

# *Feminist Scholarship Review*

Women and Philosophy

Trinity College  
Volume VIII, No. 1

Hartford, CT.  
Spring 1999

"O DIOTIMA," I ASKED, "WHO ARE THOSE  
WHO LOVE WISDOM  
IF NOT THE WISE OR THE IGNORANT?"

"BY NOW CERTAINLY IT WOULD BE CLEAR  
EVEN TO A CHILD," SHE REPLIED,  
"THAT THEY ARE THOSE WHO ARE IN A STATE  
BETWEEN DESIRE AND WISDOM,  
ONE OF WHOM IS EROS.  
TO BE SURE WISDOM IS AMONG  
THE MOST BEAUTIFUL OF THINGS  
AND EROS IS THE LOVE OF BEAUTY;  
AND SO EROS MUST BE A LOVER OF WISDOM,  
AND BEING A LOVER OF WISDOM,  
HE LIES BETWEEN WISDOM AND IGNORANCE."

· PLATO, SYMPOSIUM

# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	Page 2
<b>Women and Philosophy</b> <i>By Dr. Helen Lang</i>	Page 3
<b>The Difference the Difference Makes: The Question of Woman in Plato</b> <i>By Dr. Drew A. Hyland</i>	Page 5
<b>The Other Socratic Method</b> <i>By Dr. Dan Lloyd</i>	Page 11
<b>Selected Readings</b>	Page 13

## **Co-Editors**

*Beth Miller-Lee and Edwina Walker*

## **Feminist Scholarship Review**

is a project of the **Trinity College Women's Center.**

# Introduction

After presenting a topic for the Feminist Scholarship Review, I ask this amorphous question of our contributors: "Write about women and your field of expertise." The responses from the brave scholars who take it on are vast and interesting. Though, honestly, it is exactly the kind of question I would complain about if a professor gave it to me. Philosophy gives me the same lost and overwhelmed feeling giant questions give me.

For me, philosophy (as a discipline) teases me with the false security of an often simply stated idea before the questioning starts and the ground shifts, dumping me into weightless space and giving me a headache. Then there are those brave souls who actually sign up for or major in philosophy! THEN there are the few who pursue doctorate degrees in philosophy and make a lifelong pursuit of it! Dr. Helen Lang, Dr. Drew Hyland and Dr. Dan Lloyd are the brave philosophers who graciously contributed their gleanings on women and philosophy to this issue.

Dr. Helen Lang is the Director of the Trinity College Philosophy Department. Her essay is about the woman philosopher she knows best: herself. Lang discusses balancing the daily responsibilities of motherhood and scholarship. Lang then implies a simple question: "What is your personal philosophy and how does it inform all aspects of your life?" Lang's life philosophy is based upon Philosophy as a discipline which she applies by "examining arguments and ideas" through her "individual context of experience." This essay explores the continuity of life between its competing aspects and Lang's personal philosophy that informs her actions and untangles commitments, responsibilities and experiences.

Dr. Drew Hyland reflects on postmodernist feminist review of Platonic dialogue. Postmodernism is invaluable for validating women's experiences of being left out of history. It can, however, complicate true historical understanding by inappropriately injecting modern consciousness and social reality into Plato's intention, for example. Hyland suggests Platonic dialogue is not an outline of gender dynamics in ancient Greece. As drama, the Platonic dialogues could have reflected any social reality. Hyland explains the difference between modern feminism which focuses on "ethical, political or social justice principles" and the intention of Platonic dialogues: to explore the nature of philosophy.

Dr. Dan Lloyd relates *The Connected Classroom*, teaching forum to Platonic dialogue upholding both as ideal teaching methods. *The Connected Classroom* honors cooperative dialogue between students and teachers which diffuses the power imbalance of the lecture form. Equality and dialogue, according to Hyland, will forge the path to wisdom embraced by Socrates and Plato. Lloyd joins erotic energy and pursuit of wisdom, describing *eros* as the charge of inspiration that can foster wisdom through the intimate exchange of knowledge.

Reading each essay and observing the absence of women between ancient Greece and contemporary America, I immediately thought of Virginia Woolf's philosophy in "A Room of One's Own," that women could not become great writers until they had a legacy of ancestral women writers upon whom to lean. Women philosophers, those lost in the past and those struggling today, still wait for their legacy to evolve. Meanwhile, scholars like Lang, Hyland and Lloyd have contributed their voices and expertise to the growing discourse on Women and Philosophy.

# Women and Philosophy

*Dr. Helen Lang, Director of the Trinity College Philosophy Department*

Our daughters still tease me, asking why my first book was completed only a year after they graduated high school (they are twins) and left home. Was it, they ask, that my workload was significantly reduced and so I had time to do something I had never done before? A second book followed rather quickly. In one way, the answer is "yes:" after they left home I did have significantly more time. But in a more important way the answer is "no:" the philosophical maturity represented by my first book presents my own growth and sense of myself.

Every parent complains of the balancing act required of working and parenting. But historically, the problem has been much more serious for women than for men, in part for biological reasons, women give birth and nurse, and in part for historical reasons, women have been excluded from the work force, particularly professors. And academe is a profession: we never clock in and never clock out, the work seems endless and the workday endlessly expandable.

The work of this profession contains great variety. We teach students, work with our peers and colleagues on committees that govern the institution, and do a host of things alone in the library, our office, or at home, such as scholarly work, grading papers, and writing letters of recommendation. I have served two terms as chair of the Philosophy Department and this position opens up a whole new realm of demands and rewards.

One point should be made immediately, if only so that it can be set aside. Studies show that women's pay for equal work lags considerably in other professions. The old statistic of 70 cents for every dollar a man earns has not changed that much. And this point was also true at Trinity College until about ten years ago, when a blind study showed gender bias and the College corrected it. Neither past injustices nor the mark of the past on the future were addressed, but the future was assured as a better future.

But the more important point for me has to do with philosophy as a discipline. It is a discipline that examines arguments and ideas; it looks at the foundations of science and society, the foundations of the values we hold (or think we hold). In order to conduct such examination, one must be willing to take the time to think about the character of experience, whether the experience of knowing something, of feeling prejudice, of participating in a social structure. And such examination can be (indeed, in my view should be) conducted in a variety of settings. It is what I think I do when I teach, what I think I do when I work writing scholarly articles or a book, sometimes what I do for personal fulfillment.

And it is certainly something I do as a parent. I remember the protests, rising to shrieks, when I told my daughters that according to Aristotle parents love their children more than children love their parents. I also reflected privately later that when I lost this argument, I in fact won. When they were adolescents and complaining about every possible body part, I told them Aristotle comments that if a work of art could come to life it would not thank its maker as much as the maker might expect. They responded by inventing remarks they would like to address to their maker. "When you think thighs," one said, "think longer, think

thinner."

I always said that I would not write a book until I had "a book sized idea." In philosophy as a discipline, many books are just expanded and badly written essays. And I learned more about writing by working with our daughters on their papers than I ever could have learned on my own. Can it be an accident that I had such an idea when they were in high school? No, probably not.

When our daughters were in high school, I felt considerable frustration about my workload. I wanted to be with them, shopping, working-out and a host of other things. At the same time, I had been promoted to full professor and so acquired new responsibilities here at Trinity. I expressed my frustration to a colleague who replied with great passion that his youngest child had graduated high school and gone off to college. "These days never come again - take advantage of them. You can always return to a larger role at the College but you can never have this time with your children again." Our children are now both graduate students and each comments to me from time to time how much they miss our discussions.

On the one hand, I have had good luck: the gift of health for our family, external support that many women lack, and good advice from friends and colleagues. On the other hand, I found a profession and subject matter for which I feel enormous and lasting passion and which has allowed me to have it all: a full-time job that I love, children whom I adore, and work that I find profoundly fulfilling.

The unity and fulfillment of my life often seems to me to be the unity and fulfillment of philosophy as a discipline. Other women will surely find other interests and must have the right to enter any profession. But my wish for them is the same as my wish for our daughters, that they find for themselves what philosophy has given me.

# The Difference the Difference Makes: The Question of Woman in Plato

Dr. Drew A. Hyland

In the last few decades, feminist philosophers have stimulated much new research and debate by examining, often critically, many of the canonical figures in western philosophy with a special eye to their position, explicit and implicit, on women.<sup>1</sup> One of the more controversial of these canonical figures has been Plato, and the reason is simple enough, that the evidence in the dialogues regarding Plato's and/or Socrates' attitude toward women is at once complex and very, very ambiguous.

For that reason, some feminist writers have been most struck by what they consider the deep and abiding sexism and even misogyny reflected in the dialogues. These attitudes suggest that Socrates and Plato were, perhaps not surprisingly, "products of their time," who consciously or unconsciously bought into the deeply sexist mores of Athenian society. Such writers have, to say the least, a rich body of *prime facie* evidence to cite in the dialogues. In the Symposium, the women are dismissed from the party when serious discussion is to begin and the dominant conception of *eros* discussed is that among males. In the Timaeus, in the mythical account of the cosmos where the development of human beings is discussed, we are told that "the superior sex is that which hereafter should be designated 'man' (Timaeus 42a), and in the reincarnation myth we are told that should a male live a life dominated by pleasure and passion, "he will be changed into a woman's nature at the second birth." (42c). And in the Republic, there is regular reference to not wanting the people who will rule in the "City in the Sky," even the women, to act like women (Republic 395d, 469d, 605e). On the surface, then, the dialogues are full of apparently unreflective sexism. Little wonder that writers struck by this evidence should be relatively unimpressed by citations of apparent counter evidence that there are strains of a kind of proto-feminism in the dialogues.<sup>2</sup>

The strongest of such evidence surely occurs in the Republic, and especially in the first of the famous "three waves," in Book V, where a strong and apparently serious argument is made that when it comes to the qualities necessary for the two crucial tasks of the philosopher-rulers, that is, philosophical ability and capacity to rule, there is finally no interesting difference between men and women. The other strong evidence is the regular predilection of the Platonic Socrates to praise among his teachers only women: Diotima, who teaches him *eros* in the Symposium, and Aspasia, courtesan of Pericles, who teaches him rhetoric in the Menexenus.<sup>3</sup>

The task of evaluating the overall attitudes of Plato or even the Platonic Socrates would be much too much for this short paper. But before turning to the more narrow issue I want to address, let me at least say a few words about the *direction* one would have to take in resolving these larger issues.

To resolve the question of whether the many overtly sexist and misogynous remarks in the dialogues are indicative of the real views of Plato or the Platonic Socrates, we would have first to decide on a fundamental principle of interpretation regarding the dialogues. Do we follow a version of Gregory Vlastos' famous principle that anything that Socrates says in any dialogue is what Plato believes at the time? Or even expand Vlastos' principle to say that anything that *anyone* in the dialogues says is reflective of Plato's views?<sup>4</sup> Then we will not have much trouble deciding on Plato's attitude toward women. On the other hand, if we side with those many interpreters of Plato who argue that the dialogues must be interpreted as the dramas they are, with a wide variety of views presented not all of which are necessarily shared by the author, then things get much more complicated.<sup>5</sup> We would have to look at the many instances in their context, decide whether they

are simply dramatic reflections of the views of the characters, or whether they are appeals to the prejudices of the audience, or whether irony is at work, or whether they are the views of the author, not to mention other possible explanations. Obviously this is a complex task; but just as obviously, anyone committed to this hermeneutic principle will be dissatisfied at what looks like a too easy appeal to whatever anyone says in the dialogues as "Plato's view."

The same controversy would hold in the case of those passages where evidence of a kind of proto-feminism is present in the dialogues. Are they too reflections of the views of Plato, in which case we would have to conclude from the dialogues as a whole that he is profoundly ambivalent and even confused in his attitudes towards women? Or, on the second hypothesis, would we not have to examine those passages too with regard to questions of dramatic significance, rhetorical import, irony, or authorial intention?

In this short paper I will not presume to judge on those complex issues, although I have done so elsewhere (see note 4). Instead, I want to hazard a hypothesis regarding the roots of those passages where a Platonic character, usually Socrates, seems to hold to some version or other of what we today would call feminist principles. I will concentrate, then, on the putative evidence, mostly in the Republic, Symposium, and Menexenos, where Plato's characters seem much more favorable to women. In those passages I want to suggest, first, that in no case, does the proto-feminist position seem based on ethical, political, or social justice principles. They have nothing to do with social egalitarianism, or women's rights, or even human rights. Instead, the reasons are entirely philosophic. More pointedly, I want to argue that the occasional concern for women's status in the dialogues is directed not to a concern for real women in Athenian or any other society, for their social condition, but rather to the nature of philosophy. It is *philosophy* that requires in its very nature both "masculine" and "feminine" elements (I use these terms throughout to refer only to their general socially constructed meanings, both in ancient Athens and still to a large extent in contemporary cultures.), and therefore it is Plato's concern with what I will call the *androgynous* nature of philosophy that is the source of what "feminism" is present in the dialogues. Let me see if I can begin to make a case for this claim.

Begin with the famous "three waves" of Plato's Republic. For our purposes, the crucial "waves" are the first, which argues for equal education, treatment, and opportunity to become philosophic rulers for both women and men, and the third, which asserts that only if such equally educated and developed men and women are allowed to rule will justice be established in a city. Recall a point perhaps too often overlooked, that the entire effort to construct a "city in speech," of which the three waves are a crucial part, was originally motivated (all the way back in Book II at 368d ff.) by the famous "city-soul" analogy, Socrates' effort to get a better look at justice in the individual soul by looking at its supposedly "larger" counterpart, justice in the city. That analogy suggests that when something is asserted about justice in the city, the ultimate philosophic point is to examine its relevance to the individual soul. Let us, then, examine what if any relevance there may be to the principles of the first and third waves when applied to the individual soul.<sup>6</sup> Is there an analogue to the idea of equal treatment and education of women and men, and that women and men are equally qualified for ruling, when applied to the individual soul? To find it, we would have to translate the social-political distinction between men and women into an analogy within the individual soul. I suggest that we take "men" and "women" to refer to the "masculine" and "feminine" elements within the individual soul. Such a figurative application of the city-soul analogy would suggest that just as every city has within it both men and women, so every individual soul has a "masculine" and a "feminine" dimension. Moreover, the analogy suggests that, in a healthy or just soul, both dimensions must be treated equally, given equal opportunity for development, and if we do, the soul in question will become well-prepared for philosophy and for

ruling. That is, philosophy is equally available for women and for men, and for a good reason: it requires both masculine and feminine elements. It is in that sense that I want to claim that philosophy itself is androgynous. Is there evidence in support of this view in other dialogues?

I begin with a striking dramatic fact to which I have already alluded. Socrates praises only two of his teachers in the dialogues, and they are both women: Aspasia, who teaches him rhetoric in the *Menexenus*, and Diotima, who teaches him eros in the *Symposium*. They in turn share two striking things. They are both women, and they are both involved with eros. Aspasia, as the courtesan of Pericles, makes erotics her profession, and Diotima teaches eros to Socrates. But eros is intimately tied to philosophy.

It is in Diotima's teaching to Socrates on eros, which he recounts in the *Symposium*, that we see something of the depth of the connection between the feminine and philosophy for Plato. First of all, her teaching on eros, as others have seen, is replete with feminine imagery and themes. She invokes in a crucial way the theme of pregnancy: Thanks to our eros, "All humans are pregnant, Socrates, both in body and in soul." (*Symposium* 206c). If "all humans" are pregnant, then clearly, there is a feminine principle in all of us. Moreover, the pregnancy of our eros leads us to desire to give birth. Not just physical pregnancy and birth (which Diotima insists is something "divine" [206c]) but all desire to create or reproduce has its source in our erotic pregnancy. Diotima here corrects Agathon's supposition that eros both is beautiful and loves the beautiful by telling Socrates the real connection of eros and beauty: eros exhibits a natural desire to give birth and it always seeks to give birth in the beautiful (206c). Finally, the creative urge contained in our eros is in quest of immortality (207a).

This strong presence of the feminine in Diotima's speech has been noticed by others. Susan Hawthorne, in "Diotima Speaks Through the Body," (in *Engendering Origins* 83-96) nicely delineates the profusion of feminine metaphors in Diotima's speech, but concludes that this implies the historical reality of Diotima, presumably because the male Plato couldn't have thought of this. David Halperin, in "Why Is Diotima a Woman?" (Chapter 6 of *A Hundred Years of Homosexuality: and other Essays on Greek Love* [New York: Routledge, 1990]) also is sensitive to the rich feminine imagery of her speech: "Plato's theory of erotic procreativity, in short, is oriented around what his contemporaries would have taken to be a distinctively feminine order of experience." (138). But he adds that the fact that the male Socrates tells the story somehow vitiates the feminine dimension (139-145) concluding that the speech "does not simply represent an instance of male cultural imperialism, a typical attempt by men to colonize female 'difference' in order to claim it for a universalizing male discourse," in addition it "den(ies) in effect the autonomy of women's experience." (145). Though both Hawthorne's and Halperin's readings are possible, they both exhibit a more negative, critical stance than I think is called for. I want to suggest a more positive reading of this feminine imagery, that Diotima's speech clearly shows that genuine eros (and so philosophy) must contain both feminine **and** masculine elements.

Clearly, then, part of what Diotima does, indeed part of the significance of her being a woman, is that she introduces a necessary feminine element into what had heretofore in the dialogue been predominantly masculine accounts of eros. She, as it were, "corrects" the previous speeches in part by filling in a decisive lacuna: the significance of the feminine in eros.

This is made even more explicit at an important point in her speech, when Socrates asks her the odd question as to who eros' parents are, and she responds with the mythical account of eros' parentage (203b ff). Her account contradicts the earlier one of Pausanias, who, not surprisingly given his own sexual preferences, had argued that while "base" or "vulgar" eros is heterosexual, "noble" or "heavenly" eros, like the noble Aphrodite to which it corresponds, is "of the male only." (180e ff). On the contrary, Diotima asserts, eros, the one eros, is the child of the

**heterosexual** parents Poros (Plenty, Resourcefulness) and Penia (Poverty, Lack). In the paragraphs that follow, Diotima goes on to explain in detail how *eros*, like so many children, takes after **both** its parents. In some ways it is resourceful, clever, overflowing, like its father. But in other ways it is poor, lacking, striving for what it lacks, like its mother. We might well cavil at the association of the feminine with lack or incompleteness, though as the case of Freud suggests, it is a prejudice hardly confined to Diotima or even to the ancient Greeks. Even so, we should not miss the larger and more fundamental Diotiman point, that *eros*, both noble and base *eros* we can add, partakes of **both** the masculine and feminine, that it is indeed “a discrete mixture of masculinity and femininity.”<sup>8</sup>

To this we must add a second crucial consequence, adumbrated as early as Pausanias’ speech (182b) and articulated explicitly by Diotima in her famous “ascent passage” at 210a ff: Philosophy is itself a manifestation, indeed the highest manifestation, of *eros*. At the highest stage of the erotic ascent, after having experienced the “lower” forms of bodily and psychical *eros* and now prepared to get a glimpse of “Beauty Itself,” Diotima tells Socrates, we attain to “unencumbered philosophy” (210d: *philosophia aphthono*). The inference should now be clear. If *eros* is a mixture of masculinity and femininity, and philosophy is a manifestation of *eros*, then philosophy too, at its core and in its very nature, must contain both masculine and feminine elements. Consistent with the implications of the three waves of the *Republic* when applied to the individual soul, the implication here is clear; genuine philosophy is androgynous. I therefore disagree with David Halperin (“Why Is Diotima a Woman?” in *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, pp. 113-151 [New York: Routledge, 1990]) and Page duBois, (“The Platonic Appropriation of Reproduction,” in Tuana, *Feminist Interpretations of Plato*, pp. 139-156) that in the *Symposium* Plato **appropriates** the feminine and **reinscribes** it for a still exclusively male philosophy. DuBois speaks of “Plato’s desire to appropriate maternity to the male philosopher.” (141; see also 144 and 150.). This strikes me again as an overly critical reading of what can with at least as much warrant be construed in a much more positive way, that philosophy is constituted in its very nature by both the masculine and feminine, and so is accessible necessarily to both women and men.

However, even the more positive construal that I am advocating contains a problem that needs addressing. The very cultural constructions on which I am basing the androgyny of philosophy – incompleteness with the feminine, overfullness with the masculine – are themselves manifestly informed by patriarchal bias. That these associations clearly inscribed in the Platonic Diotima’s account of *eros* get preserved and even accentuated in Western culture as we move toward Freud and modernity changes nothing on this point. To associate the feminine with incompleteness and ascribe completeness or overfullness to the masculine may join together in *eros* the cultural ascriptions of the masculine and feminine then and now, but since the very associations are themselves shot through with patriarchal bias, it hardly constitutes a full transcendence of the cultural dominance of the masculine, or what is today often called phallocentrism. At this point in the argument, we may claim that Plato has indeed transcended the most blatant bias of his culture by no longer construing philosophy as entirely and completely a male activity, but he has hardly transcended the deeper patriarchal framework in terms of which the very concepts he employs are formulated. Can we, then, discover a level at which that deeper transcendence is adumbrated, if not fully accomplished?

Can we, that is, develop an understanding of philosophy as it is exhibited in the Platonic dialogues that would make visible, in a more positive and deep way than the problematic resourcefulness/incompleteness contrast, its masculine and feminine character? I think so. Consider first perhaps the most manifest characteristic of philosophy as it appears in the Platonic dialogues and especially in the person of Socrates. Philosophy is fundamentally interrogative rather than asser-

tive. As Socrates famously affirms in the *Apology* and exhibits throughout the dialogues, he does not claim to be wise (in the divine sense) and so does not conceive his philosophical mission in terms of having a set of "theories" to assert and prove. Rather, Socrates lacks wisdom, recognizes his lack, and strives to overcome it. Such is his "human" wisdom, in which he stands above all other humans. That is, Socrates' fundamental philosophical stance is *aporia*, and its consequence is that for him the philosophical stance is one of **questioning**. To say the least, Socrates lives out this consequence consistently throughout his Platonic life.

Socrates is not wise, recognizes his lack, and strives to overcome it. This triadic structure corresponds exactly to the account of *eros* presented by Aristophanes in his myth, where *eros* arises when we humans were "split" into our present condition, and once recognizing our split state desired to become whole again, which desire and effort is *eros* (189e-194e). The same structure is developed more "logically" by Socrates in his preliminary discussion with Agathon before introducing Diotima (199d ff). Philosophy as Socrates exhibits it, as founded in *aporia*, and as the stance of questioning, is erotic through and through. Its maternal heritage or feminine side is visible in its ontological status as incomplete, lacking; its paternal side in the resourcefulness with which it strives to overcome that lack, even if, we should note, finally unsuccessfully.

But we are still working within the cultural associations of the masculine and feminine, completeness and incompleteness, which we have previously recognized as themselves patriarchally inscribed. Let us, then, look at the stance of questioning that is Socrates' philosophical stance more closely, so that we can make visible its feminine and masculine elements in a deeper and more positive way. We can begin with a brief "phenomenology" of questioning. When we question something, we exhibit toward it a stance of openness. The English phrase is apt here: we hold something "open to question." Conversely, when we refuse to question our standpoints or convictions, people say that we are "close minded." Openness, we might thus say, is a fundamental characteristic of the Socratic philosophic stance of questioning. Socrates, when he questions this or that position, is and must be open to what new discoveries will emerge.

But questioning is not simply openness. When we question something, that means that we do not simply accept it as it is; in questioning it, we **respond** to it, respond to it in and by our questioning. The stance of philosophic questioning, then, is characterized at once by openness and responsiveness; it might be called a stance of responsive openness.<sup>9</sup> And here, at a deeper level, the androgynous character of philosophy again becomes visible.

For the openness of the stance of philosophic questioning corresponds both in Diotima's myth of *eros*' parentage and even in many contemporary cultural assumptions with the feminine. Often the feminine is associated with receptivity, caring, nurturing, all of which connote an enhanced openness to others. The responsiveness, on the other hand, corresponds, again both in Diotima's myth and in many of our cultural associations, with the masculine (aggressiveness, assertiveness, etc.). There is a crucial difference, however, between the responsiveness/openness duality and the earlier completeness/incompleteness one in that, or so I want to suggest, the responsiveness/openness pair escapes the pejorative ascription to the feminine side inherent in the earlier association. This is especially true of the appropriateness to philosophy of both responsiveness and openness, which are, as it were, co-primordial and equally worthy. If philosophy is construed after the Socratic model as fundamentally interrogative, and if that stance of questioning involves both openness and responsiveness, and if those characteristics, respectively, embody the cultural signs of the feminine and masculine, then philosophy itself, as exhibited in the Platonic dialogues, is indeed shown to be that "discrete mixture of masculinity and femininity" discussed earlier, an androgynous activity, best suited for women with a touch of masculine sensibility and for men with a touch of the feminine.

I therefore agree with those writers who note that the reasons for Plato's "feminism" are more complex than his having a proto-feminist social consciousness or proto-modern egalitarian beliefs (which they deny). See for example Janet Farrell Smith, "Plato, Irony, and Equality," p. 26, and Wendy Brown, "Supposing Truth Were A Woman...": Plato's Subversion of Masculine Discourse," pp. 157-158, 162, both in Tuana's Feminist Interpretations of Plato. Both writers, however, understand their own insight on this issue as critical of Plato and/or Socrates in its denial of any feminist consciousness. In so doing, however, they risk missing the deeper meaning about philosophy itself, that philosophy is androgynous and therefore necessarily and equally accessible to women and to men.

But if so, what happened? Surely philosophy as it has developed in the West became for all too long a time and in all too many ways a male, all too male, enterprise, both in terms of the people who make up the profession and the method of argument. I close with a brief and I hope provocative speculation. After Greek philosophy, and especially with the rise of modern philosophy in the 17th century (I am thinking especially but not only of Descartes), philosophy largely lost the interrogative character definitive of Socratic philosophy. It became much more assertive, a matter of propounding this theory or that, proving it (ideally with indubitable certainty), and refuting all alternative theories. Asserting, proving, refuting: these are the masculine traits comprising only part of the Socratic enterprise but, I suggest, which became the dominant characteristics of modern philosophy. Such "phallogocentrism," I submit in closing, is a function less of our acceptance of the teachings of the Platonic dialogues than of our ignoring them.

## Footnotes

1 An earlier version of this paper was read at the IAPL conference at University of California at Irvine, May, 1998, and more recently, at Loyola University of New Orleans. On the latter occasion I was especially challenged and abetted by stimulating discussion that followed my reading. I want to give special thanks for their helpful comments to Ronna Burger, Leslie Campisi, Frances Coolidge, Mary Anne Franks, James Watson, and the other discussants whose names I did not identify.

2 Two good examples of recent books, many of whose contributors hold to this view, are Bat-Ami Bar on, Egendering Origins: Critical Feminist Readings in Plato and Aristotle (Albany, SUNY Press, 1994), and Nancy Tuana, Feminist Interpretations of Plato (University Park, Pennsylvania Press, 1984). Also to be consulted is Luce Irigaray's Speculum of the Other Woman (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1985).

3 Examples of works sympathetic to Socrates' or Plato's putative proto-feminism include Natalie Bluestone's Women and the Ideal Society: Plato's Republic and Modern Myths of Gender (Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), and Stephen Salkever, "Socrates' Aspasian Oration: The Play of Philosophy and Politics in Plato's Menexenos," American Political Science Review, vol. 87, no. 1, March, 1993, pp. 133-143.

4 Gregory Vlastos, Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1991), 117 and note #50..

5 The number of writers who argue this position is now too large to rehearse. As good examples, consider the Platonic studies of such scholars as Allan Bloom, Ronna Burger, Diskin Clay, Kenneth Dorter, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Charles Griswold, Jacob Howland, Jacob Klein, David Lachterman, Mitchell Miller, David Roochnik, Stanley Rosen, and Leo Strauss. For examples of my own efforts in this direction, see my "Why Plato Wrote Dialogues," (Philosophy and Rhetoric, vol. 1, no. 1, 1968, 38-50); The Virtue of Philosophy: An Interpretation of Plato's Charmides (Athens, Ohio University Press, 1981); or Finitude and Transcendence In the Platonic Dialogues (Albany, SUNY Press, 1995).

6 For an elaboration of the reasons why we need not pay careful attention to the second wave for our purposes, see my Finitude and Transcendence in the Platonic Dialogues, Chapter 3.

7 Aspasia serves a parallel role in the Menexenos. Her funeral oration, which stands in manifest contrast to Pericles' oration as formulated by Thucydides, transforms the Athenian image of political life from the "masculine" themes of ruling and fame to the more "feminine" ones of caretaking (epimeleia) and service (therapeia). This is well set out by Stephen Salkever in "Socrates' Aspasian Oration: The Play of Philosophy and Politics in Plato's Menexenos," American Political Science Review, Vol. 87, no. 1, March, 1993, pp. 133-143. See especially 136.

8 An apt phrase employed by Alan Bloom in his commentary in The Republic of Plato (New York; Basic Books, 1968), 384.

9 For a detailed development of this point in a different context, see my The Question of Play (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), esp. Chapter 7.

# THE OTHER SOCRATIC METHOD

Dr. Dan Lloyd

In *Women's Ways of Knowing* (1986), Mary Belenky, Blythe Clinchy, Nancy Goldberger, and Jill Tarule advocate a new model of college teaching and learning: *The Connected Classroom*. *The Connected Classroom* is a place where hierarchical relations of authority and power subside to allow teachers and students to engage in inquiry side-by-side and shoulder-to-shoulder. The vehicle of learning in a connected classroom is dialogue, rather than lecture. As described by Paolo Freire, "Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers" (1971, p. 67). The connected class, according to Belenky et al., "constructs truth not through conflict but through 'consensus,' whose original meaning ... was 'feeling or sensing together,' implying not agreement, necessarily, but a 'crossing of the barrier between ego and ego,' bridging private and shared experience" (p. 223).

Dialogue, of course, has a long history in Philosophy, beginning with its unrivalled master, Plato. Yet the Platonic dialogue often seems to be a very different process than a "bridging of private and shared experience." Instead, the dialogues read as an epistemic struggle over who can claim to know. Socrates is the regular champion in these struggles, and Socratic progress is represented as moving from the *illusion* that one knows what one doesn't know to the *wisdom* of recognizing one's ignorance, or knowing that one does *not* know. Socrates achieves this end again and again by leading his partners down sly alleys of argument to dead-end contradictions. Rarely do the Socratic "victims" take well to this education, and Socrates himself riled enough public figures to provoke his own execution in 399 B.C.E.

Yet within the works of Plato there is one instance of a very different path to knowledge. In the *Symposium*, Socrates (as presented by Plato) confesses his own ignorance about the nature of love, and tells a long story about an encounter with the priestess Diotima. Diotima initiates Socrates in the mysteries of love, a path that begins in physical eroticism and ends in wisdom (that is, philosophy, the "love of wisdom"). The starting point of this ascent toward wisdom is *conversation*. The potential lover of wisdom begins with the eager embrace of beautiful bodies, "and should he happen upon someone who has a beautiful, well bred, and naturally gifted soul as well, he embraces the combination with great enthusiasm and immediately engages in many conversations with this man about virtue, about what a good man should be like, and what he should make it his business to do" (209c). But from this starting point one

must then realize that the beauty of any particular body is akin to the beauty of every other body, and that if it is necessary to pursue beauty of form, it is quite mindless not to believe that the beauty of all bodies is one and the same. When he comprehends this, he must become a lover of all beautiful bodies.... After that he must believe that the beauty of souls is more valuable than that of the body.... As a result he will be compelled to study the beauty in practical endeavors and in laws and traditions....

(210c)

And onward and upward, "from practical endeavors to beautiful examples of understanding, and from examples of understanding to come finally to that understanding which is none other than the understanding of that beauty itself, so that in the end he knows what beauty itself is" (211c).

In his description of beautiful conversation, and in the mutuality of love, Plato has depicted something akin to the connected classroom. (I think that it is not essential that Plato imagines love

erupting between two men.) The ascent from physical attraction to the apprehension of the pure Form of Beauty seems driven not by the familiar Socratic refutation, but by a positive affection, and a deepening consensus. Although this is a stretch, in these passages I read Plato as suggesting a form of inquiry that begins in the equality of both partners to the dialogue, rather than in a hierarchy of knowledge or rhetorical skill. In this one Platonic scenario, from connection comes the highest wisdom.

But the Platonic picture is also distinct from the connected classroom of Belenky and her colleagues. The connected classroom arises from the desire for knowledge shared by teachers and students, and entails an environment that fosters the creation of knowledge. Care, concern, and other interpersonal sentiments are a part of that environment of mutual trust. But Plato locates the starting point not in the desire to learn but in love itself, and for him learning is the ultimate effect of love. And Platonic love is not the cool glow of friendship it is often taken to be; rather, it is hot flame, a form of madness. It begins in erotic intensity, but as the physical falls away the intensity remains. In the **Symposium**, Plato imagined knowledge flaring from that fire. Christianity, perhaps intimidated by the intensity of Platonic love, excluded passionate love from the path to enlightenment (following another thread in Plato, the distinction between Reason and Appetite). And to this day, we think of learning as a bloodless business of the intellect, seen in opposition to the disruptive passions of the heart.

Perhaps it is insignificant that Plato has Diotima describe the ladder of love: a woman's way of knowing. It may also be that the connected classroom is a good learning environment not only for women (as Belenky et al. maintain), but for everyone. In my own teaching, tolerance for others' points of view often metamorphoses into a fondness shared among all the members of the class, growing through collaboration and dialogue. Diotima's message is that Platonic mind-to-mind affection may be more than just a warm and fuzzy side-effect of connected classrooms, but might in itself drive students and teachers toward a more intense love of learning. Though far more restrained than among the Athenians, Platonic love is part of the fuel of learning in the modern connected class.

At the end of Toni Morrison's **Beloved**, the protagonists Sethe and Paul D. reconcile their differences and tentatively contemplate a future together. Morrison shows us Paul D.'s yearning for a life with Sethe with this plain and beautiful statement:

He wants to put his story next to hers (p. 273).

The modern images of love are generally too graphic, and the modern consumers of love too impatient, to recognize Morrison's marvelous truth about the core impulse of love. When we take the time to put our stories next to each other, we experience both love and learning. This will be true both in the classroom and out. In this consensus of Belenky and colleagues, Diotima, and Morrison, there may be a convergence of loving and knowing that is feminist, humane, and wise.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Belenky, M., B. Clinchy, N. Goldberger, and J. Tarule (1986). **Women's Ways of Knowing**. (New York: Basic Books.)

Cobb, W. S., trans. (1993). **The Symposium and the Phaedrus**. (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press.)

Freire, P. (1971). **Pedagogy of the Oppressed**. (New York: Seaview.)

Morrison, Toni (1987). **Beloved**. (New York: Penguin.)

## Suggested Reading:

- Arens, Katherine. "Between Hypatia and Beauvoir: Philosophy as Discourse," **Hypatia**. Fall 1995 v. 10 n. 4 p. 46.
- Addelson, Kathryn Pyne. "Feminist Philosophy and the Women's Movement," **Hypatia**. Summer 1994 v. 9 n. 3 p. 216.
- Bolton, Martha Brandt. "Some Aspects of the Philosophical Work of Catharine Trotter," **The Journal of the History of Philosophy**. Oct 1993 v. 31 n. 4 p. 565.
- Bernick, Susan E. "Philosophy and Feminism: the Case of Susan Bordo," **Hypatia**. Summer 1992 v. 7 n. 3 p. 188.
- Bordo, Susan. "Maleness Revisited," **Hypatia**. Summer 1992 v. 7 n. 3 p. 197.
- Butler, Judith. "Response to Bordo's 'Feminist Skepticism and the "maleness" of Philosophy," **Hypatia**. Summer 1992 v. 7 n. 3 p. 162.
- Ferguson, Ann. "Twenty Years of Feminist Philosophy," **Hypatia**. Summer 1994 v. 9 n. 3 p. 197.
- Fisher, Linda. "Gender and Other Categories," **Hypatia**. Summer 1992 v. 7 n. 3 p. 173.
- Fitzmaurice, James. **Margaret Cavendish: Sociable Letters**.
- Hall, Pamela. "Feminism and the Canon," **The Journal of Philosophy**. Oct 1991 v. 88 n. 10 p. 568.
- Harth, Erica. "Cartesian Women," **Yale French Studies**. June 1991 n. 80 p. 146.
- Hirsch, Elizabeth and Gary A. Olson. "Je-Luce Irigaray': a Meeting with Luce Irigaray," **Hypatia**. Spring 1995 v. 10 n. 2 p. 93.
- Holler, Linda. "Thinking with the Weight of the Earth: Feminist Contributions to an Epistemology of Concreteness," **Hypatia**. Spring 1990 v. 5 n. 1 p. 1.

Ignatieff, Michael. "The Limits of Sainthood," **The New Republic**. June 18, 1990 v. 202 n. 25 p. 40.

Irigaray, Luce. **Thinking the Difference: for a Peaceful Revolution**. Translated by Karin Montin.

Jay, Martin. "The Conversion of the Rose," **Salmagundi**. Winter 1997 n. 113 p. 41.

Langer, Monika. "A Philosophical Retrieval of Simone de Beauvoir's 'Pour une Morale de L'ambiguïté,'" **Philosophy Today**. Summer 1994 v. 38 n. 2 p. 181.

Lukacs, John. "Resistance: Simone Weil," **Salmagundi**. Winter-Spring 1990 n. 85-86 p. 106.

Merrens, Rebecca. "A Nature of 'Infinite Sense and Reason': Margaret Cavendish's Natural Philosophy and the 'Noise' of a Feminized Nature," **Women's Studies**. Sep 1996 v. 25 n. 5 p. 42.

McAlister, Linda Lopez. "On the Possibility of Feminist Philosophy," **Hypatia**. Summer 1994 v. 9 n. 3 p. 188.

Nye, Andrea. "A Woman's Thought or a Man's Discipline? The Letters of Abelard and Heloise," **Hypatia**. Summer 1992 v. 7 n. 3 p. 1.

Ring, Jennifer. "The Pariah as Hero: Hannah Arendt's Political Actor," **Political Theory**. Aug 1991 v. 19 n. 3 p. 433.

Schaper, Eva. "Ruber Meager (1916-1992)," **The British Journal of Aesthetics**. Oct 1992 v. 32 n. 4 p. 293.

Zerilli, Linda M.G. "Machiavelli's Sisters: Women and 'the Conversation' of Political Theory," **Political Theory**. May 1991 v. 19 n. 2 p. 252.