CHAPTER - II

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Feminist philosophers criticise both the historical exclusion of women from the philosophical tradition, and the negative characterization of women or the feminine in it. Alison Jaggar \(^1\) perhaps best summarizes the feminist position in ethical speculation as it developed during the 20th century, asserting that traditional Western ethics failed in assessing women in five inter-related ways. First, this body of ethical speculation has demonstrated little concern for women’s as opposed to men’s interests and rights. Second, traditional Western ethics dismissed as ethically uninteresting the problems arising in the “private world,” the realm, in which women cook, clean, and care for the young, the aged, and the sick. Third, this body of thought implies (at a minimum) that, on the average, women are not as ethically developed as men. Fourth, traditional Western ethics prizes culturally masculine traits (e.g., independence and autonomy, mind and rationality, culture and transcendence, war and death) and exhibits little regard for culturally feminine traits (e.g., interdependence and community, body and emotion, nature and immanence, peace and life). Fifth, this body of ethical speculation favours culturally masculine approaches to ethical reasoning which emphasize rules, universality, and impartiality over culturally feminine ways of ethical reasoning which emphasize relationships, particularity, and partiality. Jaggar’s position directly hits at the traditional Western ethics.
Since most feminist ethics is done in a Western context, it is Western ethics, particularly (though not exclusively) the European Enlightenment tradition, that has been the most frequent target of feminist critique. Many of the major theorists, such as Plato, Aristotle and Rousseau are accused of having given insufficient consideration to women’s interests, a lack of concern expressed theoretically by their prescribing for women allegedly feminine virtues such as obedience, silence, and faithfulness. Some feminists charge that many contemporary ethical discussions continue the tendency to regard women as instrumental to male-dominated Institutions, such as the family or the state. Women are said to have been ignored by modern moral philosophers, who have tended to portray the domestic realm as an arena outside the economy and beyond justice and legitimate political regulation. Even philosophers like Aristotle or Hegel, who give some ethical importance to the domestic realm, have tended to portray the home as an arena in which the standard human excellence cannot be realized. Feminist philosophers began by criticizing this conceptual bifurcation of social life. Women’s moral agency is said to have often been denied, not simply by exclusion of women from moral debate or ignoring their contributions, but through philosophical claims to the effect that women lack moral reason. Such claims were made originally by Aristotle, but they have been elaborated and refined by modern theorists such as Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Freud and Schopenhauer. Even Philosophers like Augustine and Aquinas also focused directly on the relationship of women’s to their intellectual and moral inferiority.

In the moral accounts provided in the traditional ethics human nature is understood as essentially rational and male centered. It is said that woman can not be as rational as men since their nature restricts them to the world of emotion or passion only and not to reason. If they are not rational they can not be moral agents too.

Western moral theory is said to embody values that are "masculine," in so
far as they are culturally associated with men. Such associations may be empirical, normative, or symbolic. For instance, Western ethics is alleged to prioritize the supposedly masculine values of independence, autonomy, intellect, will, wariness, hierarchy, domination, culture, transcendence, product, asceticism, war, and death over the supposedly feminine values of interdependence, community, connection, sharing, emotion, body, and trust, absence of hierarchy, nature, immanence, process, joy, peace, and life. Traditional moral philosophers normally identify the categories associated with the male side within the philosophical tradition as superior to those associated with the female. Standard examples of this binary conceptual hierarchy include the following culture/nature; mind/body; form/matter; reason/emotion; universal/particular; transcendent/immanent; ideal/real; truth/opinion; absolute/relative. Men are associated with that which is self-determining, spiritual and rational. Women are associated with that which is natural, uncontrollable, and irrational. These are the characteristics which, since Plato, have been identified as the opposite of those associated with capacity to do philosophy.

