIntyre believes, we must have a society informed by a collective effort to define a shared conception of what makes a good human being. Moreover, for MacIntyre, 'justice can be rationally defined in a society only where there is general agreement on what its members deserve—based on their ranking the contributions made by the various practices and their internal goods to the more general good of their community.'⁷ Rawlsians, arguing from the

⁷ This is Exdell's paraphrase but see Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press 1981) 143–88.

justice-perspective, will respond that we have no even remotely objective way of determining what people deserve or merit or of knowing how to rank the contributions they make to the good of society. Moreover, even if we could that is not how we determine what is just and unjust. And most definitely, even if we can get some rational agreement on basic well-being (a thin conception of the good) we will not get agreement over what makes a good human being or the good life for human beings. Keeping our attention firmly fixed on questions of social justice (questions concerning the justice of institutions) and dropping questions about desert or merit, we nevertheless can, Rawlsians argue, gain agreement on certain principles of justice which it is necessary to agree on if we are to have any prospect of so living together so that we can, as individuals, seek, and have some prospect of attaining, what we severally, and often differently, take to be good. We need principles of justice authoritatively stationed in public life in order for us to be able effectively to seek and sometimes realize our individual conceptions of what a good life for us as individuals would be. We, in turn, need, for this to be possible, to agree on a minimum list of basic human goods (something like Rawls's primary natural and social goods) and to a certain extent on their respective weights.⁸ We have some prospect of eventually, given favourable conditions, gaining consensus here but our societies being very unlike *Gemeinschaften* we have no reasonable prospect of a larger consensus on the good society or the good person. Thus, for an ethic that would actually stand a chance of successfully guiding conduct about what must be done in a world of great diversity about the ends of life and about how best to live our lives, we must stick to the minimalist ethics of a justice-perspective.

It may be that a morality of rights without, as an equal partner, a morality of caring tends to dissolve the natural bonds of society, but, that notwithstanding, under any plausible extension of con-

⁸ John Rawls, 'Social Unity and Primary Goods,' in Amartya Sen and Bernard Williams, eds., *Utilitarianism and Beyond* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 1982) 159–85

temporary conditions the nuclear family can hardly be a *Gemeinschaft* (though those caught up with the ideology of the sentimental family will believe it to be) and it is thoroughly unrealistic to expect that in our contemporary large scale societies, let alone in our interconnected world, we can become one great big *Gemeinschaft* or a cluster of harmoniously interrelated *Gemeinschaften*.⁹ Whatever our 'personal moralities,' our 'private visions of the good,' we must, in a public philosophy, Rawlsians argue, stick with the minimalist ethic of justice.

Baier and Friedman (and Exdell indirectly) counter-argue that this just isn't enough to make moral sense of our fragmented lives or to meet what we expect of a morality. We have in even the most morally impoverished societies fuller relationships with each other than the minimal relationships necessary to keep civil society going. People, as Baier puts it, whose rights are respected and to whom justice is done 'may well be lonely, driven to suicide, apathetic about their work, about participation in political processes, find their lives meaningless and have no wish to leave offspring to face the same meaningless existence. Their rights, and respect for rights, are quite compatible with very great misery, and misery whose causes are not just individual misfortunes and psychic sickness, but social and moral impoverishment.' The justice-perspective, Baier seems to believe, does little to answer to such considerations. It is here where we need, she believes, the morality of caring. To have a decent society we cannot just stop with the 'essential minimum, that is on justice and rights, and let whoever wants to go further and cultivate this more demanding ideal of responsibility and care do so on a kind of volunteer basis.' We need instead something that we culturally speaking can justifiably insist on here. We cannot just go on an individual caring trip, doing our own thing, if caring is to come to much. To have this fuller life we must have the commitment of others to engage in it and not just an agreement of non-interference

⁹ Okin, 'Women and the Making of the Sentimental Family,' 65–88, clearly reveals the ideology of the sentimental family. See also Exdell and Morgan in this volume.

with those that do. The latter would only mean that the more communally minded would be in effect exploited by the libertarian types or types tending toward libertarianism.

Even going beyond old Whiggish libertarian liberalism (Hayek's sort of thing) to a Rawlsian-Dworkinian progressive welfare state liberalism, we still do not have enough of what it is in morality, Baier claims, that 'we need to pressure *everyone* to obey.' We need, as well, 'to ensure an education that will form persons to be capable of conforming to an ethics of care and responsibility.' Baier goes on to speculate that 'the liberal morality, if unsupplemented, may *unfit* people to be anything other than its justifying theories suppose them to be . . . that is, people who have no interest in each other's interests.' But this is surely not enough for there to be in place anything like a decent morality. Someone must—from anything like a decent moral point of view must—take an interest in the very young and the very old, in future generations and in those who are powerless or are lacking in the capacity for full moral agency.

It might in turn be responded a) that none of this establishes what is centrally at issue here, namely that justice-issues do not have *priority* over purely care-issues and b) that the issues mentioned in the previous paragraph are not *both* care-issues and justice-issues. They would only get ruled out as justice issues by a narrow libertarian conception of justice. They would not get ruled out as justice issues by the richer and more adequate Rawlsian conception of justice.

Perhaps we should not try to dichotomize, as Friedman argues we should not, a justice-perspective and a care-perspective? Both perspectives are essential to morality and they are intertwined. There is little point, if indeed there is any clear sense, in trying to say which is prior. We certainly need a view which incorporates both perspectives and, as Baier puts it, will 'harmonize justice and care' and *perhaps* we need not concern ourselves with which, if either, has priority or is the first virtue of institutions. There may be no *first* virtue of institutions.¹⁰

10 Sections III and IV of Friedman's essay are particularly relevant here. She challenges the dichotomy, realizes that within the justice orientation itself there

(footnote continued on next page)

IV

However the issues discussed in the previous section get sorted out, it is evident from discussions in this volume that issues of justice will continue to loom large in feminist contributions to moral theory. Given the pervasive and seemingly intractable domination of women and a growing consciousness of that domination in its various, sometimes subtle, sometimes not so subtle, manifestations, what would a just world be taken to be by people who recognized that and resolutely struggled against it? What would a just world look like that could finally rid itself of being sexist? Friedman claims that if we are to progress in our moral thinking there must be a movement 'toward a non-gendered, non-dichotomized unified moral framework in which all moral concerns could be expressed' and Ferguson firmly asserts that 'our ultimate goal must be the degenderizing of every aspect of social life.' Nothing less could be a perfectly just society. Social reality is, of course, quite different but the coming of a society without gender and without classes is part of our ideal about what it should become.

There is not in these pages or elsewhere, as far as I know, a worked out feminist theory of justice. However, Baier, Sibyl Schwarzenbach and Susan Moller Okin in an important article (not in our volume) 'Justice and Gender,' while seeing some unintended sexist residues in Rawls's work, acknowledge the seminal importance of Rawls in constructing a theory of justice.¹¹ This recognition of Rawls's central importance does not mean that any of them are contractarians. They could reject contractarianism as unequivocally as Virginia Held. The parts of Rawls they accept in a re-interpreted form do not depend on his contractarianism. But Schwarzenbach and Okin in important ways build an egalitarian genderless conception of justice on a rational reconstruction of certain major elements in Rawls.

(footnote continued from previous page)

are two distinct orientations, points to inadequacies in Gilligan's formulations and brings to our attention an array of considerations that still need sorting out.

¹¹ Okin, 'Justice and Gender,' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* **16** (Winter 1987) 42–72

However, first there must be a rational reconstruction. To this end Baier briefly, and Okin in detail, show how Rawls is unwittingly trapped in rather traditionalist sexist assumptions. That, as they are certainly well aware, is not his intention but his assumption that the free and equal persons reasoning in the original position are not thought of as single individuals but as heads or representatives of households and his further assumption 'that life within the family and relations between the sexes are not properly to be regarded as part of the subject matter of a theory of social justice' in effect reflects traditional sexist thinking about the family and the need for a family to have a head, male or female.

Rawls, as progressive and deeply egalitarian as he is, never raises the question of whether the monogamous, nuclear family is a just institution in either its traditional form or in even an idealization of what Okin calls the sentimental family of companionate marriage.¹² Given Rawls's own egalitarian theory of justice it is difficult to see how the family could be just. How, for example, on his account, is it possible for the viewpoint of the less advantaged members of the family ever to get heard? Rawls, as Okin well puts it, 'fails entirely to address the gender system which—with its roots in the sex roles of the family and with its branches extending into virtually every corner of our lives—is one of the fundamental structures of our society.'¹³

However, both Okin and Schwarzenbach provide a feminist reading of Rawls which shows how with (for example) the distinctive reading that Schwarzenbach provides of the difference principle Rawls's account of justice would support a strongly egalitarian androgynous society, though this reading would also push him to defending some form of democratic socialism and would not allow his account to remain, as it now is, neutral between welfare state capitalism and democratic socialism.

¹² Ibid., 48

¹³ Ibid., 65. It is interesting to note that there is a similar failure in the work of Jürgen Habermas. See Nancy Fraser, 'What's Critical about Critical Theory? The Case of Habermas and Gender,' *New German Critique* 35 (Spring/Summer 1985) 97–131.

Rawls's two assumptions—his assumption about the family and about heads of households—are hardly canonical parts of his theory and can, and indeed should, be abandoned. This can be shown if we work with and from deeply embedded elements in Rawls's own theory. Rawls allows—and it is important for him to do so—his contractors in the original position to know the general facts about society. Knowing that they would then have to know about the ubiquitousness of the gender-system and they would have to know that it is a system that leads to the domination of women. These (pace post-modernism) are general facts, not just culturally specific facts, though the form and extent of the domination is, of course, culturally specific. This being so contractors (pace Rawls) in the original position must take the relevant position of women and men into account in formulating principles of justice. Moreover, Rawls's second principle of justice requires that inequalities be to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged and must, as well, be attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of a substantial and not merely formal equal opportunity. But, given the gender system, women are not in a position of fair equality of opportunity and the family institutions that we now have certainly do not function to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged. Women are disadvantaged in such an institution in a way that they cannot justifiably be under a system of social justice operating with the difference principle and fair equality of opportunity.

Rawlsian justice (or for that matter any plausible form of egalitarian justice) requires a genderless society to be achievable. (To say that the struggle for genderlessness would break the strains of commitment assumes that it is more difficult than it actually is to engage in co-parenting or to alter the sexual division of labour. With such resistance the tides of ideology and rationalization are running high.) In fine, Rawls's principles of justice, given our best knowledge about the general facts about human society, are inconsistent with a gender-structured society. Schwarzenbach and Okin have given us a reading of those principles in which this is seen to be so.¹⁴

¹⁴ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 440, 396 and 178–9. See also Okin, 'Justice and Gender,' 67–8.

As long as we continue to view the world in gendered terms, where we cannot but have an ascriptive designation of positions and expectations of behaviour in accordance with the inborn characteristic of sex, we will not have a fully adequate set of principles of justice. As long as people continue to conceptualize things in a gendered way they cannot gain correct principles of justice and, given the social practices that go with such a conceptualization, we cannot have a just society. To make it possible for us to choose principles of justice in the impartial way Rawls's theory requires, our present gendered institutions and customs 'would have to be replaced by genderless institutions and customs.'¹⁵

V

Both Schwarzenbach and Okin in giving a feminist reading of Rawls's conception of justice appeal to reasonably large-scale theoretically ramified factual claims. Whether or not Rawls would accept those particular factual claims as being good approximations of the truth, Rawls believes, and I think rightly so, that such appeals are perfectly in order in the constructing and defending of an ethical theory and a social philosophy. But this takes us back, albeit circuitously, to the modernist/post-modernist issue that Wylie and Harding and, less directly, Code, discuss. Can there be anything like a feminist emancipatory social science or critical social theory that could make it plain, against post-modernist scepticism of grand theory, that factual claims—albeit interpretive factual claims—of that scope can be justifiably asserted? Jaggar's essay is a clear and forceful articulation of a modernist account as is her masterful *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*. (A modernist account need not—and indeed should not—be monocausal, reductionist or believe that there is just one thing that explains sexism or exploitation.) Such a critical theory is an account relying on (though surely developing from) the central ideals and intellectual commitments of the enlight-

¹⁵ Okin, 'Justice and Gender,' 71. See her argument 69–72.

enment. Harding's account, by contrast, is more wary about modernism and is concerned to face the fact that influential 'post-modern tendencies question the viability of the enlightenment projects on which feminist science critiques depend.'

What we think should be believed here is clearly very relevant to what we think about the form feminist social science and feminist thought about ethics should take. Integral, for example, to Okin's feminist modification and rational reconstruction of Rawls's autonomy-respecting egalitarian principles of justice are the following three factual claims.

