

INTRODUCTION

Feminist philosophy is a specific type of critical reflection within a broad spectrum of contemporary philosophical currents. It is indicative of the important fact (often overlooked in history) that human beings are not gender neutral. In addition to placing an emphasis on the gender dimension of human beings, feminist philosophy made a distinction between sex as given by nature and gender as a social construction. The category of gender, which became crucial for this philosophy (and also for other sciences), operates as a conceptual tool that enables problems associated with the theme of relations between women and men (in science, art, and in any area of social life) to be understood. Considering the gender dimension in humans and their experiences was an indisputable asset. However, it later emerged that there was a need to thematize this dimension in greater detail. In the current (varied) discussions, there are wide-ranging opinions on differentiating between sex (as a biological given) and gender (as a cultural construction); this also applies to their dual understanding, which is associated with a wider understanding of the spectrum of genders and gender identities.

We cannot overlook the fact that in the history of philosophy (and culture as a whole) human beings are considered gender neutral, although this gender neutrality is merely an impression; history actually talks of the male subject, of his experience, of his way of perceiving the world and his relationship to it. After having studied standard textbooks of the history of philosophy, it is natural to ask whether history (not only of philosophy but of the whole culture and society) was really “written” exclusively by men. Were women really absent from history? Is it not rather that they contributed to cultural heritage in a particular way but that their contribution was made invisible, just as their “cultural existence” was rendered invisible? What social preconditions contributed to the invisibility of one half of humankind? What were its consequences for the lives of particular women, for the images of woman/femininity embedded in our culture and also for the whole of our culture and society? Making the cultural performances of women visible is one of the most important tasks of feminist philosophy not only in the history of philosophy but also in the history of other sciences and in the history of culture as a whole.

One of the major ambitions of feminist philosophy is to implement “new” readings of history (including the history of philosophy); to identify the nature of relations between genders throughout the history; to uncover mechanisms leading to gender injustice and the dominance of one gender and the oppression of the other and to find the means for resolving the situation. This approach attempts to throw a new light on philosophy and to cast doubt on what has been regarded as the eternal, unchangeable relations between the genders, understood to have been given by nature. Its aim is thus

not only to criticize patriarchal society but also to establish gender justice as an important aspect of social justice; to initiate a more comprehensive approach to the history of philosophy, culture, society by adding a female perspective equal to the long-lasting male-dominated perspective. Women philosophers are fighting for this "reconstruction" (in terms of greater and more comprehensive gender equality) at the level of categories (for instance they are trying to re-define some of the underlying philosophical categories and concepts, such as subject, rationality, knowledge, morals, etc.) as well as at the level of particular philosophical conceptions concerning human beings, society, knowledge etc. This theoretical enterprise is linked to the attempt to change social relations and sociopolitical practice.

If, on the one hand, women philosophers who were active in the past were overlooked in traditional philosophy, on the other hand, concepts of women/femininity were usually understood (in comparison to the concepts of man/maleness) as something deficient. Almost no human subject has appeared as a gender-differentiated being in philosophical discourse throughout the history. The "masculine" was universalized, promoted to being the norm, and the feminine was marginalized as the "other". Female/feminine as a theme was forced to the margins or was only "covertly", and not explicitly present in philosophical tradition. Throughout history, this relegation of female/femininity as "other" was associated with a different social acceptance, with a negative attitude to the recognition of "otherness". This is why it is necessary for current women theorists to turn their attention to the past and read history anew, "to find their own past". It is necessary to stand up against unfair interpretations of the history of culture as a matter exclusively related to men, against the equally unfair marginalization of women, against woman's experience within the dominant philosophical systems as well as to actively develop a philosophy with the emancipation of women running through it as a leitmotif. Women philosophers today see their primary goal as establishing the basic framework that is required to change the traditional way of thinking.

When reading philosophical texts, it is equally important to follow the way in which the philosophical discourse has been defined; although this discourse is not gender neutral, generally one must reckon with the hidden assumption that gender is irrelevant to the philosophical system. "New" reading can be defined as critical reading, where emphasis is laid on the gender dimensions of phenomena, on examining the role gender plays in the construction of knowledge and/or how gender differentiation can manifest itself in the social sphere. Despite the fact that this reading is mainly of interest to women (in terms of ending historical injustice), this "new" critical reading can be understood and implemented as a strategy open to both women and men. However, there must be the ability and will to explore the gender system or gender relations sensitively, particularly regarding the way they are described in a given theory or in social practice. "New reading" is related not only to a critical review of the history of philosophy but also to the history of art and culture in the broadest sense of the term. In addition to the analysis of the character of philosophical (theoretical) discourse and the thematic spectrum in the past, it is also important to study how this discourse and this spectrum are changing today: whether and how both genders participate; in other words, how are both genders represented in the production of contemporary philosophy and theory—

both in terms of the topics covered and the presence of real women philosophers/theoreticians? Many women involved in intellectual business in the past were concerned with—to employ modern terminology—issues of gender difference and relations between genders, the limited opportunities for women with regard to education and in securing equality with men. Mary Wollstonecraft, Harriet Taylor Mill and Virginia Woolf are undoubtedly examples of such women. Women who concentrated on the themes associated with women's experiences were faced not only with the task of introducing into theory new themes related to woman's experiences as seen from "within", but they also had to create a new means of linguistic self-representation, which would not reproduce the dualistic and hierarchical thought anchored in traditional conceptions.

The range of problems associated with the category of gender is very wide indeed. These problems have become the subject of theoretical investigations in many scientific disciplines. I appreciate the fact that this prestigious journal *Human Affairs* is also providing the space for these themes.

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