

Dispensing with (Men of) Reason¹

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Many philosophers of feminism believe that Genevieve Lloyd, in her book *The Man of Reason*,² struck a significant blow against traditional analytic epistemology.³ Supposedly, she did this by showing that the concepts of reason and rationality have, in the historical hands of Western philosophy, become *genderized*—in particular, masculinized. In this paper, I will not comment on whether other areas of philosophy are guilty of that charge; my present aim is simply to defend epistemology in particular against it.⁴ I will argue, first of all, that Lloyd's discussion in particular—whatever its other merits might be—poses no fundamental threat to epistemology.⁵ Although her reasoning is historicist, it fails to establish the historical links it needs to establish; indeed, it unwittingly provides some confirmation of epistemology's *enduring* importance. But I will also argue, more fundamentally and more generally, that *no* feminist argument for Lloyd's kind of conclusion could pose any real threat to epistemology: The sort of genderization which Lloyd and others believe that she has uncovered would be most clearly explicable as being a failing as such, only *via* some standard elements of epistemology—which is to say that whatever shortcomings, if any, such feminist discussions could ever uncover can easily be absorbed *within* the scope of standard epistemological explanation. Epistemology's own metaphilosophical potential will thus be seen to confirm its own continuing significance, even in the face of feminist-historicist arguments like Lloyd's.

I

How influential has Lloyd's book been? Among those philosophers who regard what they call *feminist* epistemology as being important, the answer seems to be "Very influential indeed." Here are some representative remarks in support of that answer.

Klein, who is *not* approving of Lloyd's book, says (1996, 61) that it is the work usually cited as evidence of the historical male-bias of epistemology.

Code is one who often cites Lloyd's book in that way, indeed as showing the *current* male-bias of epistemological discussions:

Lloyd shows that ideals of Reason, throughout their shifting and evolving history, designate

what it is to be a good knower, determine what counts as knowledge and as a proper object of knowledge In short, these ideals have had a tacit yet constitutive effect on the shape of western metaphysics, epistemology . . . : an effect that has filtered through into popular conceptions of what knowledge is, who knowers are, and whose knowledge claims are authoritative. (1991, 119)

Indeed, feminists have uncovered notable coincidences [which] . . . are the twentieth-century manifestation of a persistent historical practice of defining reason, rationality and objectivity through the exclusion of attributes and traits commonly associated with femininity (cf. Lloyd, 1984). They leave no doubt that the invisible knowing subject in mainstream epistemology and philosophy of science is implicitly male. (1992, 140)

Gatens (1991, 94) is equally convinced by Lloyd:

phallogentrism operates by way of dichotomous thought, where one central term defines all others only in terms relative to itself.

A recent example of feminist critique which confirms the foregoing analysis of the way dichotomies function in the history of Western philosophy is [*The Man of Reason*].

Okruhlik and Harvey (1992, 2) refer to

some of the works that have set the agenda for present efforts to articulate the relationship between women and reason

and then tell us that "one of the most important of these is [*The Man of Reason*]."

A recent anthology on Australian feminism continues that theme. Among the contributors who refer glowingly to Lloyd's book (none have any criticism of it), Diprose (1998, 91) says that

As Genevieve Lloyd has demonstrated, the history of philosophy is governed by ideals of reason and rationality that, despite pretensions to sexual neutrality, are in effect male Lloyd

argues that reason and rationality, having no meaning or value in themselves, are defined in opposition to femininity or what is considered feminine behaviour. What emerges from this process are historically specific notions of reason that are, by definition, male.

I will not belabour the point any further. It is clear that there are philosophers to whom Lloyd's discussion *establishes*, or *demonstrates*, or *confirms*, or *reveals*, or *shows* a seemingly significant *result*—these being standard 'success words', of course, and ones that are standardly applied by these philosophers to Lloyd's discussion—about those most central of epistemological concepts—reason, rationality, knowledge.⁸ Yet we should bear in mind that the history of philosophy has contained very few—if any—non-technical books that have achieved such success. Even a well-regarded book will be thought by at most only a few philosophers to have *shown* or *demonstrated* or *established* what it claims to have shown. Substantive philosophy is simply not as simple as that. On inductive grounds, therefore, it would be rather surprising if Lloyd's book really had established what these philosophers assume that it has established. I will argue that it has done no such thing.

II

Lloyd's conclusion is that the concepts of reason and rationality, as used by philosophers, have become *male* concepts. What does she mean by this? What characteristics does she take to indicate such genderization of those concepts? In her view, how does such genderization occur?

She thinks that it has occurred because the philosophical study of reason and rationality has, over the ages, involved the *exclusion*, from the domain of reason and the rational, of supposedly female characteristics. This has meant the "denigration" of "the 'feminine'" (p. 107). It has occurred via philosophers having "readily identified with maleness" what they have favoured (p. 104).

As to what specific characteristics have been thus favoured, one of Lloyd's clearer examples comes from her remarks on Francis Bacon. He thought of knowledge as a matter of gaining *control* over Nature (p. 10), although not by the knower's doing so in a rough or violent way. Scientists, seeking knowledge of Nature, should treat it with "the respect appropriate to a femininity overlaid with long-standing associations with mystery" (p. 17). This "give[s] a male content to what it is to be a good knower" (*ibid.*). It is male to dominate; to know is to dominate; so, to know is male.

But Bacon's is hardly an oft-heard voice in contemporary epistemology (to put the point mildly). Metaphors of domination or power are *not* part of its attempts to understand the nature of evidence, or to answer sceptical denials of our having knowledge of a world around us, for instance. A contemporary epistemologist is more likely to conceive of knowledge as being, say, a true belief which has been *reliably* acquired (i.e., acquired in a way which is likely in general to lead to the person's having true beliefs), or as a true belief which *coheres*—harmonises—with the person's other beliefs, maybe with the beliefs of some surrounding community.

This is not to imply that the contemporary analyses are epistemologically *superior* to Bacon's (or, for that matter, to any of the others discussed in this paper). It is only to weaken whatever historicist chains would be deemed by Lloyd to *bind* the contemporary epistemologists to the various long-dead epistemologists upon whom she focuses. Lloyd seeks a *conceptual* result (and literally so, with it being a result about our some of our central epistemic concepts); and she seeks it on the basis of an *historicist* argument. But already we are finding something which we will continue to find as we scrutinise Lloyd's reasoning—which is that *even by her own historicist standards* her argument will fail to have any significant conceptual implications for contemporary epistemology. This is not because contemporary epistemology is without flaws, or because it is in all respects the best epistemology that philosophy has ever embraced; rather, it is because the alleged historical failings described by Lloyd have not in fact sufficiently shaped the conceptual content of contemporary epistemology. This is clear in the case of Bacon (and it will continue to be clear in Lloyd's other case studies, as we will see soon).

Lloyd would disagree with that. After all, she says (p. 7) that Bacon's model of knowledge is "overlaid" on Plato's, and that Plato's model "has been highly influential in the formation of our contemporary ways of thinking about knowledge." And this is significant because "Plato's picture" says (*ibid.*) that

knowledge is a contemplation of the eternal forms in abstraction from unknowable, non-rational matter. The symbolism of dominance and subordination occurs in the articulation of the process by which knowledge is gained. Knowledge itself is not seen as a domination of its objects, but as an enraptured contemplation of them.

But this, too, is *not* a model that is found explicitly in contemporary analytic epistemology,¹⁰ and Lloyd gives no textual support for her claim that it "has been highly influential" in the genesis of that domain.¹¹ Even at this stage of the discussion, therefore, it is hardly obvious that Lloyd is entitled—*even by her own historicist standards*—to infer that contemporary epistemologists treat Reason as male, in the sense gestured at by her.

III

I take it that Lloyd would see the pertinent and putative genderization as lying *beneath* the current epistemological surface. If so, though, arguments are needed on her part to make epistemologists aware of this failing of theirs. What is Lloyd's argument?¹²

In either explaining, or arguing for, her conclusion, Lloyd says (p. 108) that because philosophers "have been predominantly male," "the conceptualization of Reason has been done exclusively by men." And hence, she says (*ibid.*), "it is not surprising that the results should reflect their sense of Philosophy as a male activity."

Ironically, though, Lloyd herself provides us with a clue to why the latter

claim of hers is inadequately supported by her former claim. For she tells us that (*ibid.*)

despite its aspirations to timeless truth, the History of Philosophy reflects the characteristic preoccupations and self-perceptions of the kinds of people who have at any time had access to the activity.

And, we must ask, what “kinds” of people have engaged—and still engage—in philosophical reflection on reasoning? Lloyd’s answer is “Men.” But another answer—if anything, a *more* obviously true one—is “Philosophers, specifically epistemologists.”¹³ And isn’t it quite possible that even male epistemologists *have*, as a preoccupation and self-perception when doing philosophy, a willingness to transcend their maleness? It certainly is. As we saw just now, Lloyd thinks that it is the epistemologists’ “characteristic preoccupations and self-perceptions” that matter; but, insofar as one is being epistemological, one’s self-perceptions and preoccupations should include one’s trying to *escape* one’s personal circumstances as much as is possible and reasonable, in order to reflect as fairly as possible upon as many of us as is possible and reasonable. That is part of the *method* of analytic epistemology (a method practised by many female epistemologists too, it should be borne in mind).¹⁴

We should distinguish between the epistemologist *qua* person and the person *qua* epistemologist. A male epistemologist’s failings *qua* person are not necessarily his failings *qua* epistemologist. Insofar as someone is being epistemological, he or she is theorising; even if the person is male, he is not—insofar as he is being epistemological—being male. More specifically, the (male) person’s theorising will, hopefully, be done in a way that reflects his being successfully preoccupied with living up to his perception of himself as someone who is reflecting in a way that respects and recognises all individual differences and similarities. But Lloyd is treating male epistemologists as males, rather than as epistemologists. And that is unreasonably and irrelevantly selective on her part. Unless actual epistemologists have in *practice* warranted such an otherwise irrelevant treatment, her reasoning is inapplicable to them.

IV

What Lloyd must do, then, is show that in practice enough philosophers have let their philosophy reflect their maleness.¹⁵ And this is (almost) what she seeks to do. She tells us about the Pythagoreans, about Plato, Aristotle, Bacon, Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, Hume, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Sartre and (as someone who has not escaped the supposedly unfortunate influence of such thinkers) de Beauvoir. In all of these cases, it seems, gender-biased attitudes or formulations are not hard to find, according to Lloyd.¹⁶

But of how much interest is this (even assuming, as I am doing for the sake of the immediate argument, that it is true) to a *contemporary* analytic epistemologist? It is of real interest only if the following three conditions are all satisfied: (1) Lloyd’s list includes enough actual thinkers who have sufficiently influenced analytic epistemology; (2) her discussions of those relevant

thinkers concern their *epistemology* (rather than mainly, for example, their ethics); and (3) her discussions of those thinkers' epistemologies *criticise* their epistemologies as such. If these three conditions are not jointly satisfied by Lloyd's reasoning, then it fails, even by its own *historicist* standards, to establish any significant and worrying result about contemporary epistemology (even assuming, still for argument's sake, that her reasoning establishes anything perturbing about any of the historically *prior* epistemologies upon which she fixes her critical gaze).

And (as section V will explain) these three conditions are not jointly satisfied by Lloyd's reasoning. (1) and (2) are satisfied only by her discussions of Descartes and of Hume; but those discussions do not have anything critical to say about those theorists' epistemologies as such, and hence do not satisfy (3).

Part of the problem is that Lloyd blurs the borders of these philosophers' epistemologies. I take it that this is because (p. xviii)

Reason has figured in western culture not only in the assessment of beliefs, but also in the assessment of character. It is incorporated not just into our criteria of truth, but also into our understanding of what it is to be a person at all, of the requirements that must be met to be a good person, and of the proper relations between our status as knowers and the rest of our lives.

Whether or not this is a fair complaint against the philosophers Lloyd discusses, though, it mischaracterises how most contemporary analytic epistemologists approach their tasks. Part of the aim of most such epistemologists is—for better or for worse—to *detach* from such matters as a person's character.¹⁸ This is not to say that a person's character is automatically of no interest to epistemologists. Character can be epistemically significant, but what makes it epistemically significant is its relationship to some *further* characteristic—a *purely* epistemic one. That is, an aspect of one's character would be deemed by such epistemologists to be epistemically significant only insofar as it tends to further or hinder one's satisfaction of some purely *epistemic* characteristic. For example, one's honesty would be epistemically significant if it is part of why one's beliefs are more *reliably* formed, or if it is part of how one uses one's *evidence* in belief-formation. It is not the character as such that matters to epistemologists, though; it is how well a person, in virtue of having that character, instantiates overtly epistemic properties that matters. There is a link, but it is not identity, between character and epistemic properties.¹⁹

So, there is already reason to suspect that Lloyd's arguments—regardless of how effective they are against philosophers who *have* tried to intertwine their views about reason and rationality with their views about character—are inapplicable to at least most analytic epistemologists (who either do not theorise about character, and hence who seek to be detached about such matters, or who think of personal character only *qua* epistemic character). Let us examine whether this is in fact so.

V

Lloyd will presumably deny that any epistemologists really *can* detach in the way attempted by analytic epistemologists. But consider her discussions of Descartes and of Hume. She admits, in effect, that they *were* able to detach themselves in the way attempted by most contemporary analytic epistemologists. We can see this by seeing how insubstantial are her charges against them.

Descartes's sin, it seems, is to have lived when he did. Lloyd concedes (p. 48) that Descartes's epistemological method might have been "essentially private and accessible to all," and that he "thought his account of the mind opened the way to a newly egalitarian pursuit of knowledge." But, notes Lloyd, in *fact* women did not have equal access to education and science: "impinging social realities" (p. 49) still meant inequality of intellectual opportunities, which in turn meant unequal, socially determined, capacities to *utilise* the Cartesian method. Descartes, in thinking of Reason as being a kind of pure thought, distinguished "the ultimate requirements of truth-seeking from the practical affairs of everyday life" (*ibid.*). And the problem with this, according to Lloyd, was that he therefore "reinforced already existing distinctions between male and female roles, opening the way to the idea of distinctive male and female consciousness" (pp. 49-50). Consequently, the sense in which, according to Lloyd, Descartes "reinforced" prior social disparities between "male and female roles" is one that is *extrinsic* to Descartes's own thinking—to the content of his account. The latter was gender-neutral, but society was not.

Apparently, Hume is similarly 'guilty.' The most that Lloyd can say against him is that (p. 56)²⁰

in its social context. Hume's version of Reason, like Descartes's, which made it possible, takes on associations with maleness, even if these are not specifically required by their philosophical theory.

But these are certainly not good reasons for criticising Descartes and Hume as *philosophers*. Lloyd is admitting that their abstract reasoning—its content—is itself innocent of maleness; she is claiming only that their reasoning could be *used* in what she would call a Male way (so as to locate Reason in the world in such a way as to think of females as being less possessed of reason). She is not even saying that Descartes and Hume themselves, as philosophers, ever used their reasoning in that way; she is saying only that others might well have done so.

Yet can't we turn her reasoning on its head, and urge that her own observations provide good reason for *approving* of Descartes and Hume as philosophers? In other words (and once more), isn't her reasoning failing even its *own* supposed standards? Presumably Lloyd is just assuming that being detached is—even if achievable—not desirable in a philosopher, for to make that assumption would be badly question-begging. And her description of Descartes and Hume as in effect offering views which (i) are in themselves reasonable, but (ii) are used in a biased way by others who are thinking less detachedly, is an argument *for* trying to reason in that detached a manner! If, say, Descartes's social context—comprising non-philosophers (plus philosophers who are not

being philosophical in Descartes's way)—is faulty as regards the opportunities available to, and the attitudes taken towards, women, then surely one reasonable aim a theorist might have is to detach from such contexts.²¹ One would try to describe reason in ways that do not reflect or endorse such regrettable social realities. And Lloyd seems to admit that Descartes and Hume are not only trying to do this, but are *succeeding* in doing so. For she admits that their theories are *in themselves* neutral regarding women. It is not reasonable, therefore, for her to conclude that their *concepts* of reason—let alone ours (simply because theirs!)—are Male.²²

The most that follows from her argument is that *non*-philosophers (plus non-Cartesian and non-Humean philosophers) were Male-biased, since these were the people supplying the unfortunate “impinging social realities.” But again, this is, if anything, an argument for doing philosophy—and *for* doing it along Cartesian or Humean lines (as, very broadly speaking, many analytic epistemologists already do)! I take it that a quite reasonable philosophical account can fall upon socially deafened ears, without the philosophical account thereby being a party to, or even being influenced by, the forces of such deafness.²³

No doubt inadvertently, Lloyd is revealing part of why it is so important to do philosophy—and to do it in the detached way which analytic epistemologists aim to manifest. It is important because if people *could* detach from (i) (gender-)unreasonable social surroundings, to (ii) (gender-)reasonable conceptualisations, they would be exhibiting a kind of escape from such social failings.²⁴ Not only that, but they might even be able to rectify those social failings. They could do so, in the only way that detached philosophers can ever reasonably hope to change such matters. Specifically, they could *teach*—exemplify, display, impart—more reasonable ways of reasoning. For instance, they could teach a gender-neutral cognitive method such as Descartes's. (And they could inquire into its failings—but they could do so *in* a gender-neutral way. This is part of what analytic epistemologists already strive to do—and generally succeed in doing.) If more of Descartes's contemporaries, say, had applied his method, then—*ipso facto*—the social realities referred to by Lloyd would not have been so uncongenial to, or unchanged by, his neutral, abstract conception of reason.²⁵

VI

Lloyd implicitly concedes this. She says (p. 109) that

philosophers can take seriously feminist dissatisfaction with the maleness of Reason without repudiating either Reason or Philosophy. Such criticisms of ideals of Reason can in fact be seen as continuous with a very old strand in the western philosophical tradition Philosophy has defined ideals of Reason through exclusion of the feminine. But it also contains within it the resources for critical reflection on those ideals and on its own aspirations.

Thus, Lloyd seems to take her reasoning—her “critical reflection”—to be philosophical and, presumably, rational.

But won't *it* therefore be Male too (according to Lloyd)? That is, according to what it says itself, won't it—in particular, the concepts it employs—have been defined or constructed over time in a way that respects maleness to the detriment of “the feminine”? And (harking back to section III) philosophy is still practised by more males than females. So, wouldn't even Lloyd's own philosophical thinking (in her view) be unable to do anything *but* manifest such limitations?

The only way it can escape this limitation is if individual philosophers (*qua* philosophers), such as Lloyd herself, can do so—and if this can somehow constitute philosophy's doing so. But to admit this possibility is (i) to agree with my rejection, in section III, of Lloyd's *generic* dismissal of traditional, male-dominated, philosophy, and (ii) to concede that—contrary to Lloyd's longer, ‘case-studies argument’—individual philosophers can rise above their surrounding social realities, and still be doing (good) philosophy. In short, to make that admission is to reject Lloyd's explicit arguments. The fact that she implicitly makes it herself reveals her overall position to be inconsistent.

VII

Lloyd's argument fails in that way, in part because *no* argument like hers can achieve its ultimate aim. Let us now see why that is so.

Purely for the sake of argument, suppose that some feminist argument like Lloyd's *could* show that reason and rationality are genderized concepts. What kind of *failing* would thereby have been established, regarding epistemology and its concepts of reason and rationality? Lloyd (along with many of the other feminist philosophers cited earlier) seems to assume that for a concept to be genderized is for it to be *unfairly* genderized, and hence unfairly used—in brief, that the concept is somehow inadequate. But in what *epistemological* way, at least, would it be inadequate?²⁶

Is it, for example, that when epistemologists use a genderized concept of reason to make attributions or denials of reason, their claims are all false? When employing a genderized concept of rationality to describe one person as rational, and another as irrational, is an epistemologist automatically saying something *false*? I do not think so. If, for example, the concept of physical strength had been developed in a way that was thought to recognise only male physical capacities, this would not entail that nothing is strong. Nor must the genderized concept somehow be meaningless, so that all references to reason are *meaningless*. We could still understand uses of a genderized concept of reason, even if we disagreed with all of the uses (regarding them as false). And not even all uses of the genderized concept in relation to the ‘*excluded*’ gender must be false or meaningless: Even if the concept of physical strength had been developed in a way that was thought to recognise only male physical capacities, this would not entail that no females are strong.

In fact, it could happen to be the case that a specific concept which has been genderized in its history is *just as* accurately applied to members of the excluded gender as to members of the non-excluded one. Why is that? First, I see no evidence (and Lloyd provides none) that it is not the case that as many

women as men should be classed as being rational, relative to current epistemological discussions of rationality, for instance. Second (and more importantly), even a genderized concept *could* be the correct one to use in general. To categorise it as gendered is to comment on its genesis (notice Lloyd's historicism, hence her concentration on the *history* of philosophical talk of reason)—yet even a concept acquired by a selective or socially prejudicial method might turn out to be the correct concept. That is, it could turn out—in spite of its somewhat unfortunate history—to be the one which someone who wishes to make true claims about rationality should use. If this does not seem clear, consider a simple analogy: As epistemologists routinely point out, a person can have a belief which happens to be *true*, in spite of acquiring it via a quite unreliable method, such as guessing. Genesis is one thing, truth another.

Still, that is not to say that there would be nothing wrong with using a concept that possesses so unimpressive a pedigree. There is—and standard analytic epistemology *itself* allows us to understand (as follows) what that failing would be.

If Lloyd were correct in her main claim that the concepts of reason and rationality had been genderized by their development over the years, this would imply that they had been gained or formed in such a way as to reflect only a *limited perspective's* attempts at understanding or inquiry. (In Lloyd's view, those concepts would have been developed via a process which reflected male concerns more than female ones.) And the most clear-cut problem with this is that it affects, not necessarily the *truth* of the claims we make using those concepts, but our epistemic *justification* for thinking that we are making true claims using them. If our concepts of reason and rationality had been gained in so limited a way, it would be reasonable to say that attributions made using them are epistemically *unjustified*. The attributions might happen to be true, but this would not render them justified. Succeeding in using them to capture truths about people's cognitive capabilities would be like reaching a true belief by guessing. And analytic epistemologists routinely tell us that one way to lack justification for one's beliefs is to acquire them, or the crucial concepts contained in them, by employing perspectives that are too restricted in scope to reflect enough of those aspects of reality that could be relevant to determining the truth-value of those beliefs.

There is a profound irony in this. Many analytic epistemologists (certainly internalist ones)²⁷ would describe a lack of justification as a lack of rationality—a lack of theoretical rationality.²⁸ They would therefore understand the use of genderized concepts as being a failing—but they would do so in terms of their concept of rationality. And this shows that the failing—even if it exists at all—could never be one that tears at the heart of epistemology. *It is an epistemic failing itself—an eminently epistemologically explicable one.* Any proved genderization of a concept of rationality—or, more plausibly, of some specific conception(s) of rationality—could easily be accepted by epistemologists as being a failing; yet it would be so easy for them to agree that it is a failing, precisely because they can *explicate* the failing *qua* failing, by calling on the very concepts of reason and rationality which feminists like Lloyd think that they are undermining by uncovering the supposed genderization. Thus, even *if* epistemologists were to accept that a good argument could be given for the con-

cepts of reason and rationality having been genderized, they would not thereby be obliged to discard those concepts.

Accordingly, the most that a feminist could hope to show by arguing for Lloyd's sort of conclusion is that *one more way* for claims about reason or rationality to be unjustified—irrational, even—is for them to be genderized. An ineliminable problem for feminist projects like Lloyd's is that any such result is perfectly understandable as a detail *within* standard epistemology—a detail explicable *via* the concepts of rationality and of justification, rather than one that throws into doubt the value or coherence of those concepts. It certainly does not entail that no claims about reason or rationality are justified or rational, let alone true. Once more, therefore, even at best the feminist arguments give us simply some reason to absorb their concerns about reason and rationality *into* mainstream epistemology. Even *at best* we are being given just some more *examples* of considerations to bear in mind when assessing a belief's justifiedness, say, rather than some fundamental challenge to the very concept of justifiedness. We can sensibly ask this: "Has that belief been reliably acquired—by, in part, the believer's having been sensitive to *different* perspectives, including male and female ones?" We cannot sensibly say this: "Because genderization has occurred in how some epistemologists have thought about reason and rationality, no belief is rationally held—and, indeed, the concepts of reason and of rationality are themselves epistemologically empty or inadequate concepts." So, feminist worries like Lloyd's pose no threat as such to mainstream epistemology: *Even if their accusations of genderization are ever true, this never entails that something fundamental about epistemology itself needs to be changed.* At most, therefore, these feminist worries could direct us towards an interesting but comparatively small area to which we may apply some broader and more fundamental concepts from within standard epistemology. That is, at most the feminist arguments might help us to describe some useful but comparatively restricted details within the explanatory scope of standard epistemology.

Antony (1993, 187), for one, would be sympathetic to that conclusion:

If we focus on the existence of what might be called a "feminist agenda" in epistemology—that is, if the question, "Do we need a feminist epistemology?" is taken to mean, "Are there specific questions or problems that arise as a result of feminist analysis, awareness, or experience that any adequate epistemology must accommodate?"—then I think the answer is clearly yes. But if, taking for granted the existence of such an agenda, the question is taken to be, "Do we need, in order to accommodate these questions, insights, and projects, a specifically feminist alternative to currently available epistemological frameworks?", then the answer, to my mind, is no.

VIII

At least in principle, then, epistemologists need not resist feminist attempts to inquire into whether there has been implicit genderization in various uses—even epistemological uses—of the concepts of reason and rationality. Crucially, though, epistemologists need never *fear* the results of such inquiries. That is because no such discovery of some such genderization could ever reveal the *inadequacy*—not, at least, for epistemological purposes—of the concepts of reason and of rationality. The most that could be revealed is that some people—perhaps even some epistemologists—have lacked some justification which they might have believed they possessed. But this can be understood as being a *failing*, only relative *to* a coherent and stable epistemological concept of justification: To uncover and to understand such failings is part of the standard epistemological *use* of that concept. An epistemologist would use a concept of rationality, say, in order to understand why any putative genderization is at all a failing. Consequently, the feminist would have provided no reason to *discard* the concept due to the existence of the failing. What arguments such as Lloyd's reveal—inadvertently, of course—is that what is needed, instead, is better and more widespread epistemological training in how to use that concept, rather than a dismissal of the concept. Society requires *more*—not less—epistemology. More people need to understand better the breadth and depth of standard epistemology.

Thus, an epistemologist, by using the concepts of reason and rationality, can agree that the unfortunate moves in the name of reason which Lloyd claims to have revealed would indeed be failings.²⁹ The epistemologist would thereby view Lloyd's putative examples of gendered uses of the concepts of reason and rationality as being examples of how to *misapply* the concepts. However, he or she need not therefore *jettison* the concept. On the contrary: By *retaining* that concept, he or she can give the feminist data whatever explanatory welcome they would deserve in this setting; in that way, they may be understood to *be* data that indicate the existence of some sort of a failing. As section VII explained, epistemologists themselves—by *using* the concepts of reason and of rationality—can understand perfectly comfortably just what the failing would be in genderizing the concepts. (The failing would be that epistemic justification is absent.)

Lloyd herself would probably not interpret her argument in that way.³⁰ If so, though, she still owes us an account of just what epistemological *failing* she has described (and claimed to have uncovered). And the same is true of those many other feminist philosophers who speak in terms similar to Lloyd's. Still, perhaps it is not surprising that they have supplied so little analysis of what epistemological failing would be present and of why, according to them, reason and rationality are concepts whose life has been lived in vain. After all, if I am right, no such analysis could be correct: No epistemologist needs to regard any argument like Lloyd's as posing a fundamental or underlying threat to his or her discipline. In that regard, at least, Lloyd's argument fails, as do all other feminist arguments of similar intent and support. Regardless of whether or not some such arguments should worry other philosophers, epistemologists may view them with equanimity.

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NOTES:

1. Stephen Cohen made some very helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper, as did a referee for this journal.
2. The book originally appeared in 1984, parts of it developing an earlier paper (1979). A second edition has since appeared (1993a), differing from the first edition in adding a new preface and a new bibliographical essay. All of my otherwise unattributed page references in this paper are to the book's second edition.
3. Little wonder, then, that Grosz (1990, 162) regards Lloyd—approvingly—as being not simply a feminist, but a *radical* feminist, in this setting.
4. Lloyd does not describe her argument as being directed against epistemology in particular. Several areas of philosophy employ those concepts, and she does not distinguish among those areas, telling us (p. 108) more sweepingly that “Philosophy” as a whole has been called into question.
5. Klein (1996, 61-63), too, has argued for this, and I endorse her criticisms. They are rather brief, though. Lloyd's account deserves a fuller treatment.
6. This does not include all feminist philosophers, of course. For some dismissals of the idea of feminist epistemology, see Haack (1993), Klein (1996, chs. 2, 3), Koertge (1996), Pinnick (1994), and Richards (1996).
7. Unusually for a contemporary philosophy book first published in English, *The Man of Reason* has been translated into other languages—the first edition into German, the second into Norwegian and Turkish. I take this to be a further mark of its influence. Part of it, too, has been reprinted, in Alcoff (1998, 387-91).
8. For some further recent examples of such approval, see Alcoff (1998, 385), Braidotti (1991, 185-90, 200), Gatens (1998, 297), Grosz (1992, 367), Gunew (1990, 13, 16, 17), Held (1993, 43-44), Sargisson (1996, 134-36), and Segal (1987, 33). The approval has even occurred outside of Academe. Coombs (1996, 80) has this to say:

In her classic book *The Man of Reason* [Lloyd] shows how philosophers through the ages have consistently described the duality of man/woman in . . . terms that exclude women from the world of reason.
9. On reliabilism and coherentism, see, for instance (and respectively), Goldman (1986) and Lehrer (1990).
10. Where, in contemporary epistemological accounts of the genesis or the nature of knowledge, is anything like the concept of “enraptured contemplation” to be found? Nowhere. Does the concept of dominance appear in analytic epistemological discussions of a person's using sensory impressions to gain knowledge of the presence of another person? It does not. Again, this does not entail that Bacon's conception of knowledge, say, is conceptually *inferior* to contemporary analyses. But it does weaken any *historicist* case which Lloyd could make, on the basis of supposed shortcomings in Bacon's conception, regarding claimed weaknesses of our contemporary epistemological conceptions of rationality.
11. Epistemology *is* presumably the domain about which Lloyd is talking at this point. As note 4 observed, she generally talks of philosophy in general, rather than of epistemology in particular. But it is natural to see some specific parts of philosophy—such as the part to which other parts typically delegate the job of thinking about knowledge—as being among the intended objects of at least many of her comments. And, in speaking of “our contemporary ways of thinking about knowledge,” Lloyd apparently does mean to refer to contemporary epistemology and to those who are influenced by it.
12. The bulk of it is in her chapters 1 through 6. In chapter 7, she sums up the argument. I will begin where she ends, with her remarks in chapter 7. In section IV, I turn to the rest of her argument.
13. There are philosophers whose interest in reason has not been epistemological. As we will see, these are the philosophers upon whom Lloyd tends to concentrate. As we will also see, this at worst biases—and at best dilutes—her argument against epistemology.
14. Could Lloyd say that, necessarily, such attempts will *fail*—because male epistemologists cannot overcome their maleness, even when they have learnt, and are employing, analytic methods? (Stephen Cohen asked me this question.) Clearly, Lloyd can say it. But does she provide good evidence for the existence of such a limitation? She would take herself to have done so, since she does provide examples of what she thinks are relevant failures by male philosophers. I consider that *evidence* in sections IV and V.
15. Or (cf. note 14 above) she must show that in principle this would happen, were most philosophers male. But how would one argue for that subjunctive claim? It is far from clear how to do so. The simplest approach is to do what Lloyd attempts to do: (i) she notes that most philosophers *have* been male, and then (ii) she tries to provide (enough) *actual* examples of male philosophers failing to transcend their maleness. It is this approach of hers that I am about to consider.
16. We have already noted two of those formulations—Plato's and Bacon's.
17. It is not good enough to say, vaguely, as Lloyd does (1979, 18), that “Past philosophical reflection has after all helped form our present thought structures.”
18. And isn't one of the possible morals we can learn from studying Hume, say, the *disjointness* of our use—let alone our study—of Reason from “the rest of our lives”?
19. For a recent, and more extended discussion of this issue, see Zagzebski (1996).
20. So, it is at best misleading for Lloyd to say (pp. 49-50) that Descartes's account “reinforced” prior social disparities. It coexisted with them, and (in spite of Descartes's own efforts) failed to change them. But that is hardly the same as reinforcing them. In the preface to her book's second edition, Lloyd herself seems to question this move of hers. In the first edition, she now says (p. xiv),

I put more emphasis in this section [on Descartes] than I now think appropriate on the interaction between philosophical content and

its extraneous social context. I would now emphasise, rather, the interaction between philosophical content and the implicit play of symbols which links Descartes's texts with others in the philosophical tradition.

However, Lloyd does not proceed to tell us how her argument will allow her to do this in a way that shows Descartes's discussion of Reason to be conceptually or symbolically genderized—or, a fortiori, how she will reveal a conceptual or symbolic link between the content of Descartes's discussion and contemporary epistemological discussions. (Instead, I am about to argue that her own reasoning provides a way to understand Descartes's account as non-genderized.)

21. Another reasonable aim would be to *change* the context—that is, to stay in it, while nevertheless altering its objectionable aspects. As I will explain briefly, even the detached theorist has a way of trying to achieve this aim.
22. As we saw, Lloyd makes that inferential leap by treating the theories—hence the concepts—of Descartes and of Hume as being determined largely by their failure to change prior social disparities. However, that is anything but an obviously true principle about concept content. Can't an individual use a non-standard concept? Maybe only a special individual can do so. Yet weren't Descartes and Hume special in their use of concepts? Isn't that why contemporary epistemology does, and should, respect them so much?
23. I have encountered the objection that Lloyd's admitting that Descartes's and Hume's accounts in themselves avoid genderization is just evidence of her *evenhandedness*—and, consequently, a virtue of her account. I cannot see how that claim helps Lloyd in this setting. Evenhanded in intent or not, her concession is simply inconsistent with her conclusion. After all, her conclusion is that our concept of reason has been progressively genderized by various pertinent philosophers. This conclusion requires Lloyd to trace a pattern of pertinent philosophers' accounts that have not transcended genderization. (And if the conclusion is to be applied warrantably to analytic epistemologists, for example, *those* accounts need to be ones that have influenced such epistemologists' understanding of reason.) So, for Lloyd to admit that Descartes's and Hume's accounts do, strictly speaking, transcend genderization is for her to undermine her own argument. (And the fact that it is those accounts—Descartes's and Hume's—upon which contemporary analytic epistemologists draw so heavily is, again, a strength of such epistemology—even by Lloyd's own reasoning, ironically!)
24. Witness one of the oft-claimed benefits of pertinent people functioning as good role models for others. A detached thinker—considering many possibilities and counterpossibilities, different viewpoints, competing viewpoints—might be a good intellectual role model (especially in social circumstances like, apparently, Descartes's or Hume's).
25. For more historically detailed criticism of Lloyd's discussion of Descartes, see Atherton (1993).
26. Elsewhere (1993b), Lloyd says that what she has shown (in 1993a) is that reason has been *symbolised* as male. She does not say what failings—in particular, what epistemological failings—it therefore has.
27. Hetherington (1996, chs. 14, 15) provides a brief introduction to the epistemological distinction between epistemic internalism and epistemic externalism.
28. For more on the links between theoretical rationality and epistemic justification, see Moser (1985, ch. 6).
29. Please bear in mind, though, that sections II through VI have argued that epistemologists need *not* accept that Lloyd has succeeded in revealing any such unfortunate moves having been made—not, at any rate, any that have in fact sufficiently shaped epistemology's current logical space.
30. But, of course, that does not make these remarks irrelevant. Cf. Lloyd (p. 110): "I have often highlighted points which were not salient in the philosophers' own perceptions of what they were about."