1 In 'a gender-structured society, women's and men's different life experiences in fact affect their respective psychologies, modes of thinking, and patterns of moral development in significant ways.'¹⁶

2 The 'experience of individuation—of separating oneself from the nurturer with whom one is originally psychologically fused—is a very different experience for girls, than for boys, leaving the members of each sex with a different perception of themselves and of their relations with others.'¹⁷

3 The 'experience of *being* primary nurturers (and of growing up with this expectation) also affects the psychological and moral perspective of women, as does the experience of growing up in a society in which members of one's sex are in many respects subordinate to the other.'¹⁸

It is, however, post-modernist scepticism about grand theories (totalizing theories) that makes us *holus bolus* sceptical of claims of such scope—sceptical of any claim not just these or similar feminist claims. Yet it would appear at least to be the case that the making

16 Ibid., 60

17 Ibid., 70

18 Ibid.

and sustaining of some *such* claims is essential for the feminist project. Yet Wylie and Harding (as do Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson as well) take post-modernism very seriously indeed, but they are, that notwithstanding, as much as Jaggar and Okin, concerned to defend and develop the feminist project (if we can indeed speak of it so monolithically).¹⁹ They all believe that feminist social science can and should be both emancipatory and give explanatory and interpretive accounts of macrostructures and institutions. They further believe that it can and should give accounts of large scale social change and of the roles of ideology in social life. Things need not be as local and practice-oriented as Jean-Francois Lyotard believes. Yet how are we to meet post-modernist scepticism here?

Let us see if in Harding's and Wylie's essays we can find a way or at least a hint at a way out of the swamp. Wylie notes that secondorder philosophical reflection on the import of feminist disciplinespecific critiques of a given science (e.g. sexist bias in anthropological research) has revealed that even after obvious biases were corrected for it remained the case that not infrequently 'highly competent and conscientious empirical research . . . consistently failed to expose sexist bias.' It was only when a feminist critical approach was brought to bear on the topic that the bias introduced into science by social and political factors was brought out in the scientific research. Here the scientific method seemed at least not to be selfcorrecting.

A concomitant post-modernist worry is over the status of the new critical perspective. Is it self-correcting? How critical and how objective is that perspective and on what is its critical stance and content based? This worry is particularly acute if there is nothing of a factual sort—and thus at least potentially scientific—on which to base that critique. Ideology can be Janus-faced and Hydra-headed. Moreover, if such critiques and meta-critiques expose ideological bias in science, raise questions about the scientific enterprise itself and

¹⁹ Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson, 'Criticism Without Philosophy: An Encounter Between Feminism and Postmodernism' presented at the Eastern Division of the *American Philosophical Association* (Boston, December 1986).

the meta-critiques raise questions about both the warrantability of the first-order critiques themselves and their own status, we are left in such a circumstance in perplexity about whether Okin's theoretically ramified factual claims or any such claims could justifiably be believed to be true or approximately true or (if truth is thought to be a Holmesless Watson) warrantably assertable. So in this way postmodernist worries about science insinuate themselves into at least some programs for a feminist ethics and for an emancipatory social theory.

Standpoint theorists (including feminist standpoint theorists) stress, as Wylie brings out, that social context and one's position in it are relevant to all science, typical or abnormal, good, bad and indifferent. Feminist theorists working from that perspective are dedicated, as Wylie puts it, in a way that fits with modernism rather than post-modernist scepticism, 'to achieving a fuller, more accurate understanding of women's experience and of women's status and roles within encompassing social contexts.' (Jaggar's work is a powerful exemplification of this.) This presupposes that there are some facts of the matter that we can come to understand more or less accurately and that is, as again Wylie puts it, 'a variant of the enlightenment ideal of producing a unitary, authoritative conception of reality.'

Post-modernist critics, including some feminist critics, have responded that a belief in such unitary objective standpoints is a myth. Women's experiences from different classes, cultures and races are too varied for it to be the case that there is a distinctive women's standpoint. We simply have no Archimedean point 'to adjudicate between knowledge claims originating in different contexts or of establishing a unitary theory that is valid across contexts.' Just as there is no significant universalizability across contexts so there is no significant truth across contexts. Justified generalizations (platitudes apart) always have a narrower scope.

To this it might in turn be responded that wherever the gendersystem exists (and it is monotonously ubiquitous in all societies up to the present) there is underlying the diversity of women's experience in different situations some deeply embedded similarities that give some substance to the claim of a distinctive women's standpoint. Put crudely, it is true that in all societies women of all classes

and strata are in one degree or another, and in one way or another, disadvantaged compared to their male counterparts. The life chances women have and the activities they can engage in are in all societies and among all classes disproportionately narrower than those of men and what they do and their very life roles are everywhere systematically devalued relative to the activities that males engage in in the same society. This is culturally universal. As Dorothy Smith puts it, women everywhere, everywhen find themselves in subdominant gender defined positions. This is not just a grand metanarrative of some speculative theory of culture but a rather general empirical claim whose probable truth or falsity appears to be at least weakly empirically testable in a tolerably straightforward way.

Still there are sharp conflicts between modernist critiques and post-modernist critiques and this is important for feminist theory, for, as Harding points out, the 'post-modern tendencies question the viability of the enlightenment project on which the feminist science critiques depend.' Yet, as Wylie points out, Harding, her wariness here notwithstanding, finally comes down to defending a nuanced and sophisticated enlightenment theory seeking to gain a 'unified field theory' which has both an emancipatory intent and seeks to comprehend the often conflicting experiences of individuals occupying a not inconsiderable variety of standpoints. Nonetheless, as I have remarked, there remains an acknowledged ambivalence in Harding's account. She is one with the postmodernists and earlier positivists in rejecting totalizing theories or grand theories or any belief in a 'stable, coherent "master theory."' Believing in such things, in her view, is on a par with defending foundationalism or going on the quest for certainty. She with postmodernists such as Rorty realizes there are no neutral or perspectiveless descriptions of the world and with that they give up any belief that there is or can be any one-true-story-about-reality-account of the world. However, she does not draw relativistic or Feyerabendish 'anything goes' conclusions from the acceptance of these characteristic post-modern beliefs. 'While there is not and cannot be,' as she pithily puts it, 'one true story of reality, some claims are empirically less defensible than others.' But Harding does not at all waffle about rejecting arbitrarily universalizing theories which make

claims to unity, comprehensiveness and coherence beyond anything we are in a position to claim or in any way empirically corroborate.

Post-modernists make us see that there are many at least apparent incoherencies in modern thought. At times there may be incoherencies or at least apparent incoherencies we do not know how to resolve. We find ourselves in a situation where we have good reasons for holding on to both of two beliefs that we cannot at a given time see how to consistently put together. The reasonable thing to do for a time might be to just tolerate that at least apparent incoherency. It may also be the case that we may never be able to achieve an overarching theory of the scope that, say, Habermas seeks. But the implausibility of such a quasi-totalizing theory (if indeed it is implausible) does not make it the case that there cannot be gained increasingly more coherent and comprehensive theories which ever more adequately meet the test of experience and reflective examination. There do not appear to be any a priori limits here and to seek for ever more coherent and comprehensive theories is, as Wylie points out, a reasonable regulative ideal. To proceed in the way characterized above is not to be committed to a rationalism or intellectualism that is blind to the complexities of experience.

I take Harding's point that both feminist science critiques and postmodernist critiques have much to offer. For an understanding of our condition and for an understanding of what can be done and what is to be done to achieve our liberation, we need, as Harding puts it, a 'full appreciation of the tensions and contradictions between the two projects.' Yet even to speak of *our* human condition so monolithically in the face of the great diversity of life experiences of so many different peoples in so many different conditions may be a bit of romantic ethnocentrism lingering on in modernism.

All the above notwithstanding, I remain inclined to believe that things do not balance out all that evenly. Perhaps I am too much a child of the enlightenment, but it does not seem to me unreasonable to work on the assumption—the rebuttable assumption—that feminist science critiques or at least feminist critical theory, without falling prey to foundationalist or essentialist assumptions, can capture within its scope the insights of post-modernism, correct for postmodernism's overstatements and errors and present a more adequate social theory, fallibilistic and pragmatic, with a better guide

for emancipatory human practice than we find in post-modernism. Moreover, it can do this without the telling of just so stories or making any claim that there is a one true view of reality.

Harding rightly alludes to the fact that the epistemological turn cannot provide foundations for a critical feminist theory. But we might very well have critical feminist theory without such philosophical foundations. Perhaps what we need is social criticism, and perhaps fairly systematic social criticism at that, without philosophy.²⁰ Still, it is not just Rorty and Lyotard who reject taking such an epistemological perspective but the pragmatists before them and they in some sense did philosophy, though it should not be forgotten that not a few traditional philosophers thought that whatever it was that Dewey was doing, it was not philosophy. Yet, whatever we may say about that, I think it is fair enough to say that there is no need at all for feminists 'to make the results of feminist inquiry respectable from the perspective of traditional epistemologies.' Powerful cases have been made by anti-foundationalists (including post-modernists) that such traditional epistemologies actually block inquiry, are of a problematic coherence and have no corner on what our understanding of objective inquiry and critique should come to. They are too discredited to have any authority as guardians of culture.

However, free from this 'foundationalist epistemological hold' one can see how political goals might reasonably guide inquiry and could enhance its objectivity rather than diminish it. We can say, however, that political goals can, do and should guide inquiry while remaining one with Max Weber in denying they can be used to corroborate or test the truth of the claims we make on the basis of that valueguided inquiry. Neither our goals nor our wants can determine what is the case, though what categories and conceptions we use in describing what is the case are not immune from such influences and they may not be any the worse for all of that.

At the beginning of this section, I gave three theoretically rami-

²⁰ Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson, "Criticism Without Philosophy:" An En-counter Between Feminism and Postmodernism.'

fled factual claims of Okin that seemed to me at least reasonable claims of very considerable interest to feminists and, as well, reasonable candidates for claims that are true or approximately true. And when we say that about them we do not mean to be claiming they are 'true for me' or 'true from a certain standpoint' (say from a woman's standpoint) but true period, though some—in some instances women—might be in a much better position to realize or appreciate that they are true than are others. (And to say this, as Rorty is fond of pointing out, requires no commitment to any particular analysis of 'truth' at all.) Exactly the same thing needs to be said of two key theoretical cum-factual claims made by Harding:

- 1 There is a close-to universal male dominance of human beliefs and behaviour and belief systems in all societies.
- 2 There are in societies such as our own false social science accounts used to justify a public policy 'that is not only sexist but usually also racist and bourgeois in the sense that it oppresses women differently and worse who are not white and/or not rich.'

I think (perhaps mistakenly) that these statements are factual statements and that they are true and I think Harding thinks that too. But when we think that we do not think they are true just from the standpoint of women or from a Marxist perspective but we think they are true *sans phrase*. Moreover, these putative truths are (if true) important truths, as are Okin's previously quoted statements. It is also of some not inconsiderable moment for feminists that these statements be reasonable approximations of the truth. That is, it is important that they be true and that (if they are) they be reasonably believed to be true and that we develop political strategies around them or at least in accordance with them.

What a good feminist theory needs to do is to assert in a perspicuous representation a cluster of factual claims, such as the three claims I have taken from Okin and the two I have taken from Harding. Then, where clarification has some practical point, it should go on to clarify them, to show, where evidence is needed, the evidence for their truth, draw inferences from them and, set them,

where this is feasible, in a coherent and comprehensive theory (or some approximations thereto) which has as an integral part a normative side which makes a normative critique, argumentatively backed, on the basis of such factual claims put in their proper interpretive setting. So construed such a theory is at one and the same time descriptive, interpretive, explanatory and normative, though we need not, and indeed should not, try to run these conceptions together or try to reduce one to another. A critical theory is just internally complex in doing all these distinct jobs.

A feminist critical theory attempts to describe our human condition, including, of course, the condition of women, to explain, if possible, why it is as it is and to show how, if it can, the gendersystem can be broken so that women and men can attain emancipation and gain a greater human flourishing.²¹

Can post-modernists give us compelling reasons for abandoning such an account or for modifying it? The above are indeed versions of enlightenment beliefs but so what? What reasons have we for believing that they are mistaken? There seem to be no *a priori* road blocks here. No doubt we should be wary of such claims, particularly when they have an extended scope, and look for evidence to back them up but why should we just claim, particularly prior to a sustained investigation, with a fine show of cultural pessimism, that we cannot know or justifiably believe that any such things are true or even could be true?

Harding and Wylie have pointed to the fact that it appears at least to be the case that the scientific method is not a method which is self-correcting. And this, if it turns out on further examination to be firmly so, dashes great hopes and expectations of the positivists and pragmatists and with it a very central element in their programmes would be undermined. I want to suggest that even if

²¹ Even if it is too totalizing to speak of the human condition of women or of the gender-system, we can limit our generalizations to generalizations about the condition of women across classes and strata in modernizing societies such as our own. Such generalizations limited in scope as they are could be both theoretically interesting and have an emancipatory wallop in modernizing societies.

this is so about scientific method perhaps a determined but reflective and reflexive use of what has come to be called wide reflective equilibrium might give us a way out of the yellow wood. A central reason why scientific method seems not to be self-correcting or (put more minimally) sufficiently self-correcting is that it has no way of incorporating political and other social and moral standpoints into its account in the requisite way or of adjusting for ideological factors. Wide reflective equilibrium, by contrast, can do those things. First articulated by Goodman and Quine (though not under that name), utilized quite self-consciously by Rawls and by the feminist philosophers Jane English and Marsha Hanen and extensively refined and developed for ethics by Norman Daniels and recently given a more general application by Hilary Putnam and Richard Rorty, this method is a thoroughly coherentist, fallibilist and antifoundationalist way of going about things.²² Its starting points in considered judgments will be in varying degrees ethnocentric (what else can they be) but it provides us with a method such that the always provisional, always for a time, *endpoints* need not be ethnocentric or ideological. We, in the by now perhaps overused metaphor, are constantly rebuilding the ship at sea. There neither is nor can be a God's eye view of reality where we can escape hav-

22 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 19–21, 48–51, 577–87; Rawls, 'The Independence of Moral Theory,' in *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 47 (1974/5) 7–10; Rawls, 'The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus,' *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 7 (1987) 1–25; Jane English, 'Ethics and Science,' *Proceedings of the XVI Congress of Philosophy*; Marsha Hanen, 'Justification as Coherence' in M.A. Stewart, ed., *Law, Morality and Rights* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: D. Reidel 1983), 67–92; Norman Daniels, 'Wide Reflective Equilibrium and Theory Acceptance in Ethics,' *The Journal of Philosophy* 76 (1979); 'Some Methods of Ethics and Linguistics,' *Philosophical Studies* 37 (1980); 'Moral Theory and the Plasticity of Persons,' *The Monist* 62 (1979); 'Reflective Equilibrium and Archimedean Points,' *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 10 (March 1980); 'Two Approaches to Theory Acceptance in Ethics,' David Copp and David Zimmerman, eds., *Morality, Reason and Truth* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld 1985); Hilary Putnam, *Realism and Reason* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 1983) 229–47; and Richard Rorty, 'The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy' in Meryl Patterson and Robert Vaughan, eds., *The Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 1987).

ing some perspective or other and just see things as they are under the one true description. But historicism and contextualism need not add up to relativism or nihilism. We can have a standpoint theory without relativism or anarchism and this, I think, is exactly what Harding and Wylie want.

Post-modernist wariness will lead us to wonder whether we are trying to get a philosophical fix here—an anti-foundationalism still hankering after what only foundationalism could provide. And such wariness is to the point. It will hardly be the first time this has happened in philosophy and it surely is true that a methodology will be just such a fix if it proceeds without scepticism, is not concerned with specific studies, concrete genealogies and narratives and does not rely repeatedly on our collective reflective good sense. (Rorty's scorn of talk of conceptual foundations is surely understandable.) But perhaps we humans will sometimes use our collective good sense and perhaps wide reflective equilibrium abstractly depicts something of what it is to do so. Perhaps it is the underlying methodology of a fallibilistic non-rationalistic modernism that has taken to heart post-modernism's salient lessons.

VI

Marsha Hanen in her introduction has pointed out rightly that feminist theory should not be construed just as a political theory guiding or attempting to guide political practice. This volume surely illustrates and confirms Hanen's claim. There are contributions to what has come to be called applied ethics, to ethical theory, to a critique of moral methodology, critical examinations of some major contemporary moral philosophers, contributions to social theory, the philosophy of science, to ideology-critique, examinations of

23 If that is a persuasive definition make the most of it. Not all persuasive definitions, as C.L. Stevenson well argued, need be bad. See C.L. Stevenson, *Ethics and Language* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 1944), Chapters IX and XIII.

epistemology and contributions to meta-philosophy. To claim that feminist theory reduces to political theory is plainly a mistake.

And yet—there is always a 'yet' in philosophy—the heart of feminist theory, the underlying rationale for its being, is broadly speaking political. As the underlying rationale for Marxist theory is its functioning as an instrument in our struggle for emancipation from class society so the *raison d'être* of feminist theory is in its capacity to serve as a guide in the struggle for women's liberation and more generally our emancipation as women and men from a gendered world. Genderlessness is to feminist theory what classlessness is to Marxist theory and they can be consistently combined in a struggle for both, though there will, of course, be questions (sometimes difficult tactical and strategic questions) about which, if either, has priority.

The activities mentioned in the first paragraph of this section are in large measure at least weapons of a theory for woman's liberation. They are part of its theoretical practice. I do not think that Hanen means to deny this or underplay it and, unless I misread their intentions, I think this is understood and assented to by the contributors to this volume. In feminist theory, even pessimistic feminist theory, there needs to be a unity of theory and practice. The point is not just to understand the condition of women but to change it, where changing it has a chance of being emancipatory, and in changing it to, at least most feminists would say, change the condition of both women and men.

A weakness of this volume—or so it seems to me—is that there is not more political writing in it, including strategic theory and whatever kind of political theory is needed in support of it. A related weakness, or at least a lacunae, is the absence of work dealing with the relation of Marxism to feminism. (It is in part compensated for by the extensive discussions of this in the literature.)

It is my view that a feminist critical theory of the scope and type characterized in the previous section would fit well with Marxism. Indeed I would think that Marxist theory and a feminist critical theory properly distancing itself from post-modernism would find themselves complementary allies and not opponents or rivals. Each makes up for the other's deficiencies. Combined they provide an impressive framework. We need, to put it crudely and oversimply,

a liberation (if we can get it) from both a gendered society and a class society and, or so it seems to me, we need a reasonably unified theory to guide us in our liberation struggles. We do not theorize here just for the fun of it or just for its intrinsic interest.

Given the depth and pervasiveness of female subordination to males and by males, a critical theory in our time must be a critical feminist theory of society. (That, of course, does not mean that is all it must be.) A putatively critical theory which is not also a feminist theory simply does not have the self-consciousness to be a genuinely critical theory.

What scope our critical theory can attain cannot be determined a priori and independently of the actual nature of the problems of our age and its intellectual resources, though we can, starting from what we have, forge new intellectual resources. We will have both to see what we need and what we can get as we resolutely confront actual problems that well up in our lives (including the lives of poor and uneducated people of colour and particularly women of colour whose conditions of life are very different from most, if not all, of the people who will read this volume). If we are going to have anything like a genuinely critical theory we can rule out from the start in thinking about scope and explanatory and critical power the extremes. That is we should rule out totalizing theories that are grand speculative philosophies, à la Hegel and Spengler, of history and (at the other extreme) the limitations to the restrictive localizations of Lyotard or Derrida. But in between the field is wide open and will, I believe, be determined, if there is to be a reasonable determination, by pragmatic considerations. And these pragmatic considerations will have in part a profoundly moral and political character rooted very deeply in our hopes and sympathies, though these in turn are, where non-Quixotic, chastened by what we think is possible and what we take to be inescapable and, of course, here, as Exdell's essay poignantly shows, by what we think is likely to be, but perhaps need not be, deeply ideologically distorted. Here again, seeing the desirability of seeking a wide reflective equilibrium is vital.

In this general context, Nancy Fraser's picture of what a genuinely critical theory should be is illuminating.

A critical social theory frames its research program and its conceptual framework with an eye to the aims and activities of those oppositional social movements with which it has a partisan though not uncritical identification. The questions it asks and the models it designs are informed by that identification and interest. Thus, for example, if struggles contesting the subordination of women figured among the most significant of a given age, then a critical social theory for that time would aim, among other things, to shed light on the character and bases of such subordination. It would employ categories and explanatory models which revealed rather than occluded relations of male dominance and female subordination. And it would demystify as ideological rival approaches which obfuscated or rationalized those relations. In this situation, then, one of the standards for assessing a critical theory, once it has been subjected to all the usual tests of empirical adequacy, would be: How well does it theorize the situation and prospects of the feminist movement? To what extent does it serve the self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of contemporary women?²⁴

The essays collected together here have not, as I have remarked, been of a direct political character but they are indirectly political and importantly critical. They meet, in revealing and diverse ways, Fraser's criteria for a genuinely critical theory. In this way they, taken together, make an incisive contribution to the development of feminist theory and in doing so to human emancipation. In this way they are thoroughly political. It is certainly not the intent of the critical queries I have raised about some of those essays to obscure that vital contribution: a contribution which, while being a contribution to our understanding, is not just a contribution to our understanding.²⁵

24 Nancy Fraser, 'What's Critical About Critical Theory? The Case of Habermas and Gender,' 97

25 I am grateful to Russell Cornett and Marsha Hanen for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay.