

# DOWNLOAD PDF FEMINIST INTERPRETATIONS OF JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU (RE-READING THE CANON SERIES)

## Chapter 1 : Feminist Interpretations of Jean-Jacques Rousseau - Lynda Lange - Google Books

*A webpage for the book series Re-Reading the Canon published by Penn State University Press. This series consists of edited collections of essays, some original and some previously published, offering feminist re-interpretations of the writings of major figures in the Western philosophical tradition.*

Feminist Criticisms of the Canon as Misogynist 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. So, it is interesting to explore how and why feminist philosophers came to the realization that gender is a useful analytic category to apply to the history of philosophy. We can distinguish two aspects to this process although, in many cases, the two aspects merge into a single project. The first stage of realizing the importance of gender consisted of the cataloguing of the explicit misogyny of most of the canon. The second stage consisted of probing the theories of canonical philosophers in order to uncover the gender bias lurking in their supposedly universal theories. Let me illustrate these points with Aristotle. However dispiriting or annoying this litany is, and whatever problems it presents to a woman studying or teaching Aristotle, it can be argued that Aristotle simply held a mistaken view about women and their capacities as did most Athenians of his time. Here Aristotle is the chosen example, but similar feminist critiques are available chronicling the explicit misogyny of other canonical figures like Plato and Kant. That is, we find that matter and form are gendered notions in Aristotle Witt By a gendered notion we mean a notion that is connected either overtly or covertly, either explicitly or metaphorically with gender or sexual difference. And sincehylomorphism is the conceptual framework that underlies 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. If every composite substance is a complex of matter and form, then each would be a hermaphrodite, rather than a male or a female as is the case with animals. Moreover, whatever plausibility gender associations with matter and form might have with regard to animals, is lost entirely when we consider artifacts, like shoes and beds. Deslauriers Sometimes, as in the case of Descartes, the feminist argument in favor 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 implicationsâ€” on the assumption that women are emotional and bodily creatures e. Scheman ; Bordo ; Lloyd b, ch. The synoptic approach considers the Western philosophical tradition as a whole, and argues that its core concepts are gendered male. But, if this is so, then the Western philosophical tradition as a whole, and the central concepts that we have inherited from it, requires critical scrutiny by feminists. Feminist synoptic interpretations of the canon take several forms. From Aristotle to Hume, from Plato to Sartre, reason is associated with maleness. Therefore, the notion of reason that we have inherited, whether we are empiricists or existentialists, requires critical scrutiny. In other words, this story chronicles a turn in philosophy coincident with the rise of modern science, which generated ideals of reason and objectivity that are deeply antagonistic to women and feminism. It is important to note that Lloyd and Bordo differ not only with regard to the historical story they tell concerning the maleness of reason, but also with regard to the way they understand that maleness. For Lloyd, the maleness of reason is symbolic and metaphorical rather than cultural or psychological. Lloyd does not intend the maleness of reason to refer to either a socially constituted gender category or a psychological orientation shared by males. What she gains in flexibility, however, she loses in content, since it is difficult to specify exactly what metaphorical maleness is, and how it is related to psychological or social maleness. Other feminists have attempted to develop an account of how male metaphors and symbols undermine philosophical arguments Rooney For Bordo,

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however, the maleness of Cartesian reason is given both a social meaning and a psychological content. First, the social meaning of maleness: This social meaning is paired with a psychological consequence: However, unlike Bordo and Lloyd, Irigaray uses highly unconventional methods of interpreting canonical philosophical texts in order to uncover the ways in which the feminine or sexual difference is repressed in them. For example, Irigaray uses humor and parody rather than straightforward exegesis, and she points to instabilities contradictions in philosophical texts as symptoms of patriarchal thinking. According to Irigaray, patriarchal thinking attempts to achieve universality by repressing sexual difference. But, the presence of contradictions or instabilities in a philosophical text is symptomatic of the failure of patriarchal thinking to contain sexual difference. Does the feminist synoptic critical reading of the history of philosophy justify either the conclusion that traditional conceptions of reason ought to be flat-out rejected by feminists or the conclusion that traditional conceptions of reason ought to be subjected to critical scrutiny? Even if feminist historical arguments are successful in showing that philosophical norms like reason and objectivity are gendered male, this conclusion does not justify a flat-out rejection of either traditional philosophy or its norms of reason and objectivity Witt Recall the distinction introduced above between intrinsically and extrinsically gendered notions. An intrinsically gendered notion is one that necessarily carries implications regarding gender, i. In contrast, an extrinsically gendered notion typically does carry implications concerning gender, but not necessarily so. If the maleness of reason is extrinsic to the traditional concept of reason, then the historical fact that it was a gendered notion does not justify or require its rejection by feminists. If on the other hand, it can be shown that the maleness of reason is intrinsic to it, it still does not follow that reason ought to be rejected by feminists. For, the idea the reason is intrinsically male-biased would justify a rejection of it only if it ought to be other than it is. So, what needs to be argued is that reason and objectivity would be different, and better, if they were not gendered male, but were gender-neutral, gender-inclusive or female. But, if feminist philosophers develop this argument, which they need to buttress the historical argument, then they are reconceptualizing traditional notions of reason and objectivity rather than rejecting them. Even though the work that feminist philosophers have done to show the ways in which traditional conceptions of reason and objectivity are associated with maleness falls short of justifying their rejection, their work has been valuable in two respects. First, it has established that gender is associated with the central norms of philosophy, a conclusion that warrants attention from anyone attempting to understand our philosophical tradition. Second, the historical studies raise questions about reason and objectivity that are valuable areas of inquiry for contemporary philosophers. These women are not women on the fringes of philosophy, but philosophers on the fringes of history. It is a distinctive project because there is no comparable activity undertaken by other contemporary philosophical movements, for whom canon creation has been largely a process of selection from an already established list of male philosophers. It is a radical project because by uncovering a history of women philosophers, it has destroyed the alienating myth that philosophy was, and by implication is or ought to be, a male preserve. In *A History of Women Philosophers* Mary Ellen Waithe has documented at least 16 women philosophers in the classical world, 17 women philosophers from 1600-1800, and over 30 from 1800-1900. And, in the recent feminist series *Re-reading the Canon* seven of the thirty-five canonical philosophers are women: What is crucial to understand is that none of the three is canonical if by that you mean included in the history of philosophy as it is told in philosophy department curricula, in histories of philosophy, and in scholarly writing. Still, there has been progress. Consider that *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, published in 1967, which contains articles on over 1000 philosophers, did not include an entry for Wollstonecraft, Arendt or de Beauvoir. Far from being canonical, these women philosophers were scarcely even marginal, warranting perhaps a passing reference in a survey of existentialism or political philosophy, but little more. The project of retrieving women philosophers has a paradoxical relationship with contemporary feminist theory, however. On the one hand, it is clearly a feminist project; its originators were interested in establishing that women have been philosophers throughout the history of the discipline despite their routine omission from standard histories and encyclopedias of philosophy. However, the newly-recovered women philosophers suggest that

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there is little overlap among three groups: For most of the newly discovered women philosophers were not feminist thinkers nor did they write philosophy in a feminine voice, different from their male counterparts. Indeed, their breadth of philosophical interests is comparable to that of male philosophers although their domain of application sometimes differs. The women philosophers restored to the tradition by feminist hands are not all proto-feminists nor do they speak in a uniform, and different, voice from their male peers. Similarly, women philosophers who are candidates for initiation into the philosophical canon—like Mary Wollstonecraft, Hannah Arendt and Simone de Beauvoir—are a diverse crew. And while Wollstonecraft and de Beauvoir were both feminists, they share neither a common philosophical voice nor common philosophical principles. The diversity of women philosophers raises the question why their recovery or re-valuation is an important project for contemporary feminist theory. What the retrieval of women philosophers, and their inclusion in the philosophical canon has done is to challenge the myth that there are no women in the history of philosophy and the fallback position that if there are any women philosophers, they are unimportant. Lovers of wisdom that we all are, we all benefit from the correction of these mistaken beliefs. Moreover, as feminists, we are interested in correcting the effects of discrimination against women philosophers, who were written out of history, unfairly, because of their gender not their philosophical ideas. That self-image is created and maintained in part by a tacit historical justification. It is a damaging self-image for women philosophers today, and for women who aspire to be philosophers. The rediscovery of women philosophers raises the following question: How can women philosophers be rewoven into the history of philosophy so that they are an integral part of that history? Lisa Shapiro, considering the case of women philosophers in the early modern period, argues that it is not enough to simply add a woman philosopher or two to the reading list Shapiro Rather, according to Shapiro, we need to provide internal reasons for the inclusion of women philosophers rather than relying upon a feminist motivation on the part of the teacher or editor. The history of philosophy is a story and we need to find a plot line that includes new, female characters. One way to do this is to show how certain women philosophers made significant contributions to the work of male philosophers on central philosophical issues. It is a good strategy for several reasons: On the other hand, it reinforces the secondary status of women thinkers and if this were the only way of integrating women philosophers, that would be an unfortunate result. Not only does it reinforce a secondary, handmaiden role for Beauvoir, but it also promotes a distorted understanding and appreciation of her thought Simons Alternatively, we could find in the work of women philosophers issues that they have developed in a sequential fashion. The thread extends into the following century in the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Wollstonecraft. Since philosophers become canonical as part of a story anchored at one end by contemporary philosophical questions that are thought to be central, the task would be to make these questions ones that we turn to the tradition for help in answering. And, of course, these are precisely the central questions posed and discussed extensively by contemporary feminism. Thus, the idea is that as we pose new kinds of questions to the history of philosophy we will find in women philosophers an important, sequential discussion that we can securely thread into our curricula and textbooks. At this relatively early stage of the process of including women in the history of philosophy we need all to use all three strategies. There is nothing wrong with a purely external approach. By all means one should include a woman philosopher on a topic just to provide an indication that there are some interesting and important women working on a particular topic. Finally, it is important to ask new questions of the tradition, questions that might allow some women philosophers to play a starring role rather than a walk-on part. A Case Study From about the mids, there has been a concerted effort by scholars both to rehabilitate the works of early modern women philosophers and to integrate at least some of these women into the philosophical canon. These efforts illustrate how a range of different feminist approaches to the history of philosophy can be integrated together. While many contemporary philosophers have little knowledge of the women philosophers of the early modern period, there are in fact good historical records of these women and their works. This fact has made the doxographic task of retrieving these women thinkers a relatively straightforward one, even if labor intensive. It is worth considering the context in which these women were writing and what it suggests

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about their feminist methodology in the history of philosophy. Though anachronistic, it seems appropriate to characterize at least some of these women, along with some of their male contemporaries, as engaged in a feminist project. Many of these thinkers were self-consciously countering a recognized misogyny in philosophy but, insofar as they deployed philosophical methods, they would seem to reject the view that the problem was intrinsic to the discipline of philosophy itself. While the so-called querelle des femmes had been going on for centuries, the seventeenth century marked a turning point in the debate over the status of women as better or worse than men in virtue of their form or soul.

### Chapter 2 : Lynda Lange - Department of Philosophy - University of Toronto

*A progenitor of modern egalitarianism, communitarianism, and participatory democracy, Jean-Jacques Rousseau is a philosopher whose deep concern with the relationship between the domains of private domestic and public political life has made him especially interesting to feminist theorists, but also has made him very controversial.*

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