A big part of Plato’s works is devoted to the distinction between soul and body, the body being seen as inferior and as a hindrance to the ambitions of the soul. In the *Apology* he urges philosophers to abandon the needs of the body as much as possible to allow for growth of the soul and a promising afterlife. In the realm of Pythagorean ideas men are seen as the opposite of women, the men being of a spiritual nature and the women of a material nature. Indeed women are seen, especially in the areas of reproduction and child rearing, as having more of a connection and dependence of a bodily nature. Men, in this method of thought would be seen as being more connected to the soul and things of a spiritual nature. Plato embraced this idea, as did many of his contemporaries. Plato went so far as to say that men and women have different types of souls and a female body may not necessarily contain a female soul. He went on to explain that a soldier who is more concerned with protecting his body than fighting has a more body-centered
soul and will return to life as a woman. Conversely, a woman who displays skills of a philosophical nature and cares not for things of the body will re-enter life as a man.  

The notion that life in a female body is punishment for cowardice is a hard one to swallow and begins to break down Plato’s heroism as a pioneer for feminists. It begins to seem as though Plato is saying that the ultimate goal for any person is manliness, but it is possible for a soul in a female body to achieve it. He also says that the soul being in a male body does not automatically infer the desired quality of soul. It appears that Plato is using the term man and woman in such a manner that they no longer concern the gender of the body. He suggests that “female” refers to someone who is connected to the world on a bodily level, and “male” is someone who has risen above to a higher philosophical level. In essence, anyone can be either female or male, depending on his or her nature. On the other hand Plato does maintain the principle of gender dualism in the sense that he argues that whatever woman can do, men can do better, which suggests that men in general have greater reasoning and spirited elements than women.

As compared to Plato, Aristotle was far less sympathetic to women. He described women as having lack of reason to determine the Good and therefore obligated to be obedient to achieve virtue. He held the view that women, as being was the physical opposite to the spiritual male. He claimed that women were merely passive receptacles who bore and nurtured the life created by the semen supplied by the spiritual male. He shared Plato’s notion that women are the opposite of men and connected to the body, but not his belief that there was potential for growth beyond that state. He described women as “children who never grew up.”

For Aristotle women were inferior creatures to men. He argued that women were ‘incomplete’ men, because they did not reproduce semen, which supposedly contained a whole human being, woman ‘is as it were an infertile male’ (Generation
of Animals, I, 728 a). ‘A male is male in virtue of a particular ability, and a female in virtue of a particular inability’ (Generation of Animals, I, 82f). Furthermore, he argued that women were of only instrumental value. Aristotle’s arguments were later picked up by Thomas Aquinas, a Christian philosopher. According to Aristotle, man rightly takes charge over woman, because he commands superior intelligence. This will also profit the woman who depends on him. He says that “nature has distinguished between the female and the slave”— so women are not slaves. However, they are normally subordinate to men. It seems that he wants to say that men and women are by nature unequal, like citizens in a constitutional regime. Aristotle also makes a distinction within the reason. One part of the soul is reasonable in the sense that it deliberates, reasons, and draws conclusions — he sometimes calls this the deliberative faculty; another part of the soul is reasonable in the sense that it is persuadable by reasoning. The emotions are persuadable. It is possible to reason someone into a different state of feeling; it is sometimes possible to reason oneself into a different state of feeling — to reduce fear, for example, by reflecting on the real facts about the apparent dangers or by reflecting on the importance and value of what it is one has to do in the face of real dangers. Corresponding to the two reasonable parts of the soul there are two sets of virtues: there are intellectual virtues, virtues of the reasoning or deliberative faculty, and there are moral virtues, virtues of the persuadable part, the part of the soul that is capable of being influenced by reasoning. Courage, for example, is a moral virtue that consists in the responsiveness of one’s fears to reasoning. How does this distinction between parts of the soul and kinds of virtue resolve the questions whether slaves and women can have virtues and if so why should they always be subordinate, though in different ways, to free men? Aristotle’s answer seems to be that slaves can have only the virtues belonging to the part of the soul that is influenced by reasoning, while women can also have the intellectual virtues, but in a subordinate way. He concludes that all human beings including slaves have moral virtue, that free men and women have intellectual virtue also, but that in women the moral
and intellectual virtues are marked by subordination.®

Cynthia Freeland's utterances may be recalled here: "Aristotle says that the courage of a man lies in commanding, a woman's lies in obeying; that matter yearns for form, as the female for the male and the ugly for the beautiful; that women have fewer teeth than men; that a female is an incomplete male or as it were, a deformity which contributes only matter and not form to the generation of offspring; that in general a woman is perhaps an inferior being that female characters in a tragedy will be inappropriate if they are too brave or too clever."®

Ferguson holds more or less a similar view. As she states: "Aristotle takes reproductive differences to be essential differences between the sexes,. . . . his theory of biological reproduction maintains that the principle of life and of individuation is the rational, formal, male principle contributed by the sperm, while the female contributes only the matter of the fetus, composed of her menstrual blood. Clearly here, the male is identified with the rational and with the mental principle of the general type of thing to be produced, while the female is identified with the irrational and with the physical principle of shapeless 'stuff' out of which the fetus is made...”®

If we consider Aristotle's theory of hylomorphism we find a connection between form and being male, and matter and being female. That is, we find that matter and form are gendered notions in Aristotle. Most of Aristotelian theory from metaphysics and philosophy of mind to biology and literary theory, it looks as if his supposedly universal and objective theories are gendered, and it looks as if his negative characterization of women tarnishes his philosophical theories. Several feminist philosophers have developed this thesis. For example, in "Woman Is Not a Rational Animal", Lynda Lange argues that Aristotle's theory of sex difference is implicated in every piece of Aristotle's metaphysical jargon, and she concludes that "it is not at all clear that it [Aristotle's theory of sex difference] can simply be cut away without any reflection on the status of the rest of the philosophy".®
Elizabeth Spelman has argued that Aristotle's politicized metaphysics is reflected in his theory of soul, which, in turn, is used to justify the subordination of women in the Politics. And, finally, Susan Okin has argued that Aristotle's functionalist theory of form was devised by Aristotle in order to legitimize the political status quo in Athens, including slavery and the inequality of women.

Aristotle's gender dualism and justification of male dominance became vastly influential in Western thought through its incorporation into Christian theology in the writings of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas in the Catholic Church. As Mary Daly pointed out in the Church and the Second sex, the confusion about whether men and women were not different species of being is referred in some medieval theological writings.

For many modern feminist theologians examining the role of women in the Catholic Church, Augustine has been a standard target for criticism. Some have blamed him for 1,000 years of sexism in the Catholic Church. Many modern feminist theologians have taken Augustine to task for his comment in De Trinitate and certain other statements that aroused the anger of feminists. As is argued for, the woman together with the man is the image of God, so that the whole substance is one image. But when her role is assigned as a helpmate, who pertains to her alone, she is not the image of God: however, in what pertains to man alone, is the image of God just as fully and completely as he is joined with the woman into one.

Thus Catholicism developed an even greater deprecatory gender dualism than ancient Greek society and an even stronger identification of woman with the body and the sins of the body, rather than sin with the virtues of reason and the soul.

Sometimes, as in the case of Descartes, the feminist argument in favour
of a gendered theory is subtle since, unlike Aristotle, he expresses both a personal and a theoretical commitment to equality. Further, his theories are not stated using gendered notions. Yet, some feminists have argued that his theory of mind-body dualism, and his abstract characterization of reason resonate with gender implications—on the assumption that women are emotional and bodily creatures. Haraway regards the impartial standpoint of traditional ethics as neither feasible nor desirable. The alternative she proposes is “a doctrine of embodied objectivity,” which involves partial, locatable, critical knowledge sustaining the possibility of webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology.”

Only through such partial perspectives, she claims, can we approach objectivity. Most obvious manifestations of masculine bias in Western moral philosophy have been frequent failures by philosophers working in that tradition to accord women’s interests equal weight with men’s. In the past, the moral priority assigned to men’s interests was often justified by denying that women were as fully or perfectly human as men; philosophers such as Aristotle, Aquinas, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche argued that women should serve and please men, since their capacity for reason was different from and inferior to men’s.

Several feminist writers have criticized Kant’s comments about the body, sexuality, and especially about women and women’s place in the family and in society. Barbara Herman (1993), describes Kant as “the modern moral philosopher feminists find most objectionable.” Furthermore, on a closer inspection, many of Kant’s particular conclusions about women seem to straightforwardly contradict conclusions he draws about the rights and duties of all human beings. How is it that Kant can argue that all human beings are naturally equal and free, and that nobody can give away this natural freedom and equality, nobody can enter into a contract that makes them cease to be their own master, yet also argue that a marriage can make the husband the master of his wife (“he the party to direct, she to obey”). How can Kant oppose people having special rights and privileges by
virtue of the status into which they are born, and argue that all human beings must have the ability to become active citizens (be able to vote), while automatically excluding all women from active citizenship, arguing that no woman—no matter how astute, financially and politically independent, rational or capable she is—can do what (at least in principle) the poorest and most dull-witted of male serfs and apprentices can do?

Kant claims that "the philosophy of women is not to reason, but to feel" that "the fair sex is hardly capable of principles". Kant's moral philosophy is well known as claiming that moral actions must be based on principle not sentiment, it would seem that these passages on women lead to the conclusion that women cannot be moral agents at all and thus are inferior to men.¹⁸

Kant laid down the principle of Universality for establishing Kingdom of Ends. He maintained the following view in The Fundamental Principles of Metaphysics of Morals: "That is practically good, however which determines the will by means of the conception of reason .... on principles which are valid for every rational being as such. It is distinguished from the pleasant as that which influences the will only by means of sensation from merely subjective causes, valid only for the sense of this or that one and not as a principle of reason which holds for every one."¹⁹

But in an early work of him he had maintained a just reverse thesis which provides the ideal target for feminist criticism because it contains both overt statements of sexism and racism, and a theoretical framework that can be interpreted along gender lines. In Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime, we find Kant arguing that women lack humanly essential characteristics and most clearly they lack the sort of moral agency which is characteristic of human nature (qua rational). Thus Kant writes, "Women will avoid wicked not because it is unright, but only because it is ugly.... Nothing of duty, nothing of compulsion, nothing of obligation..... They do something only because it pleases
them...I hardly believe that fair sex is capable of principles. Rather "Her Philosophy is not to reason, but to sense".

Fichte was also equally prejudiced in stating his view in *The Vocation Of Man*, "I must be free, for that which constitute our true worth is not the mere mechanical fact, but the free determination of free will for the sake of duty."

But who, when speaking of woman in *The Science of Rights* claims that "[she] is subjected through her own necessary wish – a wish which is the condition of her morality – to be so subjected."

Schopenhauer was, as a philosopher, a pessimist; he was a follower of Kant's Idealist school. He is also famous for his essay *On Women* (*Über die Weiber*), in which he expressed his opposition to what he called "Teutonico-Christian Stupidity" on female affairs. He claimed that "woman is by nature meant to obey". His biological analysis of the difference between the sexes, and their separate roles in the struggle for survival and reproduction, anticipates some of the claims that were later ventured by sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists in the twentieth century.

He upheld the view that women are directly adapted to act as the nurses and educators of human beings' early childhood, for the simple reason that they themselves are childish, foolish, and short-sighted – in a word, are big children all their lives, something intermediate between the child and the man, who is a man in the strict sense of the word. For Schopenhauer women lack essential human properties. He writes that: "Women is in every respect backward, lacking in reason and reflection... a kind of middle step between the child and the man, who is the true human being... In the last resort women exist solely for the propagation of the race." It is because women's reasoning powers are weaker that they show more sympathy for the unfortunate than men, and consequently take a kindlier interest in them. On the other hand, women are inferior to men in matters of
justice, honesty, and conscientiousness. Again, because their reasoning faculty is weak, things clearly visible and real, and belonging to the present, exercise a power over them which is rarely counteracted by abstract thoughts, fixed maxims, or firm resolutions, in general, by regard for the past and future or by consideration for what is absent and remote. Accordingly they have the first and principal qualities of virtue, but they lack the secondary qualities which are often a necessary instrument in developing it. Women may be compared in this respect to an organism that has a liver but no gall-bladder.

Schopenhauer believes that it will be found that the fundamental fault in the character of women is that they have no "sense of justice". This originates first and foremost in their want of rationality and capacity for reflection but it is strengthened by the fact that, as the weaker sex, they are driven to rely not on force but on cunningness. Women are guilty of perjury far more often than men. It is questionable whether they ought to be allowed to take an oath at all. That woman is by nature intended to obey is shown by the fact that every woman who is placed in the unnatural position of absolute independence at once attaches herself to some kind of man, by whom she is controlled and governed; this is because she requires a master.

In *Emile* — Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s celebrated treatise on education, he denied that women were social individuals in their own right, arguing that ‘woman was specifically made to please man’. For Rousseau, there are natural differences in the bodies of men and women. All other differences between men and women stem from this difference. Only man was the complete social individual. Women were made to please men and to be mastered by them. In these societies, men are more likely to acquire certain virtues. All aspects of culture are to be man made and women’s role is merely reproducing the conditions necessary for the continuation of culture. Women must not be like men, they must cultivate the peculiarly feminine virtues. They thus play a crucial role in maintaining the happiness of society. Men
have a greater possibility of being self-sufficient and independent than women do: they are naturally superior to women.

Rousseau believed that women had a specific purpose. He felt that men and women were different and should be encouraged to behave in certain ways. He felt that men should be “active and strong”. He thought that women should be “passive and weak”. Rousseau went on to say “they must be trained to bear the yoke from the first, so that they may not feel it, to master their own caprices and to submit themselves to the will of others.”

Rousseau’s view of women is riddled with stereotypes and prejudices about women. For him sex determines the entire nature and role of subject. “The male is only a male now and again, the female is always a female, or at least all her youth; everything reminds her of her sex.”

Rousseau begins with the obvious biological difference and creates more and more differences between men and women. He argues, “reason is more natural property of men than women ....”

Hegel, it is argued, understands woman as by nature destined to fulfil the role of passive embodiment and nurturer of family values, while her male counterpart assumes the challenge of progressively transcending natural immediacy, creating a cultural sphere of free moral action, of politics, art, science, religion and philosophy. Hegelian analysis of female virtue and potential is being grounded in a discredited biological essentialism. Women are capable of education, but they are not made for activities which demand a universal faculty such as the more advanced sciences, philosophy and certain forms of artistic production.... Women regulate their actions not by the demands of universality, but by arbitrary inclinations and opinions.

The great thinkers of nineteenth century Nietzsche, Freud and Sartre challenge the Enlightenment glorification of the sphere of universal reason. Though some aspects of their thought suggests a new valorization of women, ultimately the patriarchal elements of their theories reflect their attempts to challenge the idea that there are two spheres: reason, identified with men, and passion identified
In Freud’s time, and since his death, his views of women and femininity have stirred much controversy. Freud, himself, has been charged with viewing "...woman as a 'mutilated creature'. . ." and rejecting "...women as full human beings." 30

What do women really want? If that question were asked of Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, his answer would have been that they want to be wives and mothers. Psychoanalysis has been categorized as "...patriarchal and phallocentric." 31 The involvement of women in the development of psychoanalysis as a theory and a therapy can be seen as a sort-of paradox in light of the various charges of misogyny against Freud. For Freud, " Women in general will have less ability to control their impulses with reasoned moral principles. Lacking fear of castration of that most essential organ for mental health, the penis, women will lack the libidinal forces necessary to repress sexual desire and empowered by superego and thus will be unable to sustain the optimal balance between the forces of reason and desire," 32

Nietzsche believed that there was a radical difference between the mind of man and the mind of woman and that the two sexes reacted in diametrically different ways to those stimuli which make up what might be called the clinical picture of human society. It is the function of man, he said, to wield a sword in humanity's battle with everything that makes life on earth painful or precarious. It is the function of woman, not to fight herself, but to provide fresh warriors for the fray. Thus the exercise of the will to exist is divided between the two: the man seeking the welfare of the race as he actually sees it and the woman seeking the welfare of generations yet unborn. Of course, it is obvious that this division is by no means clearly marked, because the man, in struggling for power over his environment, necessarily improves the conditions under which his children live, and
the woman, working for her children, often benefits herself. But all the same the distinction is a good one and empiric observation bears it out. As everyone who has given a moment's thought to the subject well knows, a man's first concern in the world is to provide food and shelter for himself and his family, while a woman's foremost duty is to bear and rear children.

Nietzsche also points out that, in the racial economy, the place of woman may be compared to that of a slave-nation, while the position of man resembles that of a master-nation. Therefore, he argued that man should accept woman as a natural opponent arrayed against him for the benevolent purpose of stimulating him to constant efficiency. He argues that philosophers, motivated by a will to self mastery, creates a sphere of abstract contemplation, the world of ideas, which is beyond the everyday life of sensed experience, in order to control life. But in his treatment of women he remains clearly ambivalent. On the one hand he goes on romantically portraying women as somehow less abstracted from life and more in touch with its concrete meaning and on the other refers to women as weak and thus prone to the slave moralities of the weak. As such, associations of men with women represent a danger that the former will be infected with the slave morality of the latter.\textsuperscript{32}

Sartre, developing Nietzsche's thought also falls into misogyny when in passages in \textit{Being and Nothingness} he presents women as the other that tempts consciousness to bad faith. As Sartre says "The obscenity of the feminine sex is that of everything which 'gapes open'. It is an appeal to being as all holes are. In herself woman appeals to a strange flesh which is to transform her into fullness of being by penetration and dissolution."\textsuperscript{33}

Through numerous illustrations like those cited here one could easily visualise and assess the representation of women nature in the western philosophical traditions. Traditional ethicists hold that rationality is the dominant and essential
human characteristic of male while beauty or aesthetic sensibility that is a subordinate characteristic to reason is of female. Throughout the course of history rationality played a dominant role in social life and in the maintenance of civil society and political state. Because of which it became identified not only as the essential human trait but also by association as a male trait. As aesthetic sensitivity and intuition are treated as feminine characteristics, women are assigned to play subordinate role in social, political and moral life.

In the past, the moral priority assigned to men's interests was often justified by denying that women were as fully or perfectly human as men. Most of the philosophers (like Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Freud and Nietzsche) argued that women should serve and please men, since their capacity for reason was different from and inferior to men's. One reason for the continuing neglect of women's interests by most prominent Western moral philosophers is that many issues for women have been either ignored entirely or else defined as falling outside the domain of morality proper. Western philosophers have often justified their exclusion of these issues by appealing to a distinction between the supposedly public and private spheres of human activity. Different philosophers have drawn this distinction in varying places and according to varying criteria, but it has always had gendered connotations.

A second reason why women's interests still frequently fail to receive due weight is that Western moral philosophers tend to disregard the social realities of gender. “Gender” refers to the varying norms of masculinity and femininity that, in all known societies, regulate what biological males and females respectively are expected or permitted to do. Because gender norms assign systematically different privileges and responsibilities to males and females, social practices and policies that are formally gender-neutral may in practice have results that are disproportionately disadvantageous for one sex or the other. In response, feminist philosophers have criticized both the historical exclusion of women from the
philosophical tradition, and the negative characterization of women or the feminine in it.

Different trends of feminist moral philosophy criticise mainstream interpretations of moral concepts on the grounds that they are empirically misleading in ways that rationalize the subordination of women. The feminist moral philosophers contend that these conceptions are empirically inaccurate in ways that discredit women's capacity for moral reasoning. This pattern of argument is evident in feminist challenges to the traditional Western opposition between reason and emotion. Feminists have been responding to the traditional disparagement of women's moral agencies by arguing that woman are just as capable of moral rationality and autonomy as men. They have expanded the domain of moral philosophy to focus women's issues and their subjectivity, which were previously neglected. They have argued that the principles of justice should be applied to arenas traditionally conceptualized as private such as home. Feminist ethics rejects the claims traditionally made in mainstream ethics. It is committed to make ethics free from male biases and delegitimize women's subordination. It begins from the convictions that the subordination of women is morally wrong and that the moral experience of women is as worthy of respect as that of men.

REFERENCES


15. Ibid p. 62.


20. Ibid p, 212.

21. Ibid p,212.

22. Ibid p, 212.

23. Ibid p,212.

24. Ibid p,213.


29. Ibid P, 263.


32. Ibid p. 64.

33. Ibid p. 65.