

- [44.](#) For a coruscating account of Western Marxism, see Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, London 1976.
- [45.](#) Lacan's essay can be found in this volume, ch. 4; and in his *Écrits*, London 1977. See also Fredric Jameson, "'Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan'", *Yale French Studies*, 55/56, 1977.
- [46.](#) Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, London 1969, pp. 233-4.
- [47.](#) See Colin MacCabe, "'On Discourse'", *Economy and Society*, 8, 3, August 1979.
- [48.](#) Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, London 1971, p. 174.
- [49.](#) Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration*, London 1987, pp. 78-9.
- [50.](#) Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, p. 169 (emphasis added).
- [51.](#) Althusser, *For Marx*, p. 235.
- [52.](#) Quoted by Jonathan Rée, *Philosophical Tales*, London 1958, p. 59.
- [53.](#) See Althusser's unpublished essay of 1969, '*Théorie, Pratique Théorique et Formation Théorique, Idéologie et Lutte Idéologique*', quoted by Elliott, *Althusser*, pp. 172-4.
- [54.](#) Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge 1977, p. 192.

10 Feminism, Ideology, and Deconstruction: A Pragmatist View

Richard Rorty

Neither philosophy in general, nor deconstruction in particular, should be thought of as a pioneering, path-breaking, tool for feminist politics. Recent philosophy, including Derrida's, helps us see practices and ideas (including patriarchal practices and ideas) as neither natural nor inevitable -- but that is all it does. When philosophy has finished showing that everything is a social construct, it does not help us decide which social constructs to retain and which to replace.

Most intellectuals would like to find ways of joining in the struggle of the weak against the strong. So they hope that their particular gifts and competences can be made relevant to that struggle. The term most frequently used in recent decades to formulate this hope is 'critique of ideology'. The idea is that philosophers, literary critics, lawyers, historians, and others who are good at making distinctions, redescribing, and recontextualizing can put these talents to use by 'exposing' or 'demystifying' present social practices.

But the most efficient way to expose or demystify an existing practice would seem to be by suggesting an alternative practice, rather than criticizing the current one. In politics, as in the Kuhