

technical aspects of key-grinding or lock-smithing. The major difficulty with Foucault's view is that he reverses this relationship. He writes as if we see and talk about doors, locks and keys in the way we do because of certain historical developments in the discourse and practice of locksmithing and key-grinding. In the allegory offered here, the difficulty with such a picture is immediately apparent: technical manuals and technical innovation in locksmithing and key-grinding presuppose the practice of locking and unlocking doors, and of forgetting one's key and getting locked out, and a host of related activities, for their very existence.

In the case of our notions of selfhood, the parallel situation is blurrier. There are, I believe, two reasons for this. The first is rather obvious: the uses of the notions of "key", "lock", and so forth are neither particularly plentiful nor especially complicated. This is not so in the case of the idea of "man" or "self" or "human being", because, quite simply, we are fundamentally more interested in our minds or souls than we are in locks and keys. We are more inclined to reflect upon what it is to be a "self" than what it is to be a "key"; this interest carries with it a willingness to ruminate upon the idea, and pose ourselves problems, in a way that only locksmiths are willing to do in the case of doorlocks. Foucault's invitation to his readers to think in terms of "technologies of the self" requires that we attend to our souls, or minds, or psyches, as the keygrinder approaches locks and keys. If our interest is in conceptual clarity and not theorizing for its own sake, however, the inversion of the relationship between intellectual or professional discourse and the vernacular is highly problematic. I believe that the confusion behind this inversion can be cleared up, once again, by taking a closer look at the differences between first and third person uses of certain kinds of words.

By way of example, let us take a look at an actual event that has bearing upon the question at hand. A local newspaper in central Sweden ran a front-page story about a farmer from the tiny hamlet of Dyviken who had a serious accident.⁹³ Anders Louthander was driving on a dirt road that gave way under the weight of his tractor, due to cracks in the road caused by melting ice. The tractor tum-

⁹³ *Södra Dalarnes Tidning*, 25 September, 1997.

bled upside-down into a deep ditch, landing on its rooftop, crushing Mr. Louthander against the steering-wheel. Mr. Louthander was trapped in the driver's seat, immobilized by the weight of the tractor upon him, for several hours before being discovered by his wife, who immediately telephoned an emergency rescue team. After several hours engagement in what seemed like an impossible task, Mr. Louthander was finally extricated from the tractor, and driven off to the emergency room of the local hospital. After weeks of lying in a hospital bed, covered in sores, casts and bandages and urinating blood, he was allowed to return home on the condition that he "take it easy". Upon his release, he was offered treatment for "post-traumatic distress". Mr. Louthander's response to the doctors was that, in the words of the reporter, "post-traumatic distress" was not a "feasible concept" in Dyviken.

There are two alternative readings of this response that immediately confront the reader, and they are diametrically opposed to one another. One common reading is that Mr. Louthander does not have the education and cultivation needed to realize that he might be having experiences that, medically speaking, fall under this heading. That is, whether consciously or not, he *must be* undergoing some sort of psychological crisis, whether or not he understands or recognizes its manifestations. But there is another possibility. The reporter's description might have been accurate. One could say that the concept of "post-traumatic distress" has no *use* in Dyviken; the villagers have no need for it.

What is interesting about this example is that, despite the many traditional ways of living that make up farm life in remote regions, it is clear that no one is immune from the intrusions of twentieth-century technological and social developments. Mr. Louthander, like all of his colleagues, was required to go to school until the ninth grade. One may safely assume that he watches television, reads the evening paper from time to time, uses the automatic teller to withdraw money from his savings account, and that his children own tomagachis, and so forth. This means that he has also been inundated with the medical, juridical and social discourse of modern life, and, presumably, has been affected by it. But since these intellectual discourses that characterize so much of contemporary urban life bear little if any relation to the exigencies and satisfactions of

his day to day life, he can see them as separate from himself. Many urban professionals, on the other hand, might well experience something like "post-traumatic distress" under similar circumstances precisely because of the role medical terminology plays in the daily lives of educated urbanites. Thus one might then think that this example serves as an illustration of Foucault's point, rather than as an argument against it. The point of the story, however, is that Mr. Louthander's distance from the discourse of contemporary psychology is *not* something that he *achieved* through theorizing, or even by some great effort of will. To the contrary, while he understood the words being spoken to him, he was equally capable of asserting that they were not an active or useful part of his vocabulary. Mr. Louthander did not "re-invent" himself, or "disengage himself from the disciplinary regime of medical psychology". He simply had no *use* for the notion of "post-traumatic distress".

Our objection to Foucault consists in this: most of us live in a world that resembles, in a number of crucial respects, the world of Anders Louthander. The difference is that we (as philosophers, or intellectuals) are inclined to think that just those elements of everyday life that are the same for a lawyer in New York and a farmer in Dyviken are irrelevant to philosophy: neither doubt that language will work for them in the morning as it did the night before; or that a red light will not suddenly mean go; that people will not start spitting at each other as a form of greeting, and so forth. And while it is possible to construe these facts in historical or cultural terms, these *post-facto* interpretations in no way jeopardize the facts that they interpret, anymore than they constitute them. While the scientific and professional discourses of modernity may influence what is possible to think scientifically or professionally, individual human experience is not thereby reduced to epiphenomenal functions on this theoretical matrix – even if one can see the historical formation and degeneration of certain concepts as a "structured field of knowledge" in which individual bits of experience might be located. To put the point more simply, the mere existence of a term or concept does *not* constrain us to use it, philosophical theories to the contrary notwithstanding.

Up to this point, we have used the tractor-accident example to illustrate two ways of looking at the patient's experience. Let us

now examine the doctor's perspective. We can imagine a case in which, weeks after the accident, the patient shows signs of what, from the medical point of view, could be called post-traumatic distress; he may have trouble sleeping, perhaps he feels lethargic, and unmotivated to perform the tasks that were previously second nature to him. In this case, we can say that the doctor has seen evidence of post-traumatic distress, whether or not the patient himself would describe it as such. Her observations of the patient's behavior can then be described as "evidence" or "grounds" for the diagnosis of post-traumatic distress. Another doctor might, on the other hand, have reason or grounds to doubt the accuracy of this judgment. Perhaps he interprets the insomnia and fatigue as indications that there was a head injury that had gone unnoticed, and should be attended to. But what would it mean to doubt the "accuracy" of the patient's reports that he is unusually lethargic and has trouble sleeping?

As we have shown earlier, it means nothing. It is not the case that the patient observes himself not milking the cows, not eating properly, and so forth, and therewith arrives at the conclusion that he is lethargic. The doctor may doubt the patient's *motives* for his complaints: perhaps the patient is fully recovered, but is hoping to receive government subsidies to hire help, for instance. Or the doctor may interpret these reports as expressions of a diffuse feeling of unhealth in general, as vague and uncertain descriptions of a general sense of malaise. The doctor's doubt does not consist in questioning whether the patient has sufficient *evidence* for the *claim*, "I feel lethargic". Moreover, while it may be the case that the feeling of lethargy or fatigue is one that can be interpreted in numerous ways, in different contexts (psychologically, medically, even metaphorically), for those interpretations to get off the ground, the experience of fatigue must be a fixed starting point. This means that, while it would be strange to say that the patient is "certain" of his fatigue (since, as we have noted earlier, there is no possibility for doubt) in the sense that the doctor may well be certain of his diagnosis of its cause (say, that the patient had suffered a mild concussion), the *fact* of what it is to feel lethargic is, in some sense, fixed. Whatever interpretation one may give to the construction of a symptomatology that includes such concepts as "post-traumatic syndrome", the experience of lethargy is comprehensible to all, both

patient and doctor, without recourse to medical or psychological terminology.

Finally, whatever the history of the uses of the notion of lethargy, the purposes to which it has been put and the consequences of its use in medicine, it is difficult to see how the fact that someone is "not feeling up to milking the cows today" is a product of the power-knowledge nexus in the history of medicine. Taking the risk of belaboring a point that has already been made several times thus far, an observer *can* perhaps, in a given case, offer such an interpretation, and even do so convincingly. The question is if he has thereby actually succeeded in describing what *it is* "not to feel like milking the cows today". To claim that he has, is to conflate a method of description or explanatory model, with the originary experience of which it is a model or attempts to describe. It is to superimpose the third-person perspective on first-person experience and, in so doing, to lose sight of its starting point.

Foucault says of his model of discourse, that it brings together "the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems".⁹⁴ In this respect, one can say that Foucault's "discourse" functions in much the same way as the notion of a transcendental subject functions for Kant or Husserl. Foucault's discourse may be immanent rather than transcendental, but when applied universally (or what amounts to the same thing, indiscriminately), it is still metaphysical.

5. A Note on Neo-Pragmatism: An Excursion with Rorty and Fish

Our criticisms of Foucault may seem to emerge from a neo-pragmatist notion of language use. Richard Rorty, for example, seems to say something similar when he criticizes the notion (popular among American deconstructivists, in particular) that the influence of philosophical notions on our language and habits of thought are "utterly

⁹⁴ AK, p. 191/AS, p. 250: "Par *épistémè*, on entend, en fait, l'ensemble des relations pouvant unir, à une époque donnée, les pratiques discursives qui donnent lieu à des figures épistémologiques, à des sciences, éventuellement à des systèmes formalisés [...]." Frank (1989) makes a similar point to our own (see especially, pages 161–165).

pervasive".⁹⁵ Indeed Rorty goes so far as to say, in an often-cited passage, that philosophy is nothing more than "a kind of writing [...] delimited, as in any literary genre, not by form or matter, but by tradition – a family romance involving, e.g., Father Parmenides, honest old Uncle Kant, and bad brother Derrida".⁹⁶ One important difference between the view being suggested in this chapter and Rorty's position consists in this: Rorty views *philosophical problems* themselves from the third-person perspective, that is, from the perspective of someone who is not troubled by philosophy anymore (except as a useful tool for politics).⁹⁷ Standing outside the problem of, for example, seeking the conditions for the possibility of experience, he can find no justification or evidence for its being a problem at all. But for the philosopher who takes seriously the idea that truth needs foundations, it would be nonsensical to demand evidence for its being problematic. He might describe what he finds troubling, but if Rorty were to dismiss the problem with the criticism that the attempt to solve it is "boring", or, in a more serious vein, suggest that he stop having the problem and accept, with James, that truth is "what is good in the way of belief", there is no evidence for the existence of the problem as a problem, and our philosopher certainly cannot provide objective evidence for the experience of not finding the problem boring.

In contrast to Rorty's view, our attempt at anchoring our philosophical insights in facts about how we actually speak, work and

⁹⁵ This point recurs often in Rorty's writing. One example is his response to an essay by Christopher Norris, "Philosophy as *Not* Just a 'Kind of Writing': Derrida and the Claim of Reason" in *Redrawing the Lines: Analytic Philosophy, Deconstruction and Literary Theory*, ed. R.W. Dasenbrock (Minneapolis, 1989). See also Richard Rorty, "Two Meanings of 'Logocentrism': A Reply to Norris" in *Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers, Vol. 2* (Cambridge, New York, etc. 1991).

⁹⁶ Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism: Essays: 1972–1980* (Minneapolis, 1982), p. 92.

⁹⁷ This seems to be a reasonable interpretation of the opening of the Norris reply (Rorty, 1991, p. 108), in which Rorty describes his relationship to philosophy as an accident of his early personal history. What is surprising in this essay, is that he generalizes his estrangement from the philosophical problems as a fact about what philosophy is and is not (*viz.* that there are no philosophical problems *per se*, only books written in the manner and tradition of philosophical thinking) in the same breath that he remonstrates the early Derrida for generalizing from his "personal, quasi-filial relationship" with his God, "the discourse of philosophy", to language and thinking as a whole.

live, only makes sense if genuine insight into the problems being posed is possible. This, in its turn, presupposes that there are *problems* under discussion, indeed problems that have puzzled and deeply concerned the thinkers who have dealt with them, and not just texts. The picture of philosophy as nothing more than a literary genre with certain stylistic contrivances rather than others is a common theme in post-analytic philosophy, poststructuralist thinking, and a great deal of contemporary literary theory. What is interesting about the self-evidence of the neo-pragmatist position among its proponents is that it assumes the legitimacy of the very academic, professionalized praxis that it claims to call into question (philosophy simply cannot be anything other than "we" prominent professors take it to be). In comparative literature, for example, one of the results of the influence of deconstruction and neo-pragmatism is that traditional demands for relevance and scholarly respectability have been shown to rest on evaluations that in themselves could not be justified by recourse to scholarship or relevance. Until the early seventies, while it was considered legitimate and respectable to analyze Joyce's *Ulysses* as biography, or to compare its style and themes with contemporaneous works of other writers, or to contrast the early Joyce of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* with the later Joyce of *Finnegan's Wake*, it would have been considered embarrassing to compare it with, say, Dr. Seuss' *The Cat in the Hat*. A deconstructivist might say, for instance, that there is nothing intrinsic to the text that precludes such a comparison. She might argue that the fact that I read Dr. Seuss to my son the night before writing a paper on Joyce, the fact that I ate a donut while sitting at my computer and writing, the fact that I may have spent years studying Irish literature, are all *contingent* elements in the play of significations that make real-life reading, understanding and interpretation possible.

Note that what might have been an unassailable observation about the impact of everyday life on our literary interests and activities, becomes instead a dogma based on a subtle and complex theory about the historical, linguistic and cultural determination and formation of beliefs and conventions, and their contingency. There are two aspects of this transition that tend to go unnoticed: first, that the theoretical apparatus is *not necessary* for arriving at this observation when and where it is relevant; one might well try to thought-

fully consider how one has arrived at certain ideas without invoking a theory about why this is not only justifiable, but semiotically necessary. Second, this observation is not always *relevant*. Very often, the choice of approach to a work of art is not in fact produced by the discourse of literary theory and the articulations it makes possible, but by a deep and abiding interest in a certain kind of artwork. Similarly, the choice of approach to a work of art is not a bi-product of the contingencies of daily life. That academic discourses usually take certain kinds of forms and not others is no more surprising or complex a phenomenon than that points are counted and schematized differently in tennis than in hockey.

Neo-pragmatists, of course, usually consider themselves opponents of theory, but this anti-theoretical position is often seeped in theoretical presuppositions. Even when they are at their most anti-theoretical, they often seem unprepared to provide examples of non-theoretical practices beyond simply naming them. Thus Stanley Fish, for example, might ask, as we did: "Am I following or enacting a theory when I stop for a red light, or use my American Express card, or rise to speak at a conference?" He answers that, "Clearly it is possible to answer yes to all these questions but just as clearly that answer will render the notion 'theory' and the issue of its consequences trivial by making 'theory' the name for ordinary, contingent, unpredictable, everyday behavior."⁹⁸ Once more, we can pose Fish the same question that we raised in response to Foucault. In what practical everyday sense can we say that crossing the street at green rather than red is contingent? In real life, red *actually* means stop and green, go. The meaning of the red light is neither unpredictable nor contingent from the standpoint of ordinary, everyday behavior. Thus Fish's readiness to admit that theory, even his own anti-theoretical theorizing, "makes no difference", is not a demonstration of the validity of his thesis that all conceptual thinking is rhetoric;⁹⁹ it is rather an expression of the dead-end at which one

⁹⁸ Stanley Fish, "Consequences", in *Against Theory: Literary Studies in the New Pragmatism*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago, 1985), p. 116.

⁹⁹ See, for example, "Introduction: Going Down the Anti-Formalist Road" in Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (Oxford, 1989). Fish sees all argument, all reference to "objective facts", all attempts to speak honestly about what one believes as different forms of

must arrive if theory for theory's sake runs rampant. What he does not do is provide a case, on the basis of more detailed elaborations of his own examples, for why this is so. It is as if the examples were offered for their rhetorical efficacy, rather than the clarity they may shed on the problem.

Another important difference between the view being presented here and Fish's anti-theoretical theorizing or Rorty's brand of nominalism (a term which he uses almost interchangeably with pragmatism to describe his position) is that they both accept the results of certain kinds of theorizing as facts of some kind. Fish is willing to call just about everything "rhetoric", and insists that

communications of every kind are characterized by *exactly* the same conditions – the *necessity* of interpretive work, the *unavoidability* of perspective, and the construction by acts of interpretation of that which supposedly grounds interpretation, intentions, characters and pieces of the world.¹⁰⁰

Rorty blithely accepts, without much further ado, the idea that our "web of linguistic usage" amounts to "our habits of responding to

persuasion: "we live in a rhetorical world." (p. 25.) There is no fundamental difference between principle and preference, since principles are always contingent and transformable in the same manner as preferences. The point of Fish's writing is just that there is no "point". This use of "contingent" and "transformable", like Foucault's, Derrida's and Rorty's, is highly problematic, since it assumes the point of view of someone for whom the meaning of a red light, the fact that "coffee" is never used to mean "rosy-fingered", the experience of having a toothache, etc. could be otherwise. This, we wish to say, is a distorted picture of how meaning actually works in our lives. For the pedestrian crossing the street, the theoretical possibility of society deciding at some point in time to change the meaning of the red light is irrelevant. In this respect, Fish's anti-theoretical stance is extremely theory-laden; he assumes that since the meaning of the red light cannot be grounded or justified by recourse to theory, it is "accidental". Rather than saying that all conceptual thinking is theory and all theory is rhetoric, so that all conceptual thinking is rhetoric, if Fish were as anti-theoretical as he claims, he would see that the cancellation of the distinction between these presupposes that we understand what it would mean for there to be such a distinction. This, in turn, shows that there is nothing intrinsically impossible in seeing a difference, at least in some concrete cases, between persuasion and thinking. To call such distinctions "conventional" is not edifying in the least since, once again, their "conventional" character is only relevant when talking about these distinctions as cultural artifacts. Their ostensible "conventionality" is irrelevant for our practices of trying to attain clarity with regard to some problem, on the one hand, and trying to persuade someone to think or do as we do, on the other.

¹⁰⁰ Fish (1989), pp. 43f. (emphasis added).

marks and noises with other marks and noises".¹⁰¹ He writes: "'recognition of meaning' is simply ability to substitute sensible signs (i.e., marks and noises) for other signs, and still other signs for the latter, and so on indefinitely."¹⁰² This account of meaning is extremely detached from the everyday non-philosophical sense of meaning that Rorty otherwise insists is independent of philosophical terminology and conceptualization. Indeed, it is detached from the experience of meaning that Rorty himself has, at least in his non-professorial mode. In this respect, Rorty shares the detached third-person, theoretical perspective that we have seen in Foucault (although his twist on it, he claims, is closer to Davidson's). In the first-person mode, that is, when using language as we usually do, as opposed to observing what it is that we do when we use language, we do not respond to marks on paper with other marks, nor to noises with other noises. Rather, we respond to requests, insults, commands and greetings with answers, apologies, gestures, and questions. We respond to philosophical papers by writing more philosophical papers, to questionnaires by filling in the blanks, to newspaper editorials by slamming our coffee cups on the kitchen table. We generally do not see words as "marks on paper" in the midst of reading. Similarly, it is a sign that something is wrong when we hear familiar words in familiar contexts as "noises". To be able to do so, to distance oneself from everything that makes human lives *human*, is a "competence" one develops only after years of study, after having, as Rorty would say, "cathected the discourse of philosophy".¹⁰³

On one hand, Rorty denies that the picture of language as "strings of marks and noises which organisms use as tools for getting what they want" is any *truer* than any other image.¹⁰⁴ On the other hand, he grants this picture's *usefulness*, which implies truthfulness in the sense of "goodness in the way of belief". Moreover, he writes in a manner that suggests that this picture is unproblematic from the standpoint of experience. We have been suggesting, however, that this picture is neither true nor false, neither useful nor inefficient,

¹⁰¹ Rorty (1991), p. 109.

¹⁰² Rorty (1991), p. 115.

¹⁰³ Rorty (1991), p. 108.

¹⁰⁴ Rorty (1991), p. 4.

at the moment when one is reading a book, listening to a lecture, solacing a friend, or ordering from a menu; it is simply *inappropriate*. Upon visiting a restaurant, I *do not* emit noises in response to prior noises emitted from a similar organism standing one and a half meters away from me, upon having my pupils irradiated by marks on a material consisting of wood fibers. A more accurate and less prolix description of what I do is this: I order tandoori chicken.¹⁰⁵ It is on the basis of our familiarity with the language in use and the circumstances surrounding that use (an Indian restaurant in New York), that we can begin speaking in abstract terms of organisms and irradiation of pupils. The description of human verbal interaction as noises and marks on paper is a perspective that can be had only by some hypothesized non-human intelligence. As human, we hear and see the languages that we understand as *language*, that is, as meaningful, and not as physical marks or noises.¹⁰⁶

Rorty's admonitions regarding what is best for us may take the form of suggestions rather than commandments, but, as Putnam has remarked, they are nonetheless uttered from the divine standpoint:

It may be that we will behave better if we become Rortians – we may be more tolerant, less prone to fall for various varieties of religious intolerance and political totalitarianism. If that is what is at stake, the issue is momentous indeed. But a fascist could well agree with Rorty at a very abstract level – Mussolini, let us recall, supported pragmatism, claiming that it sanctions activism. If our aim is

¹⁰⁵ This would be our answer to Searle's formulation of the philosophical perplexity that ensues when viewing language as a "phenomenon". Searle asks: "How is it possible that when a speaker stands before a hearer and *emits an acoustic blast* such *remarkable* things occur as: the speaker means something; the *sounds he emits* mean something; the hearer understands what is meant [...]?" *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge, 1969), p. 1 (emphasis added). We reply: *speakers do not emit acoustic blasts* ("speaker" is not synonymous with "acoustic blaster"). Speakers speak. What makes speech speech and not "sounds" is that it is meaningful in some respect. Part of speaking is precisely meaning something, and often enough, being understood. In most cases, there is nothing "remarkable" about this.

¹⁰⁶ Notice that when we use the term "noise" to refer to speech in certain idiomatic expressions, the purpose is to point out ironically that the speech was not as meaningful as one might have hoped. Think of the irritated father remonstrating his indigent adult son living at home with the acerbic remark: "Weren't you making noises about getting a job?"

tolerance and the open society, would it not be better to argue for these directly, rather than to hope that these will come as the by-product of a change in our metaphysical picture? It seems more likely to me that, most of the time anyway, Rorty really thinks that metaphysical realism is *wrong*. We will be better off if we listen to him in the sense of having fewer false beliefs; but this, of course, is something he cannot admit he really thinks. I think, in short, that the attempt to say that from a *god's-eye view* there is no *god's-eye view* is still there, under all that wrapping.¹⁰⁷

The purpose of the foregoing digression is not to criticize Rorty (that would require that far more be said on the matter), but to avoid confusion as to what "position" we are advocating. While what we have said might, at first glance, resemble a neo-pragmatist stance, this interpretation would be misleading: we are not endorsing the idea that the difference between first- and third-person perspectives on the experience of the thinking subject is "useful". We wish to say that, in some cases, there are *real* differences between what certain words, phrases and expressions mean, depending upon how they are being used. Furthermore, these differences should be comprehensible to anyone who reflects on the matter, regardless of philosophical background. In this sense, we do not simply present another interpretation, although it might be fair to describe it as another "angle". When Rorty says approvingly of pragmatism that it insists that "there is no such thing as the way the thing is in itself [...] apart from the way that *human beings might want* to put it", he is doing two things: he puts himself in the position of a neutral observer of what *they*, that is, human beings, do; and second, he suggests that *they* somehow are involved in a choice of interpretative schemes, or some such thing.

¹⁰⁷ Hilary Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face*, ed. James Conant (Cambridge, MA., 1990), pp. 24f. In fairness, it should be pointed out that Rorty is aware of the criticism of his work suggested by Putnam, as well as similar criticisms raised by Farrel. Nonetheless, he ends up endorsing a conversation in which we "might be able to agree that nobody's language has ever been or ever will be unconstrained by the world, and that nobody will ever be able to be interestingly specific about what these constraints are and how they work". "Response to Farrel", in *Rorty and Pragmatism: The Philosopher Responds to his Critics*, ed. Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr. (Nashville, 1995), p. 194. In a sense, we are claiming that the specific constraints described here are in fact "interesting", at least to the extent that they clear up confusions arising out of their disregard.

We would invite the reader to ask herself if, confronted with

CHAIR

she actually *imposes* a scheme, or *sees fit* at that moment, to see the word *chair*. It is an odd kind of “practical thinking” to disregard, as Rorty does, the facticity of what we actually do in recommending to us what is useful for us to do. Thinking of ourselves as “highly evolved organisms, [whose] highest hopes and deepest fears [are] made possible by [...] our ability to produce the peculiar strings [of marks and noises emitted by organisms] we do”, may avoid mentioning the knowing subject or its object,¹⁰⁸ but it also *redescribes* hopes, fears, desires, etc. in terms that are alien to their *actual meanings* for us, as human beings, in our everyday lives. Rorty does not account for the usefulness of the redescription except as a move in the game of philosophy. Yet he seems confident that there can be salutary effects of “getting out of the fly-bottle” even in the domain of politics and social life. But it is difficult to see why, if it is *merely* a useful move in a professional game. Like Foucault, Rorty confuses the day-to-day of language and thought with the best way that the terms and techniques of philosophy can *describe* them; he confuses the map with the terrain. Or, following the Wittgensteinian image with which we began the previous section, it makes sense that Rorty cannot see that there really might be genuine philosophical problems “*somewhere* in the neighborhood”:¹⁰⁹ he thinks he’s downtown, but he’s still in the suburbs.

¹⁰⁸ Rorty (1991), p. 5.

¹⁰⁹ Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, 1979), p. 34.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Gendered Subject: The Stories We Tell about Ourselves

Introduction

In the preceding chapters, we attempted to show how certain terminologies and methods of philosophizing, even in radically different traditions, produce an object of study that is at a far remove from the reality that they are supposed to be explaining. In particular, we noticed four recurring and related themes: (i) a confusion between what is true of language and/or thinking with what is true of theories about or models of these; (ii) an underlying assumption that *either* “the thinking subject” produces language *or* it is produced by language, as if these were innocent, theory-neutral conceptual necessities; (iii) a tendency to misapply the language and thought-forms appropriate to third-person observations about, or theoretical accounts of, states of affairs to first-person expressions; (iv) a requirement that there be explicit grounds or evidence for “beliefs” or “judgements” about which no grounds can be given, for the simple reason that what is assumed to be a belief is not a “belief”, but rather an expression or recognition of immediate experience. A corollary to this point is the presumption that the requirements of theory (such as coherence) are a reflection of what must actually be the case. The first three motifs are explicitly problematized also in this chapter. The last point, although rarely examined in the feminist literature and therefore not directly relevant to the discussion that follows, remains as a kind of offstage presence haunting the arena of debate.

One of the most important points of the feminist critique of traditional philosophy has been to show that the classical dichotomies of philosophy, universality claims about the nature of thinking (so-called “meta-narratives”), the traditional definition of rationality and various attempts to rid language of the accidental or not-standard,

have in fact led to misleading and pernicious simplifications. Feminists often argue that, based on a masculinist privileging of a certain kind of language use and a certain manner of reasoning (the so-called "adversary method", for instance),¹ all thinking which does not conform to the established philosophical norm is dismissed as "non-standard" or even muddle-headed. This standard, they point out, is itself a deviation from, or an exaggerated form of elements of everyday linguistic practice; thus it is not surprising that actual use deviates from the generalized norms derived from it. Were this not the case, there would be no room left for linguistic or conceptual analysis.²

It is not our intention here to give an account of feminist theories of subjectivity.³ In keeping with the style and spirit of this essay up to this point, we have chosen a few representative examples of recent feminist thinking in and about philosophy. Two works in particular have been chosen as startingpoints for the discussion that follows.

¹ Janice Moulton, "A Paradigm for Philosophy: The Adversary Method", in *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*, eds. Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka (Dordrecht, 1983), pp. 149–164. Moulton writes: "In the adversary paradigm, we do not attempt to judge standpoints or theories on the basis of their reasonableness, usefulness or even popularity. Instead we are expected to consider and thereby also respect those standpoints which are most *unlike* our own in order to show that we can meet their objections." (p. 158.)

² Many feminists argue that everyday language and "common-sense" notions are problematic in themselves, from a feminist point of view. Such critiques, generally speaking, are aimed at *changing* our everyday manner of thinking and not at giving an epistemological account of it. Such arguments will not be addressed in this chapter, since they are not directly germane to the discussion.

³ One relatively recent and extremely thorough critical account of some of the major trends in contemporary Anglo-Saxon feminist theory with regard to the question of the relationship between gender and knowledge can be found in Margareta Hallberg's *Kunskap och kön. En vetenskapsteoretisk studie* (Göteborg, 1992). There are now a respectable number of anthologies in English which provide a broad representation of feminist philosophy in related issues. See, for example, *Feminist Perspectives: Philosophical Essays on Methods and Morals*, eds. Lorraine Code, Christine Overall and Sheila Mullet (Toronto, 1988); *Women, Knowledge and Reality*, eds. Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall (Boston, 1989); *A Reader in Feminist Knowledge*, ed. Sneja Gunew (London & New York, 1991); and *Feminism and Philosophy*, eds. Nancy Tuana and Rosemarie Tong (Boulder, etc., 1995). A recently published anthology in Swedish (consisting largely of translations of essays from *Feminist Perspectives*) is *Feministisk filosofi. En antologi*, eds. Ewa J. Emt och Elisabeth Mansén (Nora, 1994).

Seyla Benhabib's book, *Situating the Self*, has the advantage of placing considerations of gender within the wider philosophical discussion, while at the same time attempting to work out a notion of subjectivity that would not make the same mistakes that feminists find in non-feminist works about the subject.⁴ Furthermore, Benhabib is conversant with both the Anglo-Saxon and continental traditions, in both of which her work is considered a serious contribution to political and moral philosophy. Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* is a widely acclaimed attempt to use feminist theory to reveal the internal contradictions in the standard tools of moral and psychological theorizing.⁵ It is useful, therefore, not only as an example of feminist theorizing, but also as an example of the concrete application of feminist thought to received notions about the differences between men and women and the expression of these in "scientific" or "objective" accounts of those differences.⁶

What follows is not intended as a critique of Gilligan's or Benhabib's positions as such, but a questioning of the presuppositions that lay behind their formulation of them. These are shared by many feminist theorists, and we will refer to other works in which these same assumptions come to the fore. The various internal debates between radical feminism and liberal feminism, or between cultural feminism and poststructuralist feminism, are not directly relevant to our discussion.⁷ For our purposes, it is appropriate to delimit the inquiry in terms of the relationship between philosophy as an intellectual tradition or institution, and the thinking subject or "self" as an object of study within it.

Seyla Benhabib's book is a contribution to moral philosophy rather than epistemology.⁸ We are not here interested in Benhabib's ex-

⁴ Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (Cambridge, 1992).

⁵ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA, 1982).

⁶ Given the extensive range of feminist thinking, however, even if we were to limit ourselves to those concerned with criticizing traditional modes of philosophizing, any choice of texts or arrangement of themes must ultimately be by fiat.

⁷ For a survey of the tensions between various schools of contemporary feminist thought, see Susan J. Hekman, *Gender and Knowledge: Elements of a Postmodern Feminism* (Cambridge, 1990).

⁸ One of Benhabib's major theses is that a viable moral theory must perform precisely the operation that we have denied legitimacy, namely, viewing one's own

pressed desire to reconstruct the legacy of the Enlightenment (democracy, political solidarity, economic and social justice, the moral autonomy of the individual), by incorporating the insights of feminist, postmodern and communitarian critiques. Rather, we are concerned with the *basis* of those critiques. Benhabib finds what these critiques have in common is that they have

(i) voiced skepticism toward the claims of a "legislating" reason to be able to articulate the necessary conditions of a "moral point of view", an "original position", or an "ideal speech situation"; (ii) they have questioned the abstract and disembodied, distorting and nostalgic ideal of the autonomous male ego which the universalist tradition privileges; (iii) they have unmasked the inability of such universalist, legislative reason to deal with the indeterminacy and multiplicity of contexts and life-situations with which practical reason is always confronted.⁹

These themes, the rejection of an "original position" prior to language and socialization, the critique of the distorting ideal of male rational thinking, and the inability of such a universal, rationalist ideal to handle the realities of contingent and complex life-situations, will form the framework of the chapter that follows. We will take up each of these three themes in its own right, but the central premise of Benhabib's book is worth noting:

the crucial insights of the universalist tradition [...] can be reformulated today without committing oneself to the metaphysical illusions of the Enlightenment. These are the illusions of a self-transparent and self-grounding reason, the illusion

intentions and experiences as a "narrative unity". Thus we will perforce take examples from ethics in our discussion, but it must be stressed that the ethical dimension is not at issue. See, for example, SS, p. 128f. and p. 137.

⁹SS, p. 3. For the uninitiated, the notion of an "ideal speech situation" to which Benhabib refers is formulated in a number of places by Jürgen Habermas as an essential element of his "Universal Pragmatics". In an "ideal speech situation", the participants stand on equal footing, neither dominating nor disembodying, and the point of the speech act is neither utilitarian or pragmatic, on the one hand, nor partisan or personal, on the other. According to Habermas, an analysis of the presuppositions of such an ideal case of "consensual speech actions" reveals the intrinsic possibility of transparent communication (the transmission of truth and testing of validity claims) inherent in every act of communication. The ideal is intended to remedy the mistakes arising out of the assumption of an isolated, purposive rational actor as the model of human communication. Jürgen Habermas, "What is Universal Pragmatics?", in *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (1976) transl. Thomas McCarthy (Boston, 1976).

of a disembodied and disembodied subject, and the illusion of having found an Archimedean standpoint, situated beyond historical and cultural contingency.¹⁰

Already at this stage, it is apparent that the position articulated by Benhabib is one which accepts the terms of the questions. She assumes, for example, that having disabused ourselves of the illusion that there is a fixed point at which to begin our researches, philosophers must modify or "transform" the discipline so that it takes account of "historical and cultural contingency". The consequences of accepting the terms of the discussion (for example, the use of the notion of "contingency", and the self-evidence of the historical dimension is our cultural and linguistic practices) will become clear as we take up each of these issues in turn.¹¹ Finally, we will conclude with an example of how the distinction between first-person expressions and third-person observations can resolve some of the problems with which feminists have been grappling, *not by instituting a new theoretical apparatus* (or modifying an old one, for that matter), but by showing how attention to real differences in how we speak and think can free us from misconceptions arising out of their conflation.¹² One result of such a resolution is that the perceived need for a new, more embracing concept of subjectivity (such as the notion of "narrative unity") may lose some of its force.

¹⁰ SS, p. 4.

¹¹ Benhabib's book is a collection of thematically related essays in practical philosophy, many of which are not directly pertinent to the question of gendered thinking. We will confine our discussion to those sections of the book that are directly relevant to the issues named above within a feminist context.

¹² Someone might react to this seemingly nonchalant use of "we" as reflecting a universalist or essentialist bias. It should be clear by now that the use of "we" here is *not* "we human beings", on the one hand, nor "we intellectuals", on the other. "We" is being used here in pretty much the same way as Swedes use it when explaining to tourists that "we celebrate Midsummer by eating, drinking and dancing around the Maypole", or the way a young teacher in the humanities may say "we have dismal salaries", or a medical researcher might say "we have not made very much progress in the search for a cure for multiple sclerosis". One could problematize the use of "we" in these contexts, but only in the sense of making a problem where, in most cases of actual communication, there simply is none (in non-theoretical discourse, this is known as "splitting hairs"). We take the vernacular use of "we" as described here to be conceptually unproblematic.

1. *Hobbes' Mushrooms:
Autonomy and Abstract Individualism*¹³

Benhabib cites Hobbes' formulation of the philosophical ideal of autonomy as perhaps the most vivid illustration of the disappearance of women from modern theories of human thought and action. Hobbes writes: "Let us consider men [...] as if but even now sprung out of the earth, and suddenly, like mushrooms, come to full maturity, without all kind of engagement to each other."¹⁴ In this proposed model of what is essential in our philosophical considerations of humanity, even the fact that man is necessarily born of woman, is disregarded in favor of the image of mushrooms springing up willy nilly from the earth. The Hobbesian mushroom is not so very different, in many feminists' view, from any number of major philosophical paradigms of agency. Kant, for example, associates what most of us today would call normal human feeling with insanity, since the passions and strong feeling mitigate autonomy: "To be subject to the emotions and passions is probably always a mental illness since they both exclude the sovereignty of reason."¹⁵ Without delving into the intricacies of how to place such a remark in Kant's philosophy as a whole, it does not seem unreasonable to regard the exclusion of emotion and sensation from intuition as consistent with a long philosophical tradition of mistrust toward the body, feelings,

¹³ The term "abstract individualism" was formulated by Allison Jaggar in *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Totowa, N.J., 1983). She defines it as the belief that "logically, if not empirically, human individuals could exist outside a social context; their essential characteristics, their needs and interests, their capacities and desires, are given independently of their social context and are not created or even fundamentally altered by that context" (p. 29). Jaggar suggests that much political philosophy rests on this assumption, one which she argues is fundamental to the epistemology of British Empiricism. Similarly, Sandra Harding argues that the norm of a socially autonomous "trans-historical ego" is not only constitutive of the western paradigm for rationality, namely science, but is also an important element in the cultural constitution of the male gender in our society. See *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca, 1986).

¹⁴ Thomas Hobbes, "Philosophical Rudiments Concerning Government and Society", in *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, vol. 2, ed. W. Molesworth (Darmstadt, 1966), p. 109. Cited in SS, p. 156.

¹⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, Werkausgabe, Band XII, hrsg. Wilhelm Weischedel (Frankfurt am Main, 1968), p. 580 (B 203, A 204): "Affekten und Leidenschaften unterworfen zu sein, ist wohl immer Krankheit des Gemüts; weil beides die Herrschaft der Vernunft ausschließt." (transl. ours)

and the realities of social intercourse and the vicissitudes and exigencies and everyday life.¹⁶

Most feminist philosophers take seriously the notion that certain figures of speech, images, values, and habits of thought that are recurring in the philosophical tradition are expressions of *male experience*, and its correlate, that philosophers (who, up until quite recently, were men, whether by historical accident or by cultural definition) have simply failed to notice this. In this respect, the feminist critique of traditional philosophy is not simply that it has been gender-blind, but that, rather than defining rationality, disinterested observation, agency, and intentionality, it *ordained* what kind of thinking, speech and experience was to be entitled to those honorifics on the basis of what a certain caste of European males were prone to find congenial. Similarly, it is argued, the conflation of local values with conceptual necessities in theoretical texts affects our lives, since those texts are part of the larger social institutions which inform our self-understanding.¹⁷

This second point, the pervasiveness and unobtrusiveness of these thought-forms, can be illustrated by an anecdote frequently circulated among feminists. The first chapter of an introductory college textbook in anthropology begins with a discussion of the nature and structure of the family. The first sentence reads: "People of all cultures and at all times have had wives." The laughter that ensues directly upon hearing the anecdote related is due largely to the recognition that it is, to say the least, *careless*, to read or write such a sentence without noticing the rather obvious fact that more than half the population of the world at all times has *never* had wives.¹⁸

¹⁶ This ascetic aspect of the philosophical tradition is captured by Nietzsche's parody, in *Twilight of the Idols*: "And away, above all, with the *body*, that pitiable *idée fixe* of the senses! infected with every error of logic there is, refuted, impossible even, notwithstanding it is impudent enough to behave as if it actually existed!" *Twilight of the Idols*, transl. R.J. Hollingdale (London, 1990), p. 45.

¹⁷ Kathryn Pauly Morgan, for example, argues that the contradictory views of what constitute rational and virtuous behavior for women, as dictated by men in general and the male producers of cultural artifacts such as literature and philosophy in particular, actually produce contradictions and incoherence in women's self-experience, and, as a consequence, in their behavior. Morgan, "Women and Moral Madness", in *Feminist Perspectives*, pp. 146-€7. See also DV, pp. 18f.

¹⁸ At least until the very recent present, and in an extremely limited corner of the world.

What feminists argue is that what we have called "carelessness" or "inattention" is something far more insidious, namely, the explicit equation of the properly "human", or what is significant about being a person, with male experience.¹⁹ This is what is meant, for all intents and purposes, by feminist references to the "disappearance" of woman from theoretical, scientific and academic accounts of what it is to be a person, human being, thinking subject, rational agent, etc. In her critique of John Locke, Nancy Holland remarks:

Traditionally, philosophy has addressed the so-called generically human and, if pressed for a reason why women appear not at all in the *Essay* and only briefly in the *Second Treatise*, Locke would no doubt appeal to the universality of his claims about human reason as a defense. As a woman reader of Locke, however, the number of times that one is drawn up short in trying to read oneself as the subject of "human" understanding is illustrative of the extent to which Locke, like the philosophical tradition of which he is a part, fails to include the experience and understanding of at least half of humanity.²⁰

The failure to include the experience of half of humanity in defining the properly human, or the ideals toward which any rational being ought to strive, automatically disqualifies women's reasoning from "rationality" and even from morality.

A classical feminist study of the biases at work in theoretical models of rationality and morality is Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice*. Gilligan's book will serve as our primary example in this section for a number of reasons. To begin with, it illustrates the two feminist issues named above: (i) the assumption of male values and ideals as universally valid norms by which all human beings are to be judged; and (ii) the self-evidence of these norms in the construction of theoretical models. Secondly, as we hope to show, while Gilligan's critical points about the conflation of traditional middle-class male values with objective principles are both conceptually sharp and, to some degree, empirically confirmed (in her psychological studies), like many other feminists with similar agendas, she does not follow her own critical insights to their logical conclusion, namely, the aban-

¹⁹ This point is made by Gilligan in her critique of Piaget and Kohlberg. See DV, pp. 5-24.

²⁰ Nancy J. Holland, *Is Women's Philosophy Possible?* (Savage, 1990), p. 28.

donment of abstract theoretical models as surrogates for the hard-won understanding that comes with critical reflection and attention to particulars in the inordinately complex realm of human affairs. In this respect, the sins of the fathers of theoretical discourse are visited upon the daughters.

The impetus behind Gilligan's study, as she describes it, is to indicate the fallacy of a common line of reasoning. It has long been observed that there is a disparity between models of human development and the experiences of women, but this has previously been explained as pointing to a problem with women. Gilligan suggests that, on the contrary, this disparity might rather suggest a problem with the theoretical apparatus employed. Her hypothesis, retrospectively hardly a startling one, is that "the failure of women to fit existing models of human growth may point to a problem in the representation, a limitation in the conception of human condition, an omission of certain truths about life".²¹

Gilligan claims not to propose a general theory of gender difference, but a way of highlighting a distinction between "two modes of thought" and a manner of interpreting those modes. Her examination is based on three studies: (i) the college student study, based on interviews with Harvard students who had chosen as sophomores to take a course on moral and political choice; (ii) the abortion decision study, in which a group of women from different socio-economic strata, age groups, and ethnic backgrounds, were interviewed about their decisions either to terminate or to continue pregnancy; and (iii) the rights and responsibility study, in which males and females matched for age, intelligence, social class, etc. were asked questions about their ideas concerning the self and morality, and were presented with hypothetical moral dilemmas. The ultimate purpose of the study as a whole is to

expand the understanding of human development by using the group left out in the construction of theory to call attention to what is missing in its account. Seen in this light, the discrepant data on women's experience provide a basis upon which to generate new theory, potentially yielding a more encompassing view of the lives of both of the sexes.²²

²¹ DV, p. 2.

²² DV, p. 4 (emphasis added).

Using Lawrence Kohlberg's influential studies of cognitive and moral development as her point of departure, Gilligan analyzes the six stages of moral development outlined in Kohlberg's theory against the backdrop of the self-understanding articulated by the participants in her own studies. Gilligan is most interested in Kohlberg's "highest stage of moral development", one rarely attained by adult women in his studies, which is characterized by abstract logical and juridical thinking. Moral maturity, according to Kohlberg's paradigm, consists in the individual seeing himself as an autonomous agent who can abstract from the particulars of a given situation and render a moral judgment on the basis of universalizable principles. The question is how Kohlberg can claim universal validity for his six-stage model of moral development, when almost half of the adult population, according to his own studies, never reaches beyond the third stage.²³

The assumption that autonomy, rationality, abstraction and generalization are signs of moral and cognitive maturity is one that cannot itself be corroborated by Kohlberg's studies, since developmental psychology generally grants that "the capacity for autonomous thinking, clear decision-making, and responsible action" are the qualities most necessary for adulthood.²⁴ As a consequence, the capacity to care for and about others, so important for "femininity", is relegated to the status of "intuition" or "female instinct" and, as such, is neither cognitive nor moral, properly speaking. In other words, if empirical data were allowed to call the theory into question, Kohlberg would almost necessarily be forced to reject the paradigm, since his claims to its universality are compromised by the fact that most people (if women are included in that term) simply do not exhibit these values and ideals in the case studies conducted.²⁵ Gilligan's own work is not intended to call into question the meaningfulness of universal paradigms of moral judgment, but to augment and cor-

²³ DV, p. 18.

²⁴ DV, p. 17.

²⁵ Kohlberg's allegedly universal model of six stages of moral development was initially based on an empirical study of eighty-four boys whose development Kohlberg followed for a period of over twenty years. The groups not included in his original study rarely achieved the highest level, but this was interpreted as suggesting that, as these groups (primarily women) became more engaged in the traditional arena of masculine activity, they would "progress" toward the highest stages in which

rect the standard view so as to render it more inclusive and, therefore, more accurate. Thus she proposes to interpret her material (the interviews) with an eye toward the difference between "rights-thinking" or the "justice-model", on the one hand, and "relationship-thinking" or an "ethics of care", on the other. The former, of course, has to do with juridical reasoning and the interests of the autonomous individual over and against the community. The latter has to do with the sustenance and maintenance of relationships and the needs and responsibilities that bind people. Gilligan argues that, whether by nature or by nurture, female thinking is characterized by the latter, while male thinking is characterized by the former. What she shows, as Hekman puts it, is that

the rationalist, abstract, universalizing pattern of moral reasoning is one way of moral reasoning, but neither the only nor the superior way. She shows that the contextual, relational model that characterizes women's moral reasoning is just as valid as the rationalist model.²⁶

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the relative merits and deficiencies of the two models as such. What we are primarily concerned with is the following problem: if the theoretical model of moral development at work in Kohlberg's studies (as well as in Freud's, Piaget's, Eriksson's and others mentioned by Gilligan) presupposes that one can distill, from the material studied, a set of categories and value judgments that themselves cannot be justified through those studies, then it would seem reasonable to question the explanatory force of those models. But if this is the case, what would be the point of instituting a new model to remedy the apparent failings of the old one, if not precisely to *save* the model? And what is presupposed by the perceived need to save the model?

relationships are subordinated to rules (stage four), and rules, eventually, to universal principles of justice (stages five and six). One paradox noted by Gilligan is that care and sensitivity towards others, traditionally definitive of feminine "goodness", is interpreted as a mark of their moral and cognitive deficiency. See DV, p. 18, and Kohlberg (cited in Gilligan), *Essays on Moral Development: The Philosophy of Moral Development* (San Francisco, 1981). This can serve as a paradigmatic case of the double-bind of male moralizing about women which, according to Morgan, if taken seriously, leads to "moral madness" in women.

²⁶ Hekman, pp. 56f.

By way of illustration, let us take a look at an instrument of moral measurement enlisted by both Kohlberg and Gilligan, the hypothetical "Heinz dilemma". In one study, two eleven-year-olds, Amy and Jake, were asked to resolve a dilemma (devised by Kohlberg) intended to present a conflict between moral norms that would allow the theorist to explore the logic of its resolution. The dilemma involves a man named Heinz whose wife will die of cancer if he cannot obtain a particular drug which can save her life. Heinz cannot afford the drug. In the standard format of Kohlberg's interviewing procedure, the child is presented with a description of the dilemma (Heinz' predicament, the wife's disease, the druggist's refusal to lower his price), followed by the question: "Should Heinz steal the drug?" A series of questions is posed that vary the parameter of the dilemma (such as whether or not Heinz loves his wife, and if this should affect his decision). The purpose in all of this is to reveal the "underlying structure of moral thought".²⁷

While Gilligan's work is meant to highlight the inadequacies of the Kohlbergian model of moral development, nowhere does she question the speculative nature of such a project. She sees herself as engaged in a comparable project, and her aim is rather to broaden our conception of what constitutes "moral thought" to include another "structure" as equally valid a description of what "underlies" our moral decisions. Nowhere does she account for, or problematize, what must be important differences between two very different situations. In one case, children are asked to solve a hypothetical dilemma concerning what amounts to fairy-tale figures. In another context, Gilligan interviews women in the throes of the pressing decision whether or not to bring the children they carry to term.²⁸ In the first case, one is asked to contemplate something having no immediate bearing on one's own life (in the case of interviews with children, it is not even clear how much they understand of what we might call the "existential" side of the dilemma); in the other, the decision involves *everything* that matters to most people: our high-

²⁷ DV, p. 26.

²⁸ This formulation is intended to be striking, but not merely rhetorical. The point is that, as one of Gilligan's interviewees noted, the decision to terminate a pregnancy or not is more morally charged if one considers the fetus a child and not "a lump of jelly".

est moral values, the deepest convictions, concern for the well-being of those closest to us, concern for our own continued well-being, fear for the physical consequences of either decision, fear for the social consequences, the anguish of a choice in which *one must live with the decision* for the rest of one's life, etc. In short, however the children respond to the Heinz dilemma, it makes no difference in their lives. How pregnant women respond to the dilemma of abortion, however, makes all the difference in the world for their lives.

Gilligan ignores entirely the fact that the problems posed are of two wholly different kinds, theoretical and existential. This negligence, we suggest, is intimately bound up with Gilligan's unreflected appropriation of the theoretical bias of the philosophy of moral development. The bias consists in an assumption, *in advance of any inquiry*, that the "structures" or "stages" produced by the apparatus of developmental psychology (its interviews and hypothetical dilemmas, the presumption of general discernible sequences, etc.) can *explain* the very phenomena from which they are derived through a process of theoretical distillation. With this *method of reading* interviews, the result sought is almost guaranteed. Naturally, it may be that different approaches to understanding how children reason about moral questions are helpful in the treatment of juvenile delinquents or anorexics, and that feminist approaches to women's own experiences of the critical moment of decision of whether to carry a child to term are helpful in abortion counseling. Still, the theoretical claims for either Kohlberg's or Gilligan's approach are unwarranted, since they assume at the outset that the infinitely complex process of rendering an account of why one considers a certain action in a certain situation, moral or immoral, can be explained *in terms of an abstract theoretical model*. Thus what is at issue here is not the usefulness of these models for various concrete purposes, but rather the epistemological pretensions of these models.

To illustrate why we are calling these models "methods of reading", let us examine a few of Gilligan's own interviews, and the conclusions that she draws from the pertinent material. One of the children interviewed, Amy, when asked if Heinz should steal the drug, replies elusively: "Well, I don't think so. I think there might be other ways besides stealing it, like if he could borrow the money or make a loan or something, but he really shouldn't steal the drug

– but his wife shouldn't die either."²⁹ When asked why he should not steal the drug, she responds:

If he stole the drug, he might save his wife then, but if he did, he might have to go to jail, and then his wife might get sicker again, and he couldn't get more of the drug, and it might not be good. So, they should really just talk it out and find some other way to make the money.³⁰

According to Gilligan, this means that Amy sees in the dilemma a "narrative of relationships that extends over time". Furthermore, Amy "seeks to respond to the druggist's need in a way that would sustain rather than sever connection" and "ties the wife's survival to the preservation of relationships". In sum, Amy sees a world "comprised of relationships rather than of people standing alone, a world that coheres through human connection rather than through systems of rules". Amy's proposed solutions to the dilemma, such as having the druggist provide the sick woman with the drug and have her husband pay later, arises out of her confidence that if "Heinz and the druggist had talked it out long enough, they could reach something besides stealing".³¹ Considered in light of Kohlberg's definition of the sequence of moral development, however, Amy's response is placed between levels two and three, since it seems to indicate

a feeling of powerlessness in the world, an inability to think systematically about the concepts of morality or law, a reluctance to challenge authority or to examine the logic of received moral truths, a failure even to conceive of acting directly to save a life or to consider that such action, if taken, could possibly have an effect. [...] her belief in communication as the mode through which to resolve moral dilemmas appears naive and cognitively immature.³²

Gilligan, on the other hand, sees in Amy's responses an incipient "ethic of care", in which morality arises out of the recognition of relatedness, interdependence and faith in the restorative activity of care, and in which communication is seen as a method for the resolution of conflicts.³³

²⁹ DV, p. 28.

³⁰ DV, p. 28.

³¹ DV, pp. 28f.

³² DV, p. 30.

³³ DV, p. 30.

The first thing to notice is that nothing in the reported responses to the dilemma necessitates *either* reading. Without the conceptual apparatus of developmental psychology as the basis of interpretation, one might still consider Amy's response, not necessarily as typically female, but certainly as typically "childish" in a number of respects. What Gilligan prefers to see as "confidence in communication as a method for the resolution of conflicts" can just as easily be seen as childlike optimism; neither "higher" nor "lower" than anything else, but simply an expression of the simplicity of the world in which middle-class advantaged American children live, compared to the harsh realities of day to day existence for working adults, for example.

To bring this issue of "reading" into sharper relief, let us contrast Amy's response to Jake's. Jake thinks it obvious that Heinz is in the right if he steals the drug:

For one thing, a human life is worth more than money, and if the druggist only makes \$ 1,000, he is still going to live, but if Heinz doesn't steal the drug, his wife is going to die. (*Why is life worth more than money?*) Because the druggist can get a thousand dollars later from rich people with cancer, but Heinz can't get his wife again. (*Why not?*) Because people are all different and so you couldn't get Heinz wife again.³⁴

Furthermore, Jake is confident that "the judge would probably think it was the right thing to do", and, even if it is the case that stealing is breaking the law, "the laws have mistakes, and you can't go writing up a law for everything that you can imagine".³⁵ These remarks are interpreted by Gilligan as indicating that Jake sees the dilemma in the same terms as Kohlberg, as a conflict between the values of property and life. Discerning the logical priority of life, Jake uses that logic to justify his choice. For Kohlberg, this means that Jake has achieved a higher level of cognitive and moral development than Amy. For Gilligan, even if we can say that Jake has seen aspects of the problem that Amy has not seen, so too, Amy has seen aspects that Jake has failed to notice. It is this side of the moral equation (the interconnection between other and self, mutual responsibility, communication, and care) that Kohlberg does not recognize as morally

³⁴ DV, p. 26.

³⁵ DV, p. 26.

and cognitively valid. Neither Gilligan nor Kohlberg seem to notice that the validity of the moral stances described can only apply to the "positions" that one *attributes to* Amy and Jake. What makes the development models problematic is the implicit (and in our view, illicit) replacement of the children's actual responses with the product of the interpretative schemes imposed. There is a tendency in both models to ignore one crucial fact about the interviews and the interviewees, namely, that Amy is no more a proponent of an "ethics of care" than Jake is an exponent of some social contract theory of justice. Amy and Jake are not experts in government, moral philosophers or political theorists. They are children.

Gilligan infers from her interviews that there is an intimate connection between self-perception and moral reasoning. As part of the same study, Amy and Jake are posed questions about themselves. Asked to describe himself, Jake responds without hesitation: he gives his name and age (11), tells the name of the town in which he lives, adding that he experiences that as a "big part" of who he is, explains that his father is a doctor (something that has some significance for him, but not as much as the town in which he lives), admits that he finds school boring. Jake displays some hesitation in continuing since he can't see himself as others see him, but goes on to say that he likes corny jokes, doesn't have to work particularly hard to get good grades, loves sports, and considers himself to have "the good life", as good as any he's seen, and that he is tall for his age. In contrast, Amy responds haltingly: My character? What do you mean? After a bit of prodding, she begins by saying that she likes school and studying, and would like to devote her life to it. She wants to become a scientist, and she wants to help people. Asked why, she says that the world has a lot of problems and she thinks that everyone ought to try to help out in some way. Gilligan interprets Jake's self-description as locating his particular position in the world and setting himself "apart from that world by his abilities, his beliefs, and his height". Amy's response, by contrast, although it also includes her likes, wants and beliefs, locates her into connection with others, "elaborating ties through her ability to provide help".³⁶ Amy's response, on Gilligan's reading, conveys "an ideal of care".

³⁶ DV, p. 35.

Once again, while there is nothing problematic with Gilligan's interpretation of the children's responses *as* an interpretation, it is important that one not mistake that interpretation for what was actually said. Surely both children would find the notion of "positioning" baffling, as would most adults, for that matter. There is no particular reason to focus on Amy's remark about wanting to help people more than, say, on Jake's remark that he doesn't like school, except that it is not part of Gilligan's method for reading her material. Rather than seeing gender differences, Gilligan might have researched differences between moral thinking in children who like school and studying, such as Amy, and those who don't, such as Jake. While Gilligan denies that "gender" was a methodological category guiding her work, it is striking that what she found in the children's remarks was gender difference and not parallels, say, between "liking school" and "disinclination to question authority", which would seem to be a likely option given the children's actual responses. Similarly, if she so wished, Gilligan might have read Jake's mentioning of his height as an attempt to *relate* himself to the world and other people, rather than set himself apart from it, since height is always a relative notion. Gilligan fails to see that she has, in a sense, interpreted her subjects even before they open their mouths, in a manner parallel to Kohlberg's overly determined model. Kohlberg was looking for a sequence of moral development which culminated in abstract, principled reasoning, as displayed by the men whom he had followed from boyhood. Not surprisingly, those who displayed such qualities proved to be most mature, that is, most in display of the qualities sought. Gilligan questioned the legitimacy of the definition of development utilized by Kohlberg, and sought a paradigm that would not relegate half of humanity to the status of morally and cognitively deficient beings. Not surprisingly, as this was her purpose, her readings of the interviews "corroborated" her thesis.

Here the omission of men in the abortion study is worth considering. Would most men, if confronted with the real-life decision to abort or not to abort the fetus in his partner's belly, or having recently been part of such a decision, deduce general principles from the case at hand? Some men might, whereas others might reason as many of the women interviewed did, seeing responsibility towards others as a major component of being responsible towards oneself

(as, for example, when one thinks: "Could I live with my decision to ...?"). Still others might have trouble coming to grips with the complexity of the issue, answer evasively, even weep. In Gilligan's book, however, we are never given the opportunity to see how men react, not to hypothesized moral dilemmas, but to a decision that will remain with them as part of who they are for the rest of their lives.³⁷ Furthermore, as Margareta Hallberg points out, the abortion study is of fundamental importance for Gilligan's articulation of this "different voice" in moral reasoning, suggesting that the context of abortion is somehow especially revealing about women's moral reasoning. The fact of the matter, however, is that not all women are presented with this difficulty (or option) in their own lives. As a consequence, the target group for the interview is necessarily overdetermined as a sampling of "women".³⁸

The interests of theory have a tendency, in general, to cast a long shadow over the material about which one is theorizing. In this respect, Benhabib, like Gilligan (as well as a number of feminists writing about the history of philosophy), seems unaware that she has a method of reading her material that determines the content. She finds in the

³⁷ Wendy Holloway's book *does* include interviews with men faced with this decision, but Holloway's theoretically laden reformulation of the answers provided by the interviewees is even more pronounced than Gilligan's. Unlike Gilligan, Holloway is prepared to offer an explanation for the salient gender differences found in her research: "The more multiple the acknowledged parts of the person are, the more capable they will be of identifying with many different positions [...] women are likely to incorporate greater multiplicity than men because of what woman means in relation of otherness to humankind. White middle-class men are the ones who, historically, have produced the systems of social difference which have created various Others, onto which their own repressed parts can be projected. They are left with the ideal of the unitary rational subject, to which they are more or less rigidly bound by what are in effect cultural systems of defence (discourses which reproduce and are reproduced by shared defence mechanisms)." Holloway, p. 129f. Holloway's study is a more extreme case of the falsifying character of the results of an all-too self-evident reliance on theoretical categories (even among those whose purpose is to call into question other abstract notions), but the terms in which her position is articulated (the sweeping gesture at history, the psychological explanation of conceptual distinctions, etc.), as well as the position put forth, are reminiscent of the more careful expositions of Gilligan and Benhabib.

³⁸ Hallberg, p. 198. Hallberg also points out that, for all intents and purposes, Gilligan retains the traditional *modus operandi* of developmental psychology to the extent that she accepts "stage theory" and the notion of a "male subject" and "female subject" susceptible to analysis without regard to the particulars of the historical and cultural context (p. 201).

thought of thinkers as diverse as Hobbes, Locke, Hegel, and Rousseau, and, by inheritance, in Freud, Piaget, Rawls and Kohlberg and, given her appropriation of Gilligan, Jake, one character trait that is (ostensibly) definitive for modern thought: the postulation of an *autonomous male ego*. On this interpretation, the bourgeois rationalist male ego must compensate for a sense of lost self-determination in the face of the Other, and recover from this "narcissistic wound" through the sober experience of war, fear and domination until arriving at the social contract, the establishment of the law to govern all. Political authority is, on this view, an attempt to civilize sibling rivalry by turning the individual's attention from war and conquest to property, scientific achievement and luxury. While the narcissism is not transformed, the boundaries of the ego are clearly defined:

The law reduces insecurity, the fear of being engulfed by the other, by defining mine and thine. Jealousy is not eliminated but tamed; as long as each can keep what is his and attain more by fair rules of the game, he is entitled to it. Competition is domesticized and channeled towards acquisition. *The law contains anxiety by defining rigidly the boundaries between self and other, but the law does not cure anxiety.* The anxiety that the other is always on the lookout to *interfere in your space* and appropriate what is yours; the anxiety that you will be subordinated to his will; the anxiety that a group of brothers will usurp the law in the name of the "will of all" and destroy "the general will", *the will of the absent father*, remains. *The law teaches how to repress anxiety and to sober narcissism*, but *the constitution of the self* is not altered. The establishment of private rights and duties does not overcome *the inner wounds of the self*; it only forces them to become less destructive.³⁹

³⁹ SS, pp. 156f. (emphasis added). This is a strange claim to make in consideration of Benhabib's criticism of the strong version of the "death of metaphysics thesis", namely, that it caricatures the history of philosophy. She argues that postmodernist accounts of the history of philosophy suffer "not only from a subscription to a grandiose meta-narrative, but more significantly, this grandiose meta-narrative flattens out the history of modern philosophy and the competing conceptual schemes it contains to the point of unrecognizability" (p. 224). Notice, however, that Benhabib seems to acknowledge the accuracy of the picture of a philosopher's work as a "competing conceptual scheme", rather than, for example, the effort on the part of an individual to resolve a problem. Benhabib clearly reads philosophy as a constellation of doctrines among which we may pick and choose as we see fit; this indicates that she does not take seriously that the express purpose of the philosophers to whom she refers is to get at the truth of the matter, that is, to answer a question rather than to formulate a doctrine. It is precisely the picture of philosophy as a concatenation

Some of this is fairly explicit in the writings of the thinkers named, but it is a highly stylized picture of modern thought, one which uses the tools and sensibilities of contemporary psychology to render a view of the "self" against which Benhabib can counterpose her own admixture of universalizability and the "concrete" self.

Once more, though it may be illuminating to look at moral theory from this perspective, Benhabib, like Gilligan, is unclear about the point at which her own theoretical apparatus ends and the texts to which it is applied begins. Furthermore, Benhabib writes as if her proposal for a new conception of selfhood is immune to the sort of psychologizing to which she has subjected traditional theoretical thinking. But there is no more intrinsic validity in this interpretation than if the works of Benhabib, Gilligan, Simone de Beauvoir, Mary Wollstonecraft, Andrea Dworkin, and Susan B. Anthony, were all lumped together in the claim that they express, say, "the dependent female ego who must compensate for her lack of autonomy by reproducing the same dependence not only in her daughter now, but also in her son" or some such thing. Of course, that is more or less what philosophers and psychologists have done with women's thinking and experience, which is one of the reasons why feminists are so concerned with the interpretation and analysis of suspect texts in literature and philosophy.

But there are at least two ways of dealing with the traditional metaphysical picture of what it means to be human. One response is to modify, augment or replace the traditional view of the human subject as defined by its rationality and autonomy (these in turn, defined by philosophical abstractions) with a model of human (or female) subjectivity as defined by "embeddedness" and "embodiment", relations to others, and the attempt to unify one's own experiences with those of other people. If taken as critique of the first model, that is, if Gilligan, Benhabib and others were to content themselves with showing the falsity and distortion inherent in the first picture, this account would be very helpful. In both cases, however, the critical impetus is transformed into a positive doctrine, and therefore

of competing doctrines that opens the gates for the extreme form of theoretical relativism that Benhabib hopes to avoid. In this sense, she has simply "missed the point" of the great epistemological systems such as Husserl's.

suffers from the same metaphysical tendency to conflate its own representations with the facts from which these representations are derived.⁴⁰

A second option is to recognize that the poststructuralist, neo-pragmatist and feminist critiques of the metaphysics of subjectivity point out the intrinsic conceptual limitations of theoretical representations of human action and speech. Gilligan and Benhabib are not inclined to do so because they accept the appropriateness of the theoretical models with which they are working, and hope to save those models from dissolution by philosophical cutting and pasting. A re-interpretation of Hobbes and Hegel that reduces their thought to contemporary socio-psychological themes is no more revelatory of what those philosophers "really meant" than were the defining characteristics of femininity accurate representations of what it means to be a woman.⁴¹ It may have salutary ideological consequences, but these can be held distinct from the conceptual work of getting clear on things. What we wish to argue in the following sections is that the inference that ideology and philosophy are indistinguishable in each and every case is unreasonable; in fact, it is a consequence of accepting the metaphysical pretensions of the tradition all too unreflectively.

We have used examples from Gilligan and Benhabib to illustrate how feminist philosophers sometimes repeat the metaphysical gestures of the thinkers their work is intended to criticize. They apply theoretical models to the materials and the texts of other philosophers or interviews with laymen and treat the representation produced out of that application as if it were primary. This transposition, we have argued, is a result of the perceived need for *some* kind of theory or model, an assumption inherited from the tradition for which no account is given. We have suggested in the interstices that this need may be more ideological than conceptual (and that there is a difference between these). In the following sections, we will address the feminist alternative to Hobbes' mushroom presented by Benhabib and Gilligan, where the ideological component comes clearly

⁴⁰ Benhabib's doctrine of the subject as a "narrative unity" will be taken up in the next section.

⁴¹ We will return to this theme in the last section.

to the fore, followed by a critical examination of the consequences for philosophy of the critique of rationality.

2. *Instead of an Archimedean Standpoint: The Self as a Narrative Unity*

According to Benhabib, the feminist and postmodern critiques of the sovereignty of reason as the defining characteristic of subjectivity run parallel courses:

The feminist counterpoint to the postmodernist theme of the *Death of Man* can be named the "Demystification of the Male Subject of Reason". Whereas postmodernists substitute for Man, or the sovereign subject of the theoretical and practical reason of the tradition, the study of contingent, historically changing and culturally variable social, linguistic and discursive practices, feminists claim that "gender" and the various practices contributing to its constitution are one of the most crucial contexts in which to situate the purportedly neutral and universal subject of reason. The western philosophical tradition articulates the deep structures of the experiences and consciousness of a self which it claims to be representative for humans as such. The deepest categories of western philosophy obliterate differences of gender as these shape and structure the experience and subjectivity of the self. Western reason posits itself as the discourse of the one self-identical subject, thereby blinding us to and in fact delegitimizing the presence of otherness and difference which do not fit into its categories. From Plato over Descartes to Kant and Hegel western philosophy thematizes the story of the male subject of reason.⁴²

Benhabib and Gilligan both think that attentiveness to the particularities of the lives that we actually live (including the ubiquity of language in human thought and experience), and the insight that theory always entails a degree of generalization, together leads to the conclusion that self-understanding amounts to "narratives", or "the stories we tell about our lives". To the extent that it is meaningful to talk about them at all, individuals cannot be understood in the classical terms of autonomy or reason, which are expressions of white, masculine, bourgeois self-interest, but only in terms of the "narrative unity" of their lives.⁴³ For Gilligan, this constitutes what she sees as the central assumption of her work (though we have

⁴² SS, p. 212.

⁴³ SS, *passim*.

tried to show earlier that other assumptions were equally central, if unnoticed): "the way people talk about their lives is of significance, [...] the language they use and the connections they make reveal the world that they see and in which they act."⁴⁴ Similarly, Benhabib asks if the selves described by modern psychological and political theory can be reasonably described as *human selves* at all. That is, she asks, can the identity of any human self be defined by reference to its capacity for agency alone?

Identity does not refer to my potential for choice alone, but to the actuality of my choices, namely to how I, as a finite, concrete, embodied individual, *shape and fashion* the circumstances of my birth and family, linguistic, cultural and gender identity into a *coherent narrative* that stands as *my life's story*. [...] how does this finite, embodied creature *constitute into a coherent narrative* those episodes of choice and limitation, agency and suffering, initiative and dependence? *The self is not a thing, a substrate, but the protagonist of a life's tale.*⁴⁵

In this section, we will discuss the following: are our lives characterized by a perpetual "fashioning" of the circumstances of our birth? Do we experience our lives that way from day to day? Do we perceive ourselves as "this finite embodied creature" in our everyday actions? Are our moral choices and linguistic habits a matter of "constituting a coherent narrative"? What kind of demand for coherence is at stake: a conceptual demand from the standpoint of theory, or, for example, the moral need most of us feel to avoid hypocrisy? Is there a significant difference between these? Finally, having rejected the reification of the self implicit in much classical thought, are we necessarily lead to think of ourselves as "protagonists of a life's tale"? What does this mean concretely?

Benhabib's main target is the "generalized other",⁴⁶ the assumption that I, as rational agent, can arrive at moral judgements that would be acceptable to all people at all times and places through my capacity of reasoning. She attributes this view to Kant, Rawls and Kohlberg, among others, and rejects it because "[w]ithout assuming the standpoint of the concrete other, no coherent universalizability

⁴⁴ DV, p. 2.

⁴⁵ SS, pp. 161f. (emphasis added).

⁴⁶ The phrase was originally coined by George Herbert Mead.

test can be carried out, for we lack the necessary epistemic information to judge my moral situation to be 'like' or 'unlike' yours".⁴⁷

Once again, the respective qualities of the "concrete other" versus the "generalized other" as models for generating ideology, moral philosophy or political theory, will not be addressed. We will concentrate exclusively on the epistemological issues insofar as these can be extracted from the discussion of moral theory in which they are framed. Benhabib says that her goal is not to prescribe a moral or political theory consonant with the standpoint of the concrete other, but rather "to develop a universalistic moral theory that defines the 'moral point of view' in light of the reversibility of perspectives and an 'enlarged mentality'".⁴⁸ This theory holds, however, that the representation of what it means to be a "concrete individual" is somehow more accurate, appropriate, or relevant than traditional depictions. This contention is at issue in our discussion. There is no obvious startingpoint for the posing of the problem, but given the themes and limitations of this book as a whole, it seems reasonable to take our bearings from the debate concerning the status of "the female subject", in particular, the poststructuralist feminist critique of attempts, like Gilligan's and Chodorow's, to articulate a "relational self", and similar feminist re-constructions of traditional notions such as sexuality, mothering, and reproduction.

Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson, two poststructuralist feminists, criticize all attempts to

group together phenomena which are not necessarily conjoined in all societies, while separating off from one another phenomena which are not necessarily separated. As a matter of fact, it is doubtful whether these categories have any determinate cross-cultural content. Thus, for a theorist to use such categories to construct a universalistic social theory is to risk projecting the socially dominant conjunctions and dispersions of her own society onto others, thereby distorting important features of both. Social theorists would do better first to construct genealogies of the *categories* of sexuality, reproduction and mothering before assuming their universal significance.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ SS, pp. 163f.

⁴⁸ SS, p. 164.

⁴⁹ Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson, "Social Criticism without Philosophy: An encounter between feminism and postmodernism", in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Thomas Docherty (Hertfordshire, 1993), p. 426. Originally published in *Theory, Culture and Society*, 2-3 (1988).

Nicholson and Fraser see all attempts at explaining women's oppression as displaying "essentialist vestiges" or "lingering essentialism".⁵⁰ Once more, what they see as essentialism is "the continued use of ahistorical categories like 'gender identity' without reflection as to how, when and why such categories originated and were modified over time".⁵¹ From their view, "large historical narrative" and "historically situated social theory" are rightly regarded by feminists (among whom they count themselves) as indispensable. They suggest that the categories of feminist theory be "inflected by temporality, with historically specific institutional categories like 'the modern, restricted, male-headed nuclear family' taking precedence over ahistorical, functionalist categories like 'reproduction' and 'mothering'". Where these latter categories are not eschewed altogether, they are to be "genealogized", that is, "framed by a historical narrative and rendered temporally and culturally specific".⁵² Like other feminists influenced by poststructuralism, Fraser and Nicholson are interested in how these "self-evident" categories are constructed in the discourses of knowledge and power of which they form a part.

Thus far, one might find the proposal uncontroversial, as saying "pay attention to your working definitions and how they produce their results". But they do not leave the matter at that. They move almost imperceptibly on to the positive contention that, as Linda Alcoff writes, "we are constructs – our experience of our very subjectivity is a construct mediated by and/or grounded on a social discourse beyond (way beyond) individual control".⁵³ In another

⁵⁰ Nicholson and Fraser, p. 428.

⁵¹ Nicholson and Fraser, p. 428.

⁵² Nicholson and Fraser, p. 429. Similarly, Iris Young argues that Gilligan's "relational self" commits the same fallacy as its rationalist predecessors, namely, it assumes the fiction of a self-present unity, an I that can know itself (its beliefs, intentions, needs and desires). Iris Young, "The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference", *Social Theory and Practice*, 12.1 (Spring, 1986), p. 10; cited in SS, p. 197.

⁵³ Linda Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory", in Tuana and Tong, p. 440. Alcoff criticizes this view not, as we have in our discussion of Foucault, on conceptual grounds, but because of the limitations it sets on feminist goals and aspirations in the spheres of politics and social relations: "How can we demand legal abortions, adequate child care, or wages based on comparable worth without invoking a concept 'woman'?" (Alcoff, p. 443). While her point is well taken, it is not the political efficacy or possible deleterious effects of postmodern theory for feminist causes that is the object of our study.

variation on this theme, Alcoff suggests that woman's subjectivity lay in her "positionality", that is, her identity is the product of her continuing appropriation, mediation, interpretation and reconstruction of the history and discursive context to which she belongs.⁵⁴ In sum, woman's subjectivity is no longer to be defined as deficient male subjectivity (rational and autonomous, only less so), but as the product (to a greater or lesser degree) of historical and discursive practices, and her position in relation to these. To the extent that she has some "privileged access" to her own intentions, beliefs and desires, they are as elements to be formed into a "life story" or "narrative unity".

Notice that the insertion of history and language as determining factors in the constitution of self-experience is itself a move in the theoretical debate on subjectivity, rather than an inference drawn from any particular case or cases. What do we really learn from the claim that, as Jane Flax writes, "Man is a social, historical or linguistic artifact, not a noumenal or transcendental Being"?⁵⁵ While the critical point is by now an intellectual commonplace, it is not clear why the only option left is to think of ourselves as "artifacts". To the contrary, it is conceptually impossible to go about our business doing human things *as if* we were *artifacts* and not men and women who write articles, change tires, fix meals, flirt, ask for directions and so forth. The historical background to academic procedures for the acceptance of articles to journals, the advent of the motorcar and the history of tire-making, the socio-economic factors in the development and distribution of electric stoves play no role in these daily activities. Rather they are possible interpretations of the meanings one can find in these activities observed as objects of study. Since Benhabib is interested in retaining the insights of poststructuralism while avoiding its relativist consequences, her views differ from those of postmodern feminist theorists, such as Jane Flax. Benhabib rightly points out that the main question dividing her view from poststructuralist feminism concerns "the relation of historical narrative to the interests of present actors in their historical past".⁵⁶ What is of interest

⁵⁴ Alcoff, p. 452.

⁵⁵ Jane Flax, *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West* (Berkeley, 1990), p. 32. Cited in SS, p. 211.

⁵⁶ SS, p. 212.

for us, however, is not the internal debate regarding this question, but *the terms of that debate* which are accepted unanimously (if tacitly) by those engaged in it. It is here, we wish to show, that the core of the epistemological problem is to be found.

In her discussion of Gilligan's methodology, Benhabib mentions in passing that feminist "theorists, whether psychoanalytical, postmodern, liberal or critical, are united around the assumption that the constitution of gender differences is a social and historical process, and that gender is not a natural fact".⁵⁷ She goes on to admit that while there is some disagreement on the matter, she also agrees with recent claims that the construction and interpretation of the "anatomical fact" of sexual difference is itself a "social and historical process", and that sexuality, like gender, is a culturally constructed difference.⁵⁸

Here we see a problem that we noticed in our discussion of Foucault, whose work on the constitution of the subject is of seminal importance to postmodern theories of gender identity. To say that the analytical category of "gender" or "sex" is not a "natural fact" for the psychologist, political theorist or historian may be a useful reminder that the premises of scientific inquiry are, from the historical perspective, fluid. In this sense, "gender" is not a "natural fact". But feminist theorists seem to mean something more than this, namely, that "gender" and even "sexual difference" (the latter until very recently defined purely anatomically)⁵⁹ are in themselves merely points on the moving grid of history and social context.⁶⁰ Indeed, Benhabib

⁵⁷ SS, p. 191.

⁵⁸ SS, p. 192. Gilligan herself refrains from positing a source or cause of gender differences, either in cultural history or in biology, although she does cite the psycho-sexual model in Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley, 1978) as instructive (DV, p. 16). Probably the most influential book in the positing of not only gender, but even anatomical sex, as a cultural construction is Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, 1990), which Benhabib takes up and to which we will be turning shortly. An historical work which has often cited in these contexts is Thomas Laqueur's *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA, 1990).

⁵⁹ Butler's work is intended to call into question the possibility of such a distinction, since even "anatomical sex" is a concept formed out of the various discourses of philosophy, psychology, medicine, jurisprudence, etc.

⁶⁰ This is a standard view, but its implications are rarely worked through. Linda

argues that a major failing of the cognitive-developmental framework with which Gilligan works is its *ahistoricity*.⁶¹ Benhabib's primary criticism of Gilligan is that gender difference is left *unexplained* in her work. In trying to understand gender difference, "we have to leave behind psychological theory for a *historical sociology of the development and constitution of gender*".⁶² There is no suggestion that even historical sociology employs a theoretical apparatus, is perhaps incapable of capturing something so complex as what it means for each of us to be men and women, or to perceive immediately others as men and women, even without (or perhaps *especially* without) the various sartorial and social emblems and attributes associated with both.

In any case, in order for our historical and sociological studies to get off the ground, we necessarily begin with the *fact* that there are men and women, however one may wish *post facto* to construe and account for the facticity of that fact, and however many "borderline cases", such as transvestites, transsexuals and hermaphrodites one can rack up. For, once more, what makes these cases difficult, the source of all the psychological, sociological, historical, medical and juridical attention which they have received, is precisely that they are "unusual" or "out of the ordinary". One may draw whatever ethical, legal or religious consequences one may like out of this, but it is hardly deniable that in most cases, we do not even reflect on *whether* or not the person with whom we are speaking is a man or a woman. This is not because we are naïve or prejudiced, but because I no more "believe" this person, Jake, with whom I am speaking now, to be a little boy, than I "believe" that

Alcoff writes, for example, "it is well documented that the innateness of gender differences in personality and character is at this point factually and philosophically indefensible". In contrast, Alcoff suggests that the identity of "woman" be compared to that of the pawn on the chessboard at mid-play. While its position is neither innate nor indeterminate, it is wholly relative to the shifting positions of the other pieces on the board (Alcoff, p. 439 and 451). A reading of the pertinent literature would suggest rather that both biologicistic and constructivist arguments are conceptually dubious, since they assume that there can be a sensible answer to the question "what makes men and women different?" One of the tasks in this chapter of the book is to show how deeply problematic the posing of such a question is.

⁶¹ SS, p. 192.

⁶² SS, p. 194 (emphasis added).

what I am standing on is a floor and not a table.⁶³ On those rare occasions that we are given reason to doubt (for example, we suddenly notice the lovely lady's bobbing Adam's apple, or our interlocutor explains to us that her psychological gender is something very different from what his anatomy would suggest), it is indeed surprising. Once again, it is not unreasonable to ask why those exceptional cases in which there is room for doubt or misunderstanding should dictate the terms of everyday experience in which this is not the case.

Benhabib concedes to gender constructivists that "a subjectivity that would not be structured by language, by narrative and by the symbolic codes of narrative available in a culture is unthinkable". She writes: "We tell of who we are, of the 'I' that we are, by means of a narrative [...] nevertheless we must still argue that we are not merely extensions of our histories, that vis-à-vis our own stories we are in the position of author and character at once."⁶⁴ It is clear that the image of an active creator is more in keeping with the spirit and goals of feminism than is the picture of fluid personalities and social positions formed into artifacts by historical accidents and capricious changes in linguistic and cultural practice. However, both are *representations* of human experience that would yield very strange results if applied to most of the practices and habits that make up much of our reality. Benhabib's criticism of postmodern theory is not that it is too theoretical, however, but that it does not take sufficient advantage of the theories of the social sciences:

The central question is how we must understand the phrase: "the I although constituted by discourse is not determined by it." To embark upon a meaningful answer to this query from where we stand today involves not yet another decoding of metaphors and tropes about the self, but a serious interchange between philosophy and the social sciences like sociolinguistics, social interactionist psychology, socialization theory, psychoanalysis, and cultural history among others. To put it bluntly: the thesis of the Death of the Subject presupposes a remarkably crude version of individuation and socialization processes when compared with currently available social-scientific reflections on the subject.⁶⁵

⁶³ See our discussion of "belief" and "judgement" in chapters I and II.

⁶⁴ SS, p. 214 (emphasis added).

⁶⁵ SS, p. 218.

For the purposes of continued theorizing, Benhabib is probably correct. What we have been arguing throughout, however, is that the object of theorizing, however inclusive its domain, remains a product of that theorizing; it is not interchangeable with the facts of what it means to be a thinking, feeling, performing human being. In fact, Benhabib's suggestion amounts to choosing one of the options in the dichotomous conceptual scheme that Husserl hoped he could escape – psychologism rather than biologism. The scheme that she suggests nonetheless sees the facts of human experience from the outside, as objects of study, and not as something that can be described on the basis of her own acquaintance with being a human being, or self. For while we often reflect upon what we say and do in order to tell a coherent story, achieving coherence from the point of view of observation is generally not an important feature of our lives. The fact that we at times tell stories about ourselves, or that we sometimes try to “make sense of our lives”, indicates that we often go about doing and saying things which make up the material for that story. This in turn indicates, *not* that everything that we say and do is in and of itself an element of a narrative, but rather that it *can serve* as one in certain circumstances. Let us examine such a possible case, one in which the so-called construction of gender can be said to have a clear and palpable sense.

Imagine a man about seventy years old, a widow, who has grown up and lived on the same farm all his life. His father was a farmer, as was his father before him, and his great grandfather's father, going back for so many generations that there is no record of any other family having ever lived there. Let us say that the period is the early eighties, in some technologically advanced country on the outskirts of Europe where, despite all the political and cultural turbulence of the last hundred years of history, the largely agrarian practices, customs and ways of life that were the cultural mainstay of life in that country until the last few decades are still very much in place. Our aging farmer has presumably noticed that there are more and more female authorities interviewed on television in economic and political matters; we may even conjecture that the prime minister in his country is a woman. It is equally likely that he has seen newspaper advertisements for tickets to performances in modern dance, and that he knows that the male lead dancer of the American Ballet

Theater, for example, must enjoy a great deal of prestige and respect from many people. Perhaps his local doctor is a woman. One might even imagine that he has a daughter who has gone to college and, bored by the prospect of life on the farm, she has moved to the big city, and is working as a construction engineer. The younger daughter, let us say, is employed as a meat-packer at the local grocery store. We can add that one of his sons, the youngest, has pursued a master's degree in nineteenth-century French literature, and plans to become a high-school language teacher, while the oldest has always known that he is expected to take over the farm and, in fact, is quite content to do so.

There is nothing particularly unlikely about such a constellation and yet, only twenty-five years earlier, the choices in particular of the older daughter and the youngest son would have been considered somewhat startling, even provocative, at least to the other family members, relatives and the local community. The point of postulating so much background information here is to suggest that our farmer, let us call him Jakob, is very much aware of the radical transformation in dress, social roles, and lifestyles that has occurred in the course of his lifetime, and these have even influenced his own values and thinking about what is masculine and feminine. He is, one can suppose for instance, immensely proud of his older daughter.

Now let us say that the years are catching up with Jakob, and his health is failing him. He finds that much of the work that he has performed, without a thought to the matter, every day of his life for more than fifty years is now extremely difficult. Even such “simple tasks” as building an addition to the main house requires more sawing, climbing, hammering and drilling, more hard labor, than he can muster. He finds it *embarrassing* that his older son has taken over so much of the work of keeping the farm going. The embarrassment has to do with his feeling that he is a burden, that he no longer serves a vital function in the life of the family and the community. But it also affects his sense of “manliness”. He feels like an “old woman”, reduced to the “trivial” work of tending to the chickens and taking care of minor household repairs. Even if his children were to encourage him by reminding him of the importance of these “menial tasks”, he is more hurt by their words of praise and appreciation than heartened: that kind of sentimental gibberish is, *he*

knows, the kind of thing you say "to make the old girl feel better". In terms that he would probably not choose himself, one might say that he has been *emasculated*.

What are we to say about Jakob? In one sense, one might want to say that his inability to accept the possibility that masculinity need not reside in the capacity to move heavy things around displays the extent to which our genders are entirely formed by the culture and language in which they are articulated. In the world in which Jakob's sexual identity was formed, care of children and the household was "woman's work"; men labored in the field. Jakob's son, however, *can* study a "soft" subject such as literature (in *French*, to boot), without his sexual identity evaporating into ether; the reason for this is that in the "widened perspective" of life outside the farm, the perspective in which his son was raised (through school and television, at least), there is nothing *intrinsically* girlish about reading books, even fictional ones, even in French. Is Jakob at the mercy of a language and culture which preceded and, for all intents and purposes, consumed and subsumed him? Or, if the extreme constructivist picture is rejected, is Benhabib right? Is the problem now to help Jakob "widen his perspective" so that he can *position* himself as author as well as character of his own life story, and therewith re-write the conclusion in such a way that the story constitutes a "coherent unity"?

Once again, this would depend upon how one construes the point of theory. If Jakob is a case-study, one may interpret his behaviour in terms of the historical and social milieu in which he was raised, for example, in order to render an account of, say, "the constitution of male identity in northern agrarian societies". One might study the connotations of certain words associated with work around the farm in Jakob's dialect, and look for gender markers. Or one could analyze Jakob's self-understanding with the tools of feminist object relations theory, and explain his reticence to work in the home as an expression of his complete identification with the absent father, or something of that sort. The point is that these possible interpretations make no difference to the fact that Jakob can only conceive of the meaning of his work in terms of what it *in fact* means for him. However open-minded he may be about what others ought or ought not to do, his years of tending the fields are not a "cultural

artifact" produced by language *for him*, any more than he can feed the chickens as a sort of editorial revision in "the story of his life".

Feminists are more interested, of course, in the construction of female identity. Let us take a look at what Jakob's wife's life might have looked like. Let us say that Sarah was born and raised in a neighboring village, and met Jakob at a barn dance in the summer of '29, when she was sixteen. The daughter of a farmer herself, she has learned that a woman's greatest virtue is what we today would call self-sacrifice, but what she herself understood as the patient acceptance of the facts of life: "A man must work from sun to sun, but a woman's work is never done." Sarah's responsibility for the children and the household was all-encompassing, and those rare hours of leisure enjoyed by her husband and the rest of the family, such as holidays and festivals, actually meant more cooking, cleaning and preparations of various sorts than the workaday week. Until the day she died, Sarah kept a spotless kitchen, ironed the sheets to crackling perfection and was first up in the morning brewing coffee. Indeed, during the last year of her life, even in the torments of terminal illness, she would not allow Jakob to help her: "Get out of my kitchen! Washing dishes is nothing for manfolk!" When neighbors came to offer their assistance with the cleaning, Sarah would tidy up first, so as not to be embarrassed by the mess in her home. For Sarah, to exist was to exist for others.

Was Sarah a product of a system of entrenched codes of behavior that positioned her as a series of self-annihilating acts of which she could only be dimly aware? For many modern women (as well as men), it is tempting to see her so, and it may be a useful perspective to employ in the service of political or economic reform, for example. But what is the basis for assuming that we can judge (not in the sense of evaluate, but in the sense of arbitrate) the *meaningfulness* of her life on a scale reflecting our contemporary values, expectations and desires? On what basis of measurement can we judge our capacity for self-reflection to be deeper, higher or more informed? Is the sophistication of our theoretical models a proof of their greater seriousness or accuracy regarding what constitutes a good and meaningful life? While we can surely appraise her life on our terms, no theoretical apparatus puts us in the position of assessing her life on her terms. To the contrary, it is arguable that we are not even in a

position to comprehend fully the form of life lived by Sarah, since it is no longer a viable option in most western societies any longer. It is not that women cannot be oppressed; to the contrary, the difference is precisely that our acute awareness of the infinite array of lifestyles, options and opportunities that contemporary western culture has thrust upon us (largely through the various media) makes it almost impossible for modern women to live a life even remotely resembling Sarah's without it taking the form of what we would call oppression. But the "true meaning" of Sarah's life is not to be captured by conceptual schemes, however meticulous their formulation.

Does the foregoing entail conservatism with respect to women's liberation? It need not. One might recognize the irreducible meaningfulness of Sarah's life and still be the most stalwart defender of women's rights today, because even if Sarah was not oppressed (the idea that her life might have been something else would have baffled, and even frightened her), few women in our culture today could find meaning in a life that, for us, is tantamount to enslavement. But by what faculty can we see into the true nature of reality, and deem Sarah's passive acceptance of round-the-clock drudgery as important and meaningful, sheer self-deception or an expression of the ideological construction of victimization? Benhabib's attempt to *incorporate* Sarah's self-understanding into her theory assumes the *von oben* perspective of the social sciences, since Sarah's life as lived, is not the same thing as the ethnological or sociolinguistic analyses one can make out of it. From Sarah's "innocent", Christian point of view, the lives of successful intellectual urbanites may reek of meaningless tomfoolery or even sinfulness: vain hours spent in a gym "exercising" the body so as to enhance its beauty, rather than putting the body to some useful purpose; the mad rush to climb the ladder of success in producing, selling and buying junk that nobody really needs, with the sole aim being further moral corruption in the service of Mammon and wordly acclaim; the incessant chatter about sex and feelings, as if human relationships were about wants and needs, rather than about responsibility and duty. Sarah's "life story" is a "story" for us in the same way that her moralizing is easily seen by liberated young men and women as "old-fashioned narrowmindedness" or "religious superstition". It is not the case that the social

sciences can help us adjudicate the matter (at least, no more so than the local priest can help Sarah adjudicate the matter).

It may be worth repeating at this juncture that what has been said here is aimed at conceptual clarification, and is not intended as an ideological proposal. Whether one is a gender constructivist, a gender essentialist, a "narrative unity theorist" or a traditional metaphysician, in order for the internal debates about the meaning of gender roles in any given context to work, we must first recognize a case of "doing this or that" and have some recognizable idea of what a man is or what a woman is in order for the erasure (or the bolstering) of such boundaries to be comprehensible. We all have some idea about what it means to chop wood, to clean the house, to fix a meal, to change a light bulb, to drive a tractor, and to nurse a baby. Even if, due to personal background or cultural environment, we have different associations concerning the role of such activities in people's lives, we understand enough about how these words are used to entertain our preferred theoretical interpretations of the "deeper meanings" behind them. Were this not so, we would be in no position to judge the relative merits or deficiencies of Benhabib's book, since the words "man" and "woman" which appear so frequently would always be ambiguous to the reader. But they are not. In this regard, one could say that the intelligibility of *Situating the Self* is itself testimony to the pre-ideological and pre-theoretical viability of linguistic communication. While the terms "man" and "woman" are remarkably versatile in their uses, they are in fact quite stable in most individual cases of use.

Benhabib, like others, is interested in broadening the disciplinary horizons of our understanding of human nature. A fundamental feature of feminist criticism, as we have said, is to show how the insistence upon a single method leads to reductionism. What is not clear is whether the proposed methodological pluralism comes any closer to describing its intended objects. One may note that the qualities often attributed to women *per se* actually *shape* how they are perceived by men, how they perceive each other and even how they perceive themselves *without the aid of theory*. Many thoughtful individuals who do not happen to be members of the professoriat have noticed that women, like men, do not live in a vacuum. And surely Benhabib is right in saying that sociological, psychological,

historical and economic studies can help us understand the many ways in which Simone de Beauvoir's observation that "one is not born a woman, one *becomes* a woman" is an accurate description of the emergence of certain gender differences. The so-called "tick-ing of the biological time-clock", for example, is certainly at least as much a cultural phenomenon as a natural one: the biological fact is simply that women cannot conceive children after menopause (without medical intervention). The nagging sense that a woman might feel that her life is somehow incomplete if she eschews the role of motherhood is something else.

Our self-image is often, at least partially, a reflection of the standards of the community. Sociobiological attempts to reduce the one to the other, whether or not they are ideologically motivated, illicitly smuggle in the biological dimension as if the hardness of its facticity somehow underwrites the interpretative scheme imposed upon that fact. Conceptually speaking, however, the absolute fact of woman's limited capacity to conceive children relative to man's has no necessary logical consequences for the choices that adult human beings make. The positing of a direct causal relation is merely an interpretative model. There is nothing "scientific" about it.⁶⁶ But is Benhabib's model of coherent narration a *truer* explanation of human behavior? It is certainly less simplistic insofar as it admits the complexity of human choice and action. Nonetheless, even the most subtle and nuanced of methodologies must be applied to something; the question is whether Benhabib recognizes the difference between Sarah's life as the life of a certain subject, and Sarah's life as a subject matter.

Benhabib endorses what she calls "the weak version" of the thesis of the Death of Man. The epistemological advantage of this thesis (we will not discuss the political dimension) is that it situates the subject in various social, linguistic and discursive practices:

⁶⁶ For a succinct account of the pseudo-scientific nature of sociobiological explanations of gender difference, see Ruth Bleier, "Science and Gender: A critique of biology and its theories on women", in Gunew, extract from "Introduction", in *Science and Gender: A Critique of Biology and its theories on Women* (New York, 1984), pp. 7-14.

*This view would by no means question the desirability and theoretical necessity of articulating a more adequate, less deluded and less mystified vision of subjectivity than those provided by the concepts of the Cartesian cogito, the "transcendental unity of apperception", "Geist and consciousness", or "das Man" (the they). The traditional attributes of the philosophical subject of the West, like self-reflexivity, the capacity for acting on principles, rational accountability for one's actions and the ability to project a life-plan into the future, in short, some form of autonomy and rationality, could then be reformulated by taking account of the radical situatedness of the subject.*⁶⁷

Benhabib implies here that some sort of theoretical articulation of subjectivity is both desirable and necessary. Desirable to whom? Necessary for what? Is my freedom somehow inhibited by the lack of an "adequate model"? Adequate to what purpose? What role does such a "situated self" play in my workaday world? As a description of a political ideal, it may well be efficacious as a compelling vision, a kind of "Rainbow Coalition" for intellectuals. But the Suffragettes were eminently capable of fighting and indeed winning many of the most prized trophies of political emancipation without any explicit reference to the enhancement of female agency and autonomy. Though one may interpret some of their arguments as implicitly invoking these as regulative ideals, this does not describe what they took themselves to be doing. Even if one could find a surviving Suffragette and propose to her such an interpretation, and even if she would acquiesce to that description of her aims and ambitions, it would be as a *reflection* upon what she was doing then. It might be a falsification of her genuine motives and sensibilities at the time, for all that. Benhabib falls firmly within the metaphysical tradition insofar as she cannot accept the possibility that certain fundamental facts of human existence simply may not be amenable to philosophical manipulation and governance.

Benhabib claims that the analysis of gender "forces the boundaries of disciplinary discourses toward a new integration of theoretical paradigms".⁶⁸ We have argued that however integrated the paradigms of theory are, they cannot capture the meaning of human choice and behaviour without imposing a system of standards and interpretative

⁶⁷ SS, p. 214 (emphasis added).

⁶⁸ SS, p. 218.

schemes that take an objectifying and, therewith, distorting, perspective on the object of study. We have suggested further that familiarity with the historical environment and the cultural habits of a period as pieces of information external to our lives does not put us in the position of understanding what it means to be a part of that environment or to take those cultural habits as self-evident facts of life. Thus the salutary effects of taking history into consideration in our analyses can only be of limited benefit. Moreover, the exaggerated confidence in the understanding provided by intellectual study of the linguistic or social practices of a given people at a certain epoch actually renders us less sensitive to the actual barriers that separate us from the "selves" that we take ourselves to be explaining. This last point is not merely a plea for theoretical modesty and moderation. Rather, we wish to point out the boundaries of what we can and cannot say about what it means to be a person.

In this section we have shown how the alternative formulations of subjectivity that are intended to supplant more traditional epistemological models rely on certain fundamental theoretical presuppositions. Most important among these is the assumption that there are no intrinsic limitations on theory regarding the articulation of what it means to be a self, nor on the desire to do justice to all the multifarious senses of selfhood. These seemingly incompatible impulses lead to a method of reading and analyzing the germane material that presupposes and guarantees the result of the analysis. In the section that follows, we wish to show how the effort to incorporate the critical insights of feminism, poststructuralism and neo-pragmatism while retaining the generalizing mode of theoretical discourse implies a conceptual impossibility, namely, the capacity to view one's own life (social habits, cultural background, and so forth) and language with the same theoretical distance that one may have to other languages, cultures and societies. It is this particular expression of faith in theory that accounts for the renunciation of the separation of philosophy and ideology. We will illustrate further the conceptual necessity of distinguishing between theoretical interpretations of subjectivity and the grammatical description of certain features of human thinking.

3. Self-Grounding Reason

The startingpoint of Benhabib's endorsement of a notion of situated rationality is a Rortian version of the "death of metaphysics" thesis:

The feminist counterpoint to the *Death of Metaphysics* would be "Feminist Skepticism Toward the Claims of Transcendent Reason". If the subject of reason is not a suprahistorical and context-transcendent being, but the theoretical and practical creations and activities of this subject bear in every instance the marks of the context out of which they emerge, then the subject of philosophy is inevitably embroiled with knowledge-governing interests which mark and direct its activities. For feminist theory, the most important "knowledge-guiding interest" in Habermas's terms, or disciplinary matrix of truth and power in Foucault's terms, are gender relations and the social, economic, political and symbolic constitution of gender differences among human beings.⁶⁹

She locates the crux of the matter in the repudiation of the idea that philosophy's function is that of a "meta-narrative of legitimation", or a discourse whose purpose is to articulate the criteria of validity presupposed by other discourses: "Once it ceases to be a discourse of justification, philosophy loses its *raison d'être*. [...] Once we have detranscendentalized, contextualized, historicized, genderized the subject of knowledge, what remains of philosophy?"⁷⁰

The Enlightenment ideal of philosophical reflection is, on this view, a "*fiction of legitimation* which ignores that *everyday practices and traditions* also have their own *criteria of legitimation* and criticism".⁷¹ "Situated criticism", however, is found wanting because it assumes that the narratives of our culture (such as "the Judeo-Christian tradition", "the culture of the West", and so forth) are unproblematic categories. Furthermore, it does not explicitly acknowledge that the critical thinker, no less than the objects of her critical examination, is a social actor in the position of "*constantly* interpreting, appropriating, reconstructing and constituting the norms, principles and values which are an aspect of the lifeworld".⁷² Benhabib, therefore,

⁶⁹ SS, p. 213. Benhabib considers Rorty's view more defensible than the Derridean version which, she argues, is both a false picture of the history of philosophy and an inappropriate tool for feminist criticism of sexist practice

⁷⁰ SS, p. 224.

⁷¹ SS, p. 225 (emphasis added).

⁷² SS, p. 226 (emphasis added).

endorses the need for philosophy because "the narratives of our cultures are so conflictual and irreconcilable that, even when one appeals to them, a certain ordering of one's *normative priorities*, a statement of the methodological assumptions guiding one's *choice of narratives*, and a clarification of those *principles in the name of which one speaks is unavoidable*".⁷³ Although Benhabib wants to avoid the immoderate consequences of the stronger versions of postmodern critiques of rationality, her own formulation of the problem suggests that she takes for granted the idea that clarity, truth and "getting things right" are expressions of a bygone era, outmoded and inefficient for our purposes (whatever they may be) since all attempts at grounding these notions epistemologically have been found wanting.

But what is the basis for the rejection of the possibility of "getting things right"? It would seem, at least in part, that the answer lies in the acceptance of the kinds of statements that have received the philosophical stamp of approval, "certain knowledge". When traditional claims to certainty and objectivity can be shown to be relative and partial, the immediate inference has been that certain knowledge, or intersubjective truth, is not to be had.⁷⁴ And this has led to a positive doctrine of "interest-governed knowledge" of different kinds. It has not occurred to Benhabib that even if the claims of "self-grounding reason" cannot be supported, because the language and life of the individual is always implicated (theoretically) in any philosophical pronouncement, this insight may not always be *relevant*. Of course, one could question what is meant by "relevance", and how it is to be determined, and these can be sticky issues.⁷⁵ Nonetheless,

⁷³ SS, p. 226 (emphasis added).

⁷⁴ See our discussion of Derrida in Chapter 2, and the examinations of Foucault, Rorty and Fish in Chapter 3.

⁷⁵ Margaret Crouch has shown, for example, that the accusations that feminists writing about the history of philosophy (such as Flax) commit the genetic fallacy by reducing a thinker's position to his gender and/or psychological make-up are ungrounded, since there is no basis upon which to claim that a certain piece of information is *never* relevant in any particular case. Thus she defends the usefulness of the notion of the genetic fallacy in those cases in which it *is* relevant, but argues that its relevance in any one instance cannot be assumed, but must be shown; on the other hand, neither can the relevance of biographical material be assumed in advance of any discussion. Margaret Crouch, "Feminist Philosophy and the Genetic Fallacy", in *Hypatia: Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, vol. 6, nr. 2, 1991, pp. 104–117.

the difference between relevance and irrelevance does not dissipate the moment we recognize problematic cases. To the contrary, neither Gilligan's book nor Benhabib's would be comprehensible if there were not some generally accessible, recognizable thread running through them. Of course, someone might argue that a certain point in the argumentation is irrelevant while someone else argues for its relevance. Such a discussion presupposes, however, *agreement* that there is something about which they are arguing; it is only in very rare cases that the source of the dispute lies in the proper use of the terms. In this respect, one may wish to distinguish between contentions concerning *how to use a term*, and debates about *when to use it*. One could say that the first is a *conceptual issue*, while the latter is an *ideological one*. It is in the conflation of these levels of discussion that one arrives at the conclusion that there is no difference between philosophy and ideology, or between achieving clarity and winning an argument. The sense in which the latter presupposes the former is that the issues under discussion must have more or less the same meaning to all parties involved in the debate if they are to recognize the object of the dispute.⁷⁶ In the case in point, one can find a number of instances in which the "contingent" details surrounding the life of any given philosopher have little or no immediate bearing on the conceptual remarks at issue. Let us examine one such case.

In earlier chapters, we made use of Wittgenstein's observation that first- and third-person uses of certain terms, specifically words having to do with belief or knowledge, differ in important ways. This remark is intended as a kind of rule of thumb for philosophical investigations into conceptual problems involving doubt and certainty. It may well be enlightening to look at Wittgenstein's intellectual background, life at Cambridge in the thirties, the social history of the fin de siècle Viennese bourgeoisie or perhaps even his personal reaction to Moore. But none of this would make an iota of difference for the meaningfulness (or arguably, even for the accuracy) of the general thrust of these particular remarks. Similarly, one might come up with some interpretation of these remarks that would link them together with Wittgenstein's cultural conservatism or his homosexuality. Once again, both interpretations would require that one first *understand* the remarks which one then interprets in light of the chosen scheme. Even if we wish to argue that

that very understanding is in part a product of what one expects to find, if there were no common apprehension of how to use the word "doubt", for instance, the arguments for or against any interpretation would lack an object. At this point, Benhabib might ask us what criteria of legitimation we have for the "dogmatic" assuredness with which we make this claim. The answer, as we argued earlier, is that the demand for criteria or evidence about matters in which we cannot be in doubt is misplaced. It is precisely because I am a product of the "western tradition" speaking an Indo-European language, addressing others familiar with that tradition and that language, that I know how to use certain ideas. Were I to try to explain these same notions to, say, a Borneo tribesman, there could be no question of "criteria of legitimation" since *that* notion belongs very much to *our* language and *our* culture, specifically, to intellectual culture.

If the foregoing is correct, then Benhabib is highly overstating her claim that an ordering of one's normative priorities, methodological assumptions and principles is unavoidable. This is because the characterization of what it means to be a "social actor", or person, is so theoretically exaggerated. Let us ask once more, is it the case, *really*, that we are *constantly* interpreting, appropriating, reconstructing and constituting the norms, principles and values which are an aspect of the lifeworld? One understands the sense in which this is true, namely, that while values, principles and norms are not "out there" *in any sense*, it makes *some kind* of sense to talk about the "reality" of the stone, or even of biological facts, apart from the scientific discourses of geology and anatomy.⁷⁶ Values are social products in a way in which volcanoes and bodily secretions are not. But Benhabib's description actually requires that we look at our lives with precisely the kind of theoretical distance that classical conceptions of selfhood

⁷⁶ An American Republican concerned about infringements upon individual liberties and a Democrat, concerned about the common good, for example, must both recognize how to use the term "democracy" (i.e., to designate a form of government and not, say, a kind of bicycle) if they are to be able to debate about how to best realize "democratic" ideals.

⁷⁷ To repeat summarily an argument that we have given throughout, in order for us to understand what it means to erase the distinction between a discourse and its object, we must have a preliminary understanding of the term "discourse" (something like "talk about") and "things" (what the "talk about" is about). The cancellation of that distinction then is normative rather than descriptive.

demand of us: if norms, values and principles were as amorphous and gelatinous as she depicts them, human life would be unrecognizable. There are innumerable cases in which what Benhabib is calling "norms and principles" stand fast for us. We do not, for instance, construct, defend, justify or legitimate "not spitting in our neighbor's face without provocation", or "crossing the street at green", nor need we do so in order to live our lives. The requirement that such behavior be clarified and coherently melded into a "system of values and beliefs" is a superimposed requirement from the perspective of the philosophical demand for completeness and coherence. In point of fact, if every act were characterized by the kind of indeterminacy described here ("Shall I pay for my groceries this time?"; "Why is that man walking on the sidewalk rather than on the hoods of the cars he passes?"; "How do you know which key to press when you write a word?"), we would hardly be capable of living our lives at all.

Benhabib's version of giving everyday life its due is to claim for it its own criteria of legitimation, and its own forms of knowledge. She does not question, however, whether the methods and conceptual schemes of philosophy, psychology and the social sciences are appropriate in each and every instance for an understanding of what is involved in these kinds of knowledge. She writes as if all forms of knowledge have "criteria of legitimation" that are subsumable under the criteriological demands of social and epistemological theory. In so doing, she implicitly accepts the notion of rational justification (however much she modifies what that entails) as an indisputable requirement for truth and meaning. This, if anything, is the classical gesture of the much maligned "western metaphysical tradition", and yet it is precisely this assumption that is never seriously called into question by its detractors (or, by its defenders, for that matter).

Returning to the epistemological problems raised by the specifically feminist critique of the traditional view of the objectivity of reason, one might ask, along with Sandra Harding:

Are the "problems of philosophy" really human problems, or do they only reflect disproportionately what appears problematic for men? *Are the problems of justifying the "rules" for establishing appropriate relationships between mind and body,*

reason and emotions, self and external world, will and desire – relationships painfully sundered for men in their infancy – *really human problems*? Notice that in each dichotomy, the latter is perceived as threatening to overcome and control the former unless the former creates rigid separation from and rational control of the latter. *The history of modern philosophy appears disproportionately obsessed with establishing rules by which mind, reason, self, and the will can legitimately control the body, the emotions, the external world ("nature" and "other persons"), and desire.*⁷⁸

If we set aside the facile attenuation of infantile trauma as the source of modern philosophical thinking and the sweeping generalization of what is or is not problematic for "men", there is an important question being raised here: what kind of problem is the problem of justification of facts of life (such as the fact that there are other minds); how is it even possible to establish rules for things which are simply immune to our demands for legitimation? While feminists are rightly sceptical about the valorization of certain forms of reasoning on the basis of "rules" and "rationality" decided by a certain group of people as the self-evident principles of proper thought for all human beings, they seem to be hostage to the idea that captured their predecessors, namely, the assumption of two mutually exclusive alternative conceptions: either there are things about which we are all in agreement (as articulated by traditional formulations of rational discourse) or there is only rhetoric, subjective preferences, partiality, ideology and/or the power of persuasion. Why should we allow the recent history of theoretical thinking to hijack truth, meaning and knowledge? Why is it so self-evident that the things about which we all, in fact, *do agree* are expressions of, or somehow isomorphic with, theoretical notions? Is the meaning of the red light dependent on any theory of communication, rationality, or truth? Of course, Benhabib's aim is to construct a theory of moral and cognitive agency that would negotiate between these two poles. But the very fact that she thinks that a theory is required belies the purpose to which it is put, since it acknowledges a gulf that, we would suggest, is simply not there. If theories of rationality cannot ground language or culture, because they are conceptually conditioned

⁷⁸ Sandra Harding, "Is Gender a Variable in Conceptions of Rationality? A Survey of Issues", in *Beyond Domination: New Perspectives on Women and Philosophy*, ed. Carol Gould (Totowa, N.J., 1983), p. 56 (emphasis added).

by these rather than the reverse, so much the worse for theories of rationality.

Up to this point we have been concerned with the extent to which feminist critiques of traditional philosophy, its methods and ideals, have unwittingly appropriated significant elements of those methods and ideals. They have, among other things, accepted the posing of the question, "what does it mean to be the subject of our thoughts and actions?" and the notion that there must be some sort of theoretical account that can answer that question coherently. Furthermore, the theoretical demands for coherence and systematicity are taken to reflect qualities inhering in our conceptions of what it means to be a person, to think, to act, to speak, to choose, and, importantly, to be *this man*, or *this woman*. Finally, the manner in which one arrives at the preferred model of subjectivity entails selecting and molding the material with which one is working (philosophical texts, or psychological interviews, for example) in such a manner as to yield the desired results. In the case of feminist critiques of classical views on human nature, this means rejecting the notion of objectivity as a distortion, because rational reconstructions of objectivity have falsified human experience. This critical point has been transformed into a positive doctrine of the malleability and contingency of our language use and ways of living. As a result, accurate conceptual observations about serious defects in psychological, philosophical and social theory in particular cases are themselves reduced to stance-taking in an ideological debate (the possibility of genuine conceptual clarity having been summarily dispensed with because previous claims to conceptual clarity have shown themselves to be infected with ideology).

In the last section, we will offer one example of how a philosophical problem can be resolved precisely by distinguishing between (i) discourses about subjectivity and the objects of those discourses; (ii) explanations of a given phenomenon and the purposes to which those explanations are put; (iii) the evidence or grounds offered as justification for a belief and the content or meaning of the statement of that belief. Finally, we claim that no method or criteria of justification is needed to uphold the distinction between understanding and values, conceptual clarity and the claims made on the basis of that clarity, or philosophy and ideology. By way of this example,

we wish to show that these distinctions simply are in use in a way that cannot be eradicated by theory, and, as such, are inherently meaningful.

4. Woman as a Philosophical Problem

One need not be a feminist, nor even female, to be struck by how "Woman" appears as metaphor, as symbol, as category, as almost everything except as a person, even in the works of the least conjectural, most careful of philosophers. Linda Alcoff writes:

Whether she is construed as essentially immoral and irrational (à la Schopenhauer) or essentially kind and benevolent (à la Kant), she is always construed as an essential *something* inevitably accessible to direct intuited apprehension by males. Despite the variety of ways in which man has construed her essential characteristics, she is always the Object, a conglomeration of attributes to be predicted and controlled along with other natural phenomena. The place of the free-willed subject who can transcend nature's mandates is reserved exclusively for men.⁷⁹

The consequence of this is that female philosophers in particular can feel suddenly estranged from a text which they had hitherto experienced as resonating with their own interests, problems and concerns.

Let us look at a few examples.⁸⁰ (1) In his *Anthropology*, Kant asserts that woman's character, as distinct from man's, is wholly determined by natural needs (this idea is all too pervasive to be dismissed as a simple lapse into banality; we shall return to this later). Kant's justification of this view is reminiscent of recent claims made in the name of sociobiology. He states: "Nature entrusted to the female womb her dearest pledge, namely, the species, in the form of the embryo, through which the race would reproduce and perpetuate itself. Thus she was concerned, as it were, with the preservation of the embryo, and implanted this fear into woman's character, namely, fear of physical injury and a timidity before similar dangers. Due to this weakness, she rightfully requests masculine

⁷⁹ Alcoff, pp. 434f.

⁸⁰ We've chosen not to mention the infamous case of Nietzsche primarily because, in our view, it's been overplayed, but also because his use of Woman as metaphor is so extraordinarily complicated that it simply does not suit our purposes here.

protection."⁸¹ Because of their natural timidity, women are unsuitable for intellectual work. Regarding educated women, Kant writes: "they use their books somewhat like a watch, that is, they wear the watch so it can be seen that they have one, although it has usually stopped or is set incorrectly."⁸² In an early work, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, Kant states explicitly that woman's philosophy is "not to reason, but to sense", adding: "I hardly believe that the fair sex is capable of principles."⁸³

2) In a similar vein, Kierkegaard, in "On the Concept of Dread", writes: "That woman is more sensuous than man is immediately shown by her bodily organization."⁸⁴ He goes on to say that his interest is not in her physiognomy as such, but in looking at her with regard to her "*ideal aspect*", in two senses. First of all, we are to consider her in terms of her "*aesthetic*" ideal, that is, in terms of beauty. Secondly, we can examine her from the point of view of her *ethical* ideality, namely, procreation. We are to be reminded of the difference between a man's beauty (his history, as written on his face) and woman's beauty (that is, its lack of history). Because woman's beauty resides in its lack of history, Kierkegaard concludes: "silence is not only woman's highest wisdom, it is also her highest beauty."⁸⁵ Ethically speaking, while man's life is not defined by his attraction to woman, woman's life culminates in her attraction to man, that is to say, in procreation. This shows, according to Kierkegaard, that woman is more sensuous than man. The point of the digression is to show that woman, since she is more sensuous than man, is more anxious, since the tension between sensuousness and spirit (or between drives, needs, feelings and desires, on the one hand, and the highest

⁸¹ Kant, 1968, p. 652 (B 288; A 290), (transl. ours).

⁸² Kant, 1968, p. 654 (B 290, A 292), (transl. ours).

⁸³ Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, transl. John T. Goldthwait (Berkeley, 1960), pp. 132f.

⁸⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *Begrebet Angest*, ed. A. B. Drachmann, in *Samlede Værker*, Bind 6 (København, 1963), p. 156: "At Qvinden er mere sandselig end Manden, viser strax hendes legemlige Organisation." We have translated *angest* with angst and anxiety (rather than "dread"), alternatively, following the spirit of Kierkegaard's own definition, namely, that angst lacks an object. While one can dread some concrete event, angst and anxiety suggest a more diffuse and indeterminate feeling of existential uneasiness.

⁸⁵ Kierkegaard, p. 157: "Derfor er Taushed ikke blot Qvindens høieste Viisdom, men ogsaa hendes høieste Skjønhed."

of human qualities, especially the ethical and the religious) is greater in her than in man.⁸⁶

3) And finally, Ortega y Gasset, whose sober perspicacity in analyzing the prejudices and unexamined assumptions of his own time is perhaps less in evidence than one might hope when he offers three answers to the question of in what woman's femininity, or womanliness, consists: (i) "The instant we see a woman, we seem to have before us a being whose *inward humanity* is characterized, in contrast to our own male humanity and that of other men, by being *essentially confused*." He goes on to waive the pejorative connotations of such an assertion by adding that "[c]onfusion is not a defect in woman", since it is what gives men such *delight*, in contrast to himself, who is made up of "clarities".⁸⁷

(ii) Woman has a "twofold" condition: "being human, and being less so than a man is."⁸⁸ Again, this is not a vice in woman, but a virtue: due to her fundamental inferiority, she can love man in a way that man cannot love woman, that is, she can "disappear in the other".⁸⁹ While a man needs his career to be a man, woman needs nothing but man to be a woman. In her relationship to man, she completes her humanity.

(iii) "[W]oman's whole psychic life is more involved with her body than man's; in other words, her soul is more corpeal – but, vice versa, her body lives more constantly and more closely with her spirit; that is, her body is more permeated with soul." Indeed man's erotic attraction to woman consists not in his desire for her body merely as a body, but in that to desire her body is to desire her soul, since her body is (her) soul.⁹⁰

What shall we say about this heartwarming unanimity between three philosophers who otherwise have little in common? To begin with, it would seem that Kant, Kierkegaard and Ortega agree on the following points:

⁸⁶ Kierkegaard, pp. 162f.

⁸⁷ Ortega, p. 130 (emphasis added).

⁸⁸ Ortega, p. 132.

⁸⁹ Ortega, p. 136.

⁹⁰ Ortega, pp. 137f.

- 1) Woman is more tied to her body than man is.
- 2) Woman's physicality makes her more diffuse (for Ortega), more anxious (for Kierkegaard), or more timid (Kant). Her reason, while it may exist in varying degrees from woman to woman, is less defining for her than it is for man. Ortega and Kant agree that this makes her unsuited for intellectual pursuits; Kierkegaard satisfies himself with the normative claim that the ideal for a woman is to be pretty and keep her mouth shut. Being of a more sensuous nature, woman is also less capable of principled behavior, that is to say, she is, almost by definition, less capable of ethical thinking and action.
- 3) Woman's life, ethically and spiritually speaking, is defined by, and culminates in, two events: conception and parturition. (This is stated explicitly in Kierkegaard,⁹¹ and more politely, although no less clearly, in Kant and Ortega.)

There are three common responses to the kinds of remarks cited above. One is to take the high road, so to speak, and forgive the naïveté expressed in such opinions as culturally determined, and even allow for the possibility that these descriptions of woman are true of women as their roles were determined for them by the patriarchal society in which they lived. Such a view would be one version of the classical liberal response articulated in one form or another by traditional feminists such as John Stuart Mill, Mary Wollstonecraft and Simone de Beauvoir.⁹² Another response is to take a critical attitude towards *our own* politically correct age, and allow for the possibility that, for example, women's biological constitution actually *does* make them more fit for certain activities and less fit for others, or perhaps say that whether by virtue of inculturation or biology, as a description of how women are, it is in fact fair to say that women are, for example, less defined by their careers and intellectual interests than men are.⁹³ Finally, it has become popular to view such statements as revealing expressions of what philosophers

⁹¹ Kierkegaard, p. 162.

⁹² John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty, Representative Government, The Subjection of Women* (London, 1971); Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (New York, 1967); Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Hammondsworth, 1972).

⁹³ Both radical feminists such as Adrienne Rich and Mary Daly, as well as anti-

are actually concerned with, even when they write about matters having nothing to do with sexuality or gender. One argues, for example, that Kant's pietism made him suspicious of everything associated with the body: needs, desires, feelings. This anti-sensualism is at the very root of his epistemology, the argument runs, and once we penetrate the armor of rationalism which Kant wraps around his thoroughly irrational fear of the body, of sexuality, and of women, we find nothing but fetishism and bourgeois prejudice.⁹⁴

It is not our intention to examine the veracity of these claims, nor to pay the usual tribute to the historicity of thinking on such issues, nor to show how these views of woman do or do not pervade philosophy. Enough has been said by others on these subjects, and the reader surely has his or her own ideas about such matters. What we wish to do here is to point to a possible source of confusion about what is wrong with these statements, one that presupposes no ideological conviction one way or the other. This confusion may lay behind some feminist criticism of masculinist prejudices in philosophy, but, as we hope to point out, it is precisely the same confusion that is displayed by the sorts of statements that we have just cited. In other words, our point is philosophical rather than ideological. If we are right, then whether one finds Ortega's remarks compelling and apt, or juvenile and silly, ought not to play any role in understanding and, it is to be hoped, accepting, the conceptual remarks that we are about to make.

It might be a fruitful beginning to take seriously Ortega's own recommendation on how we are to begin our investigation. He says this: "What we call 'woman' is not a product of nature but an invention of history, just as art is. [...] Instead of studying woman zoologically, it would be infinitely more fertile to contemplate her as a *literary genre* or an *artistic tradition*."⁹⁵ It seems that he has

feminists, such as Otto Weininger and Ortega y Gasset, hold this view. See Ortega, 1957 and Otto Weininger, *Geschlecht und Charakter: Eine Prinzipielle Untersuchung* (Wien, 1903). The difference is that Daly and Rich see this as an expression of the superiority of the female form of life. See, for example, Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York, 1976) and Mary Daly, *Gyn/ecology: The MetaEthics of Radical Feminism* (Boston, 1978).

⁹⁴ See, for example, Robin May Schott, *Cognition and Eros: A Critique of the Kantian Paradigm* (Boston, 1988) or Jane Flax, 1990.

⁹⁵ Ortega, p. 134f. (emphasis added).

done this to a far greater degree than he himself realizes. Furthermore, one could say that this is more or less what Kierkegaard and Kant have done, although they would presumably find such a claim downright baffling. Let us clarify.

Ortega's ruminations on the subject quoted here are offered as an appendage to a chapter entitled "More About Others and 'I'"; the title of the appendix is "Brief Excursion Toward 'Her'". That Ortega explicitly refers to a divide that must be crossed to reach that dark continent of otherness that constitutes the female is indicative of his way of dealing with woman, namely, as a metaphor or symbol. For even when describing her inner life, he does so from the point of view of an omniscient narrator describing a character of his own invention. He *ascribes* to her a confusion, weakness, dependence and sensuality that might well fit with his experience of women, but is almost impossible *to have* as an experience, from the inside, as it were. What he offers is thus not a *description* of the inner life of woman, as he claims, but an *ascription* of qualities that he associates with the "delights" of femininity. To put it another way, Ortega's claims about femininity are not descriptive, but normative.

The rhetorical waive of the pejorative connotations notwithstanding, confusion is seldom used as a positive, or even a neutral descriptive term. In real life, we usually experience confusion as an uncomfortable state, a state from which we want to extract ourselves. Thus even when one speaks of confusion as something positive, one means that, for example, it is only out of confusion that we can arrive at genuine clarity. And even if we were to imagine, say, a young French poet whose head is filled with romantic ideas about the chaos and confusion that constitute the world, we dare say that there is a kind of confusion which he finds less romantic and enticing, for example, when his fumbling attempts at explaining that he's left his wallet in his hotel room are met with impatient incomprehension on the part of the stout and surly waiter in the Turkish tavern. But even if our poet were to look back at that confusion with fondness, that fondness presupposes that the confusion is over and done with.

The confusion described by Ortega is one that cannot be worked out or done away with. It is part and parcel of being a woman – he says that confusion is no more a defect in a woman than not having wings is a defect in a fish. More importantly, even if one were to

find apt the description of woman's spiritual contours as blurry, or fuzzy, or what have you, it is only from the *outside* that one can see "woman" as such. For women, like men, experience themselves as, at times, confused, at times clear; at times uncertain, at times determined. Most of the time, women go about their business, cross the street, buy the morning paper, greet the neighbor, admonish their children, and so forth, pretty much as men do; and, in these cases which make up a large part of every day, the experience of clarity or confusion described by Ortega plays little if any part in what we do. That women themselves *can* see the world as divided up into feminine vaguaries and masculine clarities says little. No one would deny that many women, especially girls, revel in fantasies of the strong, clear-headed, practical man who will save them from their own inadequacies, just as a certain kind of man, especially older men, may well delight in the squishy soft, rose-scented bosom of some gentle, caring, blurry being. And they are welcome to each other. Of course, that is a polemical example. The kind of diffuseness described by Ortega need not be accompanied by these other attributes of femininity. He means simply this:

in the masculine inwardness everything normally has strict and definite lines, which makes the human male a being full of rigid angles. Woman, on the other hand, lives in perpetual twilight; she is never sure whether she loves or not, will do something or not do it, is repentant or unrepentant. In woman there is neither midday nor midnight; she is a creature of twilight.⁹⁶

However one reacts to Ortega's description – as an apt, honest depiction of the differences between the sexes at a time when such observations are ostracized from polite discussion, or as a collection of tiresome, sexist clichés – one must acknowledge the difference between the description of the experience of being a woman from the point of view of a man, and the description that a woman herself might give of that experience. Ortega's definition of femininity is, by necessity, formulated in terms of his male experience. No man, however practical, strong, clear-headed and proud, actually walks around twenty-four hours a day as if he were the leading man in an

⁹⁶ Ortega, p. 131.

American action film. Similarly, women cannot experience themselves in their daily doings as a literary genre, work of art, cloud of confusion, or any other male image of women, if they're going to manage in the world at all. Only when looking at themselves from the outside, that is, when looking at themselves in the reflection of what has come to be called "the male gaze" can they see that fuzzy creature described by Ortega. That is, I may well look at myself with another's eyes, but in so doing, I become "her" to myself; I look at myself as an object of desire, philosophical explanation, or bewilderment, and therewith objectify myself to myself.

Let us turn our gaze toward Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard defines angst thus: "angst is the reality of freedom as the possibility of possibility."⁹⁷ He later claims that angst, as defined, characterizes woman's fundamental experience of the moment of conception and the moment of birth. It is unlikely that most women, even women born and bred in devout Lutheran belief that their sole purpose in existence is to bear and rear children, feel the tension between body and soul, and therewith the angst described by Kierkegaard, as the primary fact of their sexual lives and the children issuing from it. Giving birth is a complicated event: one is worried that something might go wrong; one is in pain; one is elated; above all, one is exhausted. Some women experience so much discomfort that they remember nothing else. For other women, the delivery is relatively painless, and the entire event is intoxicating. Few women, one may surmise, lie there in a state of existential anxiety over the split between one's ideal nature and the twinges of corporeal necessity. On the other hand, someone studying the experience of childbirth as, say, a psychological phenomenon, or trying to fit the momentous occasion into some ethical scheme, might observe a woman in the throes of this strange concatenation of sensations and emotions, and try to capture it in terms of something like the concept of dread. Nonetheless, one should say that women's own diverse experiences force us either to reject this objectified picture of "the true meaning" of giving birth, or to admit that it fits badly with the kind of existential perspective on anxiety that Kierkegaard wants to illustrate by way of this example.

⁹⁷ Kierkegaard, p. 136: "Angest er Frihedens Virkelighed som Mulighed for Muligheden."

Finally, if we look at the example of Kant's thesis about woman's innate weakness of body and character (the latter following from the former), we again notice that he describes woman's claim on man's protection in terms of a legitimacy to be accorded, of course, by man. He explains that women who think that they have overcome their natural timidity by engaging in intellectual pursuits are simply adorning themselves in man's dress to get attention. By what faculty does he see into women's souls and perceive their true instincts? We are not denying that Kant met many such women, that is, women for whom engaging in scholarly pursuits was *de rigueur* in pretty much the same way as having the latest fashion from Paris was, and that Kant was keenly, even painfully, aware of the emptiness of their phrases. The point again, is that the attempt at justifying certain personal observations in terms of biological fact and philosophical principle, amounts to turning his own personal experience, and the metaphors and categories that he finds compelling to describe these, into an account of woman's nature *as she is in herself*. But no philosophical insight or apparatus puts one into such a position. The very attempt leads ineluctably to a falsification of the phenomenon that one is trying to capture. This, if anything, is the lesson learned from poststructuralist critiques of "metaphysical thinking", "metanarratives", and so forth.

Some feminist critics of philosophy argue that the equation of woman with sensuality, physical necessity, weakness, confusion, and unpredictability and chaos, is tied to a persistent denigration of everything that falls on the "downside" of the male/female dichotomy: strong-good, weak-bad; reason-good, emotion-bad; simplicity-good, complexity-bad; activity-good, passivity-bad; culture-good, nature-bad, and so forth. They suggest that we turn the tables and simply begin to prize that which we had neglected, and rethink our attitudes and our paradigms for thought and behavior. They point out, for example, that the obsession with mathematical reasoning, mastery over nature, competitiveness and so forth has given us nuclear meltdowns and smart bombs.⁹⁸ Why should the study of physics enjoy more prestige than, say, child care? Whose rationality deter-

⁹⁸ See, for example, Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston, 1978).

mines that more money is needed for research and development of computer applications while our elderly are withering away for simple lack of attention? From this view, feminine values are those of caring, nurturing, solidarity, co-operation, etc., and constitute a different, perhaps even a higher form of rationality.⁹⁹

This position has been criticized by other feminists, particularly those influenced by postmodern thought, as simplistic. They say that it takes for granted the univocity of the relevant terms and the dichotomy which they form. On one postmodern feminist reading, any thinking, speaking, acting subject is constituted by the various constantly shifting "positions" (in language, society, economic life, race relations, the cultural sphere, and so forth) that we have in different contexts at different times. From this view, there is no unified experience of "woman", there is no *center* to human experience, either in the body or in the mind, in history or in social class, in reason or in gender. They see all determinations as themselves products of prior determinations, and the thinking and acting subject is nothing more than a metaphor for the unity that forever eludes us. Gender, race, economic status, social status, level of education and so forth are merely markers on a grid; the subject is the point of intersection between the various lines of movement, but most importantly, the markers themselves are in motion; nothing is fixed. As a consequence, nothing is true of "woman as she is in herself", but by the same token, *nothing is false* either. Postmodern feminists argue that, while the discourse of feminism can act as a counterbalance or form of resistance to the masculinist discourse of traditional philosophy, it cannot *correct* the latter or point to its weaknesses, since there is no fixed standard by which to judge more correct or less correct. Finally, as a consequence of what has been said, the "inner life" of the individual, man or woman, is said to be a delusion, born out of the metaphysical longing for unity and coherence. Sexual difference is plastic and malleable, but there is no "I" who forms it.¹⁰⁰

Finally, there has been a great deal of criticism of these postmodern themes from feminists who are disturbed by the pluralist paradise

⁹⁹ See, for example, our discussion of Carol Gilligan.

¹⁰⁰ Butler's *Gender Trouble*, for instance.

pictured here. They worry that, in a world in which the individual is conceived of as determined by his or her place in the flux of endless signification and interpretation, in which anything is possible and everything is permissible, "who will do what to whom under the new pluralism is depressingly predictable".¹⁰¹ As Sabina Lovibond puts it: feminism must be, if anything, a political programme, the aim of which is "the abolishment of the sex class-system" and the "forms of inner life" belonging to it. This is only possible, she concludes, as an extension of the Enlightenment ideal of progress, egalitarianism, and internal coherence of the (proposed) system(s) of belief. From this view, the passive, fuzzy female ideal is *indeed* a literary genre, one produced in the writings of men, to be enjoyed by other men; the philosophical statements about the nature of woman cited earlier are what men *make* of women, when they're speaking *mano a mano*. A feminist (such as Lovibond) might say that to be a feminist is to demand that women have a say in the writing of the script, at least when it comes to the work of describing and determining their own roles, and, in particular, in articulating the motivations behind their actions and statements.

Our own view, or rather, our own question, is this: Whatever sympathies or antipathies one may have with the philosophers mentioned or with their feminist critics, why is there so much weight placed on the idle locker-room chest-pounding of philosophers? Since the descriptions of woman offered here by Kant, Kierkegaard and Ortega cannot possibly serve as descriptions of female subjectivity as experienced by women, why should we worry about them? The simple truth is that, even if we want to say that they wrote the script for societal norms and beliefs for their respective epochs and cultures (a claim that is often grossly exaggerated), those scripts lay covered with dust, unread and unloved by the vast majority of peo-

¹⁰¹ Debohra Cameron and Elizabeth Frazer, *Lust to Kill: A feminist investigation of sexual murder* (Oxford, 1987), p. 175. In the original context, the remark addresses the discussion of "pluralism" with regard to sexual practices. For critical discussions of the ideological consequences of postmodernist theory for feminist practice as well as the masculinist bias of certain aspects of postmodernism, see Sabina Lovibond, "Feminism and Postmodernism" in Docherty, and Geraldine Finn, "Why are there no Great Women Postmodernists", in *Relocating Cultural Studies: Developments in theory and research*, eds. V. Blundell, J. Shepherd, and I. Taylor (New York, 1993).

ple today. Is it even conceivable that the pharmaceutical executive who sexually harassed his secretaries and administrative assistants did so out of a metaphysical conviction about woman's inherent timidity inspired by a reading of Kant's *Anthropology*? Here it would serve us well to consider Rorty's advice: if your purpose is to overcome some form of social, economic or political oppression, you can probably find more efficient means than attacking the prejudices of dead philosophers.¹⁰² Kant's views on women are simply irrelevant for us.

There may well be men who, having happened upon one of these texts, feel a certain kinship with its author; one such man might find the metaphor of woman as confused, for example, apt. This does not carry with it any necessary consequence, any more than Jane Austen's depiction of desirable men, as strong-willed, hard-headed, not terribly perceptive means of gainful employment, turn women who are touched by her novels into cynical, manipulative goldiggers. The reason is this: we all have our ideas about the world, and differences and similarities between the people who populate it. Just because these ideas are not always thoroughly thought-out or tested for logical consistency does not make them false. On the other hand, if those personal, idiosyncratic, often inherited notions are treated as Truths to be justified within some conceptual framework, they open themselves up to the kind of critical scrutiny that we apply to philosophical discussions in general. Without the conceptual apparatus and claims to objectivity in which they are articulated, they would be treated with the same kind of sympathy, or indifference, or scorn, that we usually show toward individual expressions of taste or preference or cultural habit. Kant's description of woman as timid and unsuited to intellectual labour is, quite simply, of no *philosophical* interest. No confusions have been eliminated, no concepts clarified, no critical insights into the nature of thinking, belief or action have been gained, for us, by his account of woman's nature. The same holds for Ortega and Kierkegaard in the passages cited. As readers, we can take the insights that mean something to us, and toss out the rest. A female reader of one of these philosophers may well find the description of woman's nature wildly off the mark as a description of herself; but what is the philosophical

¹⁰² See Rorty, 1991, p. 112 (footnote).

interest in combatting such a view, if her purpose in reading that philosopher is to gain philosophical insights and not to engage in ideological or political polemics? And as we have remarked, if we are interested in ideology (insofar as it is directed toward social change), we would not do well to start with Kant. At any rate, the point is not that polemics have no value, but that we can distinguish between remarks that are philosophically relevant to our concerns, and ideas that we can only understand as facile opinions, however much intellectual decoration adorns those opinions.

Feminists who insist on reading the history of philosophy as, in the words of one commentator, "the history of the oppression of women", fall into the trap of *believing* that the justificatory rigamarole offered up as rational argument *is* of philosophical pertinence. But we are not constrained to buy as philosophy everything that is served up to us as philosophy. Kant, Kierkegaard and Ortega may or may not have accurately described the role of woman in the context in which they wrote, but they were all mistaken in believing that they had therewith described "what it means to be a woman", since, among other things, they left out the experience of women, and replaced it with their respective pictures of woman's "true nature".¹⁰³ The accuracy of the descriptions are untouched by this conceptual point. Philosophers, like cab-drivers, hockeyplayers, and firemen, are entitled to their own perceptions, and these need not meet the demands of philosophical clarity, coherence and rigor. On the other hand, it may well be desirable that they keep these personal reflections to themselves, or at least refrain from enlisting them in the service of philosophical interchange – especially in mixed company.

In the foregoing discussion, we have shown how the attempt to explain women's subjectivity (or less pretentiously, women's character) through the categories and thought-forms of philosophical reasoning involved a conceptual impossibility. To the extent that they thought themselves to be giving a philosophically perspicuous account of female experience, Kant, Kierkegaard and Ortega were simply wrong, and wrong on grounds that we must all recognize. On the other hand, one may draw whatever ideological consequences

¹⁰³ It is especially striking that Kant should attempt to describe woman as "thing-in-itself". What he ends up describing, of course, is woman as appearance.

one finds sympathetic from this recognition. The integrity of the conceptual point is in no way threatened by subsequent interpretations of the meaning of that point, nor by the political purposes for which it may be used. We have, in a sense, dissolved the philosophical question, "what is woman?", by showing how any attempted rational account must proceed from a startingpoint extraneous to the facts of life for the billions of human beings whom we call women. The attempt to incorporate those facts into a new, bigger and better answer to the question, "what is woman?" is doomed to failure, if its purpose is genuinely to illuminate female subjectivity as such. The reason for this is the same as that given above: however nuanced, subtle and sublime the model (such as that of a "narrative unity"), it is not in fact interchangeable with the manifold facts of our lives as they appear to us in the day to day existence upon which the model is based. The question, "what is woman?" requires that we distill certain aspects of the life of women in order to serve a certain purpose. For instance, we have to simplify to promulgate the view that traditional female roles of wife and mother are bequeathed by nature, and therefore ought not to be toyed with, or to espouse the position that women should refrain from engaging in sexual relations with men altogether since, by definition, it involves their humiliation and degradation.¹⁰⁴ On the face of it, however, the question "what is woman?" is only answerable by ostensive definition. We learn the difference in *how* to use gender terms at the same time as we learn how to use words. The more controversial question as to *when* to use these terms requires that we have lived in the world long enough to know that there are different fields of study (biology, philosophy, and psychology come to mind), that some people attach certain values to women and others to men (men laugh "heartily" when sufficiently amused; only women "cackle"), and so forth. And, to repeat, our self-perceptions are established, in part, by the contexts that occasion certain uses and not others. But to try and dislocate ourselves altogether from the facts that make up our existence is simply not epistemologically feasible, whatever

¹⁰⁴ This last view finds its most articulate voice in Andrea Dworkin, *Intercourse* (London, 1987), p. 138: "Intercourse is the pure, sterile formal expression of men's contempt for women."

ideological benefits may accrue from such an effort. The effort itself relies on language working as it usually does, and this means the terms "woman" and "man" must be used in a recognizable manner (and not to mean, for example, ice-cream flavor).

Ortega relates a story about his amusement upon meeting an educated young woman from the United States who insisted upon his talking to her as a "human being". Ortega replied: "Madam, I am not acquainted with this person whom you call a 'human being'. I know only men and women. As it is my good fortune that you are not a man but a woman – and certainly a magnificent one – I behave accordingly."¹⁰⁵

Ortega's analysis of the woman's remark was that

[t]he poor creature had gone through some college where she had suffered the rationalistic education of the time, and rationalism is a form of intellectual bigotry which, in thinking about reality, tries to take it into account as little as possible. In this case it had produced the hypothesis of the abstraction "human being". It should always be remembered that the species – and the species is the concrete and real – reacts on the genus and specifies it.¹⁰⁶

This comment is a fine example of how the motivations and values behind making an assertion, as well as the ideological purpose to which it is put, can be irrelevant for the truth and meaningfulness of the statement. On the one hand, Ortega apparently found it galling that his interlocutor was evidently neither charmed nor impressed by his pompous demonstrations of masculine superiority, and this was an important factor in his desire to affirm the rigidity of gender differences. Having done so, Ortega relies on our recognition of the truth of his remark in order to flesh out what this means in terms of woman's intellectual and moral vacuity. But his *point* is well taken, even if we eschew everything else he has to say about the sexes aside from this: we do not meet mere "human beings". We meet men and women. On the other hand, there are numerous instances in which this may not be particularly relevant. While it is thinkable that I might not recall what someone I met was wearing, if she had an accent or not, if she had long or short hair, what her name was, and

¹⁰⁵ Ortega, p. 129.

¹⁰⁶ Ortega, p. 129.

a thousand other things about her, it is simply unthinkable that I should forget if she was a woman or a man. Having said that, what this means for my attitude toward her, how I treat her relative to how I treat others and the like is very much indeed a matter of aculturation, personal history, and social practice. But there is no more objectivity in my apprehension of Ortega's remarks as expressions of peurile machismo than in his patronizing account of women's psychological make-up. The only kind of objectivity available to us is the ground that we stand on: we live in a world peopled by men and women. This is the "objective fact" (given any *reasonable* demands on the notion of objectivity) that makes possible our ruminations, debates and theories about the meaning of our lives from the point of view of gender.

Now *if* one accepts the premises of the poststructuralist gender argument, that our immediate apprehension of men and women is always already a linguistic, cultural artifact subject to changes in discursive practice and, in that respect, contingent and indefinite, *then* it is impossible to argue for the existence of men and women. But does it make sense to argue that there are men and women? One of the aims of this book has been to show that there are certain features of human speech and thinking that need not be grounded in argumentation, proofs, or demonstrations of any kind, since the demand for evidence is misplaced. We shall conclude with the following observation: if one of the results of contemporary theorizing about subjectivity is that we are uncertain about what we mean when we talk about men and women, not in exceptional and complex cases, but *as a rule*, then there is perhaps a greater need today than ever for the philosophical impetus to achieve conceptual clarity, for in that case, we are deeply, deeply confused.

Conclusion

We began our investigations by examining some of the problems that motivate "rationalist" or "foundationalist" projects. Husserl's phenomenology, which we took as our main illustration, is characterized by the attempt to find objective criteria for meaningfulness that would also exhibit the immediacy of subjective experience. The criterion of immediacy serves to prevent an infinite regress in the grounding of knowledge: that which is known directly need not be grounded in something else. Objectivity, on the other hand, is a necessary condition for the grounding of knowledge and understanding, if these are not to succumb to the relativizing implications of subjectivism. The attempt to bring together immediacy and objectivity is realized in the formulation of an "objective subjectivity" as ground and guarantor of knowledge, the transcendental ego.

Derrida and Foucault share the view that "phenomenology", broadly understood, represents the last bastion of metaphysical thinking in the continental tradition. The idea that we can dislocate ourselves from the linguistic and social practices which make our own theoretical discourse possible is, on this view, a myth. Poststructuralism, as a movement, can be characterized as a negation of the phenomenological project. Where Husserl tried to show the objectivity, universality and immediacy of our grounds for knowledge, Derrida and Foucault try to show how that very attempt displays the provincialism, partiality, and mediated nature of *all* thinking. Given what Derrida and Foucault take to be the intrinsic limitations of rational discourse and self-reflection upon that discourse, they are led to the conclusion that the very idea of a thinking subject as ground and guarantor of meaning is a metaphysical delusion.

Finally, taking their cue from the poststructuralist critique of foundationalism and universalism, feminist theorists such as Benhabib and Gilligan undertake to formulate a version of subjectivity that,

on the one hand, would preserve some notion of the subject (and therefore allow for political action and self-realization), while avoiding the metaphysical gesture of positing a certain form of reason as the objective and universal ground for all claims to knowledge and truth. This modified subjectivity would be a gentler, more inclusive model than the classical notion of an autonomous self-grounding Reason.

Despite the apparent opposition between the phenomenological, poststructuralist and feminist standpoints, we have argued, all three positions rest on the assumption that the transition from the description of the models of meaning with which they work, to the description of the everyday practices of which they are models, can be achieved *within* the model. There are two aspects of this assumption to which we have called the reader's attention: (i) a foundationalist view of explanatory models, that is, the supposition that there must be a general description to account for the phenomenon, and (ii) the assumed legitimacy of theoretical re-description as primary over and against what it describes.

In working through our selected examples of phenomenological, poststructuralist and feminist theory, we tried to show how the terminology and methods of philosophizing, even in radically dissimilar traditions, produce an object of study that is alien to the reality that they are supposed to explain. Specifically, we noticed five related and recurring themes: (1) What is true of language and/or thinking is conflated with what is true of theories about, or models of, these. (2) It is assumed that *either* "the thinking subject" produces language *or* it is produced by language, as if these were innocent, theory-neutral conceptual necessities. (3) There is a tendency to misapply the language and thought-forms appropriate to third-person observations about , or theoretical accounts of, states of affairs, to first-person expressions. (4) It is unreasonably required that there be explicit grounds or evidence for "beliefs" or "judgements" for which no grounds can be given. This requirement is unreasonable, we have argued, because what is assumed to be a belief is often not a "belief", but an expression or recognition of immediate experience. A corollary to this point is that philosophers often suppose that the requirements of theory (such as coherence) are a reflection of what must actually be the case in fact. We have accounted for various problems associated with this inference, the most serious of which is that the failure of everyday

linguistic practice to meet the requirements of theory is seen as a proof of its arbitrariness or contingency. Thus the contingency attributed to language (by Rorty, for example) is stipulated rather than shown. (5) It is commonly thought that the difficulties involved in grounding the many experiences and facts about our lives that we could not ever seriously doubt, call into question the truth or facticity of those experiences. If the difficulties are taken to be insurmountable, truth seems to be "perspectival" or a matter of ideology or persuasion. We have suggested that the many possible interpretations of the meaning of a given phenomenon presupposes that the interpreters recognize the object under discussion as a case of that phenomenon. Otherwise, no disagreement would be possible; they simply would not understand each other at all. Thus it simply makes no sense to say that all truth is perspectival or ideological at its roots.

It may strike the reader that these five themes seem to be different ways of formulating the same point. Philosophers have been concerned with formulating systems that would account for the possibility of meaningful speech, objective knowledge and genuine communication, or alternatively, they have tried to show that "meaningful speech", "objective knowledge" and "genuine communication" are merely abstract entities produced by philosophical systems. One way of describing both attempts is to say that they are concerned with "overcoming dualisms": in the first case, by showing how meaning is subjectively certain and objectively valid at one and the same time; in the second, by showing how the signifier/signified or subject/object distinction is itself a product of discursivity. What we have proposed is that, in certain cases, the best way to solve the philosophical problems arising out of the problem of subjectivity is to *sharpen* or radicalize the distinction between first-person and third-person perspectives.

Some readers will object, for example, that our descriptions of everyday life cannot avoid being theory-laden. We do, after all, employ examples to make theoretical points, one of which is a "theoretical" distance between ordinary and theoretical language. How can we defend the claim that our illustrations are purely descriptive, non-theoretical accounts of everyday life? The answer is that the description may well serve to clarify a problem arising in theory, but that

does not make the description theoretical. Let us take the traffic light example. I wait for the light to turn green before proceeding. One *can* say that I do so *because* of the institution of traffic regulations, but that explanation is posterior to the understanding that I, as motorist, *have* for stopping at red and driving at green, namely, that red *means* stop and green *means* go. The term "everyday life" which has played such an important role in our discussion is intended as a shorthand way of saying "the meanings that are self-evident to us as language-users". In this sense, even the most arcane technical language-use can be part of "everyday life", for instance, when chemists are working in the laboratory and discussing what to do about certain unexpected results of a recent experiment. Once more, there is nothing arbitrary or contingent about the meaning of the technical terms that they employ when those terms are in use. Reflecting upon their technical language *as* a social phenomenon, that is, looking at it as an object of study rather than a part of life, one can say that the system of signs is a cultural product and historically determined. But that observation is an interpretation of the fact that chemists do chemistry in a specific way. Chemists may be realists or constructivists regarding their own practice, without their speculations making one bit of difference for the procedures for measuring levels of radiation in heavy metals. The linguist's or the philosopher's perspective on the language of chemistry is not the same as the working chemist's when performing his work as chemist. There is an important difference between describing everyday language from the user's perspective, and from the perspective of an observer. Whatever advantages there may be in treating the most basic facts of our lives as theoretical problems or exotic phenomena, there is also something to be gained from paying attention to the concrete meanings to which we inevitably return after our philosophical flights of fancy.

The problem of "dualism" arises when we treat ordinary facts about the practices that make up our lives as something not belonging to us. The critique of dualism, as we said, usually takes one of two forms. Either one denies the legitimacy of the first-person perspective altogether, or one tries to reduce it to the third-person perspective. In either case, one cancels the distinction. What we have attempted here, in essence, is to keep the first-person and third-person perspectives

as distinct as possible, where their conflation has caused conceptual confusions (as in the difference between certainty and the impossibility of doubt). Of course, there are many cases in which it would be difficult or unhelpful to pose such a distinction. But we are not proposing or defending the distinction as a method for more theorizing. Where it has no relevance, it would be meaningless to apply it.

In the end, all we have done is to suggest that a few of the philosophical disputes regarding the status of the subject have the resolution of the conflict within reach, if the parties to the debate were to look at certain conditions that must be satisfied if there is to be a discussion at all. An examination of what we actually do when we communicate with each other, we have argued, shows that those conditions are fulfilled far more often than a great deal of literature on the subject would suggest.

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