

The Deterritorialization of Women in the Masculine Language of Philosophy through Historical Examples

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Abstract

When looking at the whole history of philosophy, from ancient philosophical traditions up to modern times, it is difficult to encounter an argument or approach which has been favored with general acceptance. Philosophy is a realm of ideas that are contradictory and conflicting; it is also a discipline of contrasts, debates, refutes, and objections. It is possible that in this vast accumulation the one factor that can bring together the majority of philosophers throughout the ages has been the development of rhetoric that denigrates women as being secondary and governed by the sword. When emphasizing this general idea, which has rarely been the case in philosophy, the masculine language that prevails in every period is notable. The ability of the language to be seen in this way articulates the values of a period and leads to period-specific crosspoints. In approaching the relationship of philosophy to women, another notable issue is that the major thinkers who put forth ground-breaking opinions had shown no diligence in this area. In this way, the justifications for the arguments of philosophers, who have been adopted as the founders of rationalism, can be observed to be on irrational grounds on the topic of women.

Keywords

Women • Philosophy • Gender • Gendered discourses

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The idea and value of being human comes with an idea of equality. While equality was justified through citizenship in the classical era of ancient Greek philosophy, in Stoic philosophy, which marks the end of the classical period, human equality is based upon the human mind. One can say that the mind and its principles constituted a reference point for the basic resources that the principle of equality was deduced from; and also in the struggle for rights in the New Era with also today's philosophy of human rights as well. The next step in the idea of equality that has been constructed on the basis of having a mind is composed of "intellectual freedom." The human, as a being with rationale, has the freedom to determine their own aims using their mind. However, the ability to use one's mind and strive for one's own goals constitutes the practical dimension of this freedom.

The origin of the ideal of equality consists of an ideality that finds existence within a temporality corresponding to the history of philosophy. However, the distinctions of citizens-slaves and *patrician-plebeian-slaves* from the Age of Antiquity, and of lord-serf from the Middle Ages show that it has not always been possible to fully transfer the ideas that are proposed in systematic philosophy into real life. Indeed, philosophical efforts to legitimize slavery from systematic philosophers such as Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) raised the idea that the ideal of equality has always been expressed with reservations in these mentioned periods. Although such forms of categorical inequality were formally left hamstrung through the idea of "equality before the law," due to geographic, class, and cultural factors, "the ideal of equality as it needs to be" can be said to have not yet been reached.

This ongoing struggle, based on its ideality throughout human history, has certainly led to some results. In this context, slaves have been freed from their chains and land-bound serfs have become emancipated from obedience to the aristocracy during a deep and lengthy historical evolution. Yet the problem of gender inequality has continually confronted us throughout these ages as unfortunately shown by the warped legacy of history and today's mortifying reality. In this modern age, the world is witnessing the devastating reality of gender inequality and injustice in ways that cut deeply, in addition to inequalities based on class, religion, ethnicity, culture, affiliation, and geography.

The percentage of discrimination against people of African descent increases substantially when they are woman; the rate of discrimination against a religious minority also takes place more heavily when the victim is a female. Women, whether they belong to the majority or the lucky few, seem to be unable to rid themselves of this sexist discrimination. Discrimination against women and gender injustice continues regularly. Although there have been different results depending on the region, culture, or economic class one belongs to. Unfortunately, this situation constitutes to the grave conflicts of our time.

This severity is associated with a way of thinking that can be seen in philosophical traditions and contemporary approaches. Women were produced as an image that represents evil, mischief, superficiality, and seduction. The female image as produced in the history of philosophy has been edited in a manner not related with values or high virtues such as wisdom, justice, or ethics. In this respect, the mind and mental activity of women have generally been accepted as peculiar in that they are commonplace and in that they are also mortal in general (Berkday, 1996, p. 449). In philosophy, that which is mortal has been considered unimportant compared to what is abstract and noble, throughout antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Age of Enlightenment. In the words of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), women are those whose existence “spreads that which is vile.” This degrading and otherizing language strikingly refers to the catastrophic state of discriminatory masculine philosophical tradition.

On the History of Masculine Philosophy

The degrading masculine language regarding the female gender is seen more present within Greek antiquity, compared to various other periods throughout history. It should also be noted that the lands of Greek antiquity is the geographical and historical center of philosophical thought. The structure of language and discourse that have been produced by philosophical thought is also not very different from other historical-cultural watersheds and eras in terms of discrimination against women. Together with these, the culture of Ancient Greece glorified the phallus as well as the humiliation of woman in cultural and public areas like no other historical period. (Gezgin, 2013, p. 72).

Ancient Greek culture, which left us the basic concepts and methods of science and philosophy as their legacy, had produced non-egalitarian gender roles due to the sharp distinction of hosting a culture of gender. As in many other cultures, these sharp distinctions were fed from religious sources. In this way, the belief that women were created after men for as their partners was found to be based on ancient Greek theology. The understanding that evil and sin entered together with women into the world of men found its place in ancient Greek theology, similar to the story of Adam and Eve’s expulsion from heaven (Gezgin, 2013, p. 74).

Women were envisioned as an unseen presence in the history and philosophy of ancient Greece. The reason for this is because women were considered to be *unseen* in the public sphere of ancient Greece. A woman stayed at home in this culture and was placed under the care of a male guardian (kyrios), who was her father or husband, or a steward. Competence in legal actions and proceedings were not found with women. In this aspect, women’s executive competence for legal proceedings were not in question. All of their transactions were made either by their stewards or

with their stewards' permission. Women were not able to vote for parliamentary or judicial authorities because they were not considered citizens. While divorce was conceived as a simple process for men, a woman's right to divorce was made difficult to the point that it could not be exercised (Boyacı, 2014, pp. 206–208).

Thinking that this inequality cannot reflect on philosophy does not seem possible unless one falls into the belief that philosophy is pure, autonomous, and universal. Yet even the great philosophers, who had deep competence in transferring their knowledge of truth and wisdom, accepted the inequality of gender roles that existed in society as given rather than as a problem, and so were their inferences related to the nature of women in accordance with this situation. Not even limited to this, they were able to assert these inferences as true knowledge. This must be recorded as an extremely interesting situation that makes profound contemplation a necessity.

Looking at thinkers such as Socrates (470/469-399 B.C.) and Plato (367-347 B.C.), who were the founders of systematic philosophy, one witnesses that the idea of the existence of mental order has been in the micro- and macro-universe. These philosophers asserted that the mind should be rid of the manipulative obstacles in front of it in order to grasp mental order. They argued that bodily pleasures, which were deemed worthless when compared to the pleasures of the mind, were a part of these manipulative obstacles (Gezgin, 2013, p. 75).

The entry of women into the world of philosophy has been mentioned as a result of this intellectual perspective. Unfortunately, women could only first enter philosophy through their body. However, this body was considered as a source of gratification to be avoided and an obstacle in the way of men for their minds to reach the truth. In theology, woman allegedly caused the expulsion of man from the precious realm of the divine; in philosophy as well, she occurs as an obstacle to his return.

While criticizing philosophical thought, we not also forget to give it the credit its due. Indeed, Plato stated in his work *Politeia* that the women of Athens, who were the unseen, could be grouped with the men in Kallipolis' class of protectors (the state's third and optimal stage), dine at the same table, and be trained together. Thus, the way for women to be present in both the protector and managing classes was paved (Platon, 2008, pp. 451–457). Looking at the above statements regarding the status of women in ancient Greek culture and life, it is finally possible to consider Plato's views as progressive (Boyacı, 2014, p. 206). Yet the still-effective traditional attitudes and assumptions which have been committed to ancient Greek culture must be stated in Plato's approach and assessments toward women. It is not possible to say that Plato equitably discussed male-female relationships. In his critique aimed at democracy, he mentioned that the idea of freedom, which was inherent to his order, could lead to corruption by disrupting the hierarchy between the two sexes. Looking

at *Politeia*, one encounters general statements regarding women's natural tendency to do things like sew and cook dinner (Boyacı, 2014, p. 210).

The ideas of the opposition of body and spirit, which had become an authoritative statement of Plato, and the soul's supremacy over the body were inherited by Aristotle as the philosophical foundation of the condition of the inferiority of women, who had been matched to the mortal body in relation to men, in which they were matched to the immortal soul (Berktaş, 2014, p. 132). With Aristotle, one could witness that the adverseness between the two parties had become more specific. This relationship led to the establishment of dependent relations essentially between the two sides. Aristotle, while explaining this relationship in the context of dependency, specified and defended the subservience of the body to the mind, of emotion to reason, of slave to master, and of women to men (Aristoteles, 2013, p. 118). Women are subject to men, for only men can be in a relation with *nous* (the divine attribute of the mind). For women, emotion does not bow to reason; it prohibits the body's soul (Aristoteles, 2013, p. 140). Therefore, Aristotle defined women as monsters (or as deficient men) who had deviated from the human form (Berktaş, 1996, p. 452).

Aristotle, in parallel to the persistent understanding of nature, advocated that slaves and nature intended women to be inferior. The purpose that nature had carved for women was motherhood. What is important here is that Aristotle did not even recognize women's subjectivity in terms of reproduction; he did not even place women together with the burden of such an existential purpose as this in the center of procreation. The purpose of women is motherhood, but it is just a tool in terms of reproduction and continuation of lineage. The bearer of the soul is the man's seed; woman consists of a means that bears and feeds this seed (Berktaş, 2014, p. 133).

Ancient times are said to have ended in the fourth century B.C., classically speaking. In this backdrop, while Greek sites had lost their independence and democratic locations had been demolished, socio-economic realities were taking place in the direction of the dominance of tyranny. In the context of this major change, philosophical thought is recorded as having gone through a conversion/change. Indeed, while philosophy had also been developed as a "philosophy of the citizens" during the classical period, it caused the end of the prosperity of the classical era: Citizenship's loss of its old meaning resulted in new searches in a philosophy that had lost its ability to establish meaningful interpersonal bonds. These searches were a need that would continue until reaching the awareness the Ummah in the Middle Age; the need did not stop here, even if it was wrong. In this environment of hopelessness and pessimism, the continued adventure of philosophy may be mentioned in two schools. The first of these is Epicurus's school. The school of Epicurus (341-270 B.C.) adopted the topic of philosophical inquiry onto the meaning of life and the way to happiness. This school was able to preserve itself from the many distinctions

of the classical era; the school of Epicurus accepted women and slaves, and it was known to suggest a particular idea of equality within the human consciousness as the greatest good. Among the followers of Epicurus's school, Lucretius was also seen to have praised woman over Venus in his *De Rerum Natura* (Işıktaç, 2010, pp. 87–89). However, this praise was focused on Venus's compassion, maturity, and fertility.

Medieval philosophy is seen, not wrongly but perhaps a bit exaggerated, as an annotation that was deduced by the theologians of ancient philosophy. In summary, this era of Christianity inherited the ideas of Aristotle on issues related to women. Through the effect of the active persona towards everyday Christian theology, while further deepening the contradictions and hierarchies that Aristotle had noted, the way was opened for the weighty prevalence of the utmost inequality to be rooted in all areas of culture (Berkday, 1996, p. 452).

After the Industrial Revolution, the topic of the perception of women can be stated to have experienced a transformation in spite of men. In this situation, capitalism bracketed men and women in common. It did not separate them. In other words, there was an undeniable *equalizing effect* caused by the reduction in labor. However, even though a disaster had been rolled up into the whole of society in equal measure, one sector of society always becomes worse or disadvantaged compared to others. Women formed the majority of this disadvantaged group. While the Industrial Revolution carried man's work away from home, it did not have the same effect on the home life of women. Even the percentage of women in the public sphere could be neglected. In industrial society and in the early modern period, men were breadwinners working outside; women, as spouses or mothers, are limited to working in the house as they are economically dependent on men (Ünal, 2005, p. 50).

During this period, one sees in philosophy that women still were placed mainly with the body, and the thoughts on their position was as an object, not as a subject. Philosophers from the Enlightenment period were seen to band on the idea of women being unsuitable for philosophical thought. Thinkers like Rousseau and Kant were unable to liberate themselves from such prejudices (Berkday, 1996, p. 450). Kant, in his book titled *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, said that a woman who endeavors to become informed, "might as well even have a beard, for perhaps that would express more obviously the mien of profundity for which she strives" (Kant, 2010, pp. 35–36).

The harshest expression of negative language and philosophical discourse against women in the modern era has been found with Nietzsche. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche devoted a chapter for women called "On Little Old and Young Women." The following expressions took place in this chapter:

On women everything is a riddle, and everything has one solution: the solution is called pregnancy. [sic] A real man wants two things: danger and play. For this reason he wants woman, as she is the most dangerous toy. [sic] Let man fear woman when she hates: for a man is in the depths of his soul only wicked, while a woman there is base. [sic] To women you go? Do not forget the whip! (Nietzsche, 2013a, pp. 60–61).

In his book *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, Nietzsche articulated through belittling and offensive rhetoric that the aim of women's philosophical thought had no interest in "the knowledge of truth." Nietzsche stated:

...Women have so much reason for shame; there is so much hidden in women that is pedantic, superficial, carping, pettily presumptuous, pettily unbridled and immodest (just notice their interactions with children!), so much that has heretofore been most effectively repressed and subdued by their ultimate fear of males. God forbid that the "Eternal-Boring" in women (they are rich in it!) ever dares to come out [sic] But they do not want truth; what do women care about truth? From the beginning, nothing has been more alien to women, more repellent, more inimical than truth; their great art is the lie, their highest concern appearance and beauty... (Nietzsche, 2013b, p. 157).

The thing that distinguishes the Enlightenment and early modern periods from previous historical periods is the increase in the tendency to resort to the natural sciences as recourse to the review of women's debasement. The uncanniness of the female body and the inferiority of her mind was a topic that naturalist thinkers had been unable to get themselves to stop speculating on. For example, the French Cartesian philosopher Nicolas Malebranche (1638-1715) searched for the reason as to why women were mentally inferior to men and finally tried to explain this through the fact that the female brain has a soft and gentle nature (Berkday, 1996, p. 452). According to him, the essence of the issue of the female brain being soft and gentle in contrast to the strong and intense male brain did not provide any insight. These types of descriptions from biologists were expressed in specific formats according to the technical level of each period. Yet one can say that the gravity of an advanced and enlightened idea such as this could not have been experienced in earlier epochs of history.

Concluding Remarks

When looking at today's critical ethics and modern law from the perspective of the accumulated legislation (acquis), the idea of equality between men and women is seen to have been given a normative structure. However, patriarchy, which today is largely dominant, continues to affect the social structure under the hegemony of the historical traditions of moral codes. In this social structure, the figure of the female is always secondarily located and otherized. When considering this reality, the fact that the relationship between social morality and law plays a crucial role must be expressed (Şahin, 2012, p. 57).

It should not be forgotten that the values produced by social morality can sometimes have a cynical included. In a specific historical period, conservatism that is closed to change and criticism is not acceptable for fixing the assumptions that exist within society. Because of the dynamic viscosity of historical transformation and in facing a time of raging floods, such an attitude is doomed to not succeed. The inequalities between the sexes that social morality has failed to pass through a filter may cause and/or be the cause of accepting and reflecting on the restrictions against women and a reordering of the legality of value judgments.

In spite of the masculine sexist language that has been produced by philosophical ideas and literature since ancient times, growth and transformation on the basis of gender equality, both normatively and culturally, are recorded to exist. Thus if a historical determination is to be made, the values on record socio-culturally and ethical-judicially on the topic of gender equality in the twentieth century should be emphasized as a layered span. Yet in spite of all these improvements, one can see that negative masculine language has filtered through into the modern era from ancient philosophical traditions and that the socio-cultural semantics produced by patriarchal traditions are spoken in the area of normative language. Thus the prejudices that still exist on this subject as well as the rules and decisions that reflect social acceptance of the legislature and law enforcement constitute clear exemplifications of this situation. What a shame that despite the regulations in our legal system, these kinds of prejudices can be provisionally constructed directly by judges.

Even with the practice of some fundamental rights and freedoms that concern all people equally, as documented nationally and internationally (the right to work, freedom of education and travel), there is evidence that discriminatory language against women has taken place in court decisions (Şahin, 2012, p. 58). If men and women are not accepted as equals legally and socially, if the suggestion is not made to society through legal and administrative mechanisms in this aspect, and if exemplary attitudes, rules and decisions are not developed, women in society will remain as an object that men practice violence on and whose labor and life are exploited (Erkızan, 2012, p. 166). Thus, how discriminatory masculine language has been produced by those who have formulated it can be seen with regard to the samples of normative expression.

The issue here is the existence of the unique language and meaning in the philosophical-intellectual accumulation that has been formed by humanity and which has come to pass while being enriched from generation to generation. With their conceptual networks and institutional structures, civilizations have produced themselves through the language and vocabulary of meaning. The language and level of meaning of ancient philosophical traditions that have flowed into modern times through their deep historical background have been problematic on the topic

of women. This problematic perspective has been self-produced through its distorted ontological justifications and semantic references. Unfortunately, this language's ceaseless production has also become a cultural teaching code and pattern of behavior.

As a result, a contracted language and the image of woman that has been formed in the world of philosophical thought through economic discourse has laid the groundwork for the birth of arguments that condemn women to social gender inequality. Through negative labeling, women have unfortunately been exiled and/or deterritorialized from the masculine world of philosophy. This philosophical discourse lay the intellectual ground for the construction of the most traumatic and deeply-rooted discrimination and inequality in history. This sort of inequality at intellectual level led to the manifestation of women's issues as a problem of human rights. This study illustrates- through a number of examples- that it is necessary to detach from such intellectual bias, in order to revive / reproduce 'woman' as the (a) 'founding' subject of human culture and civilization.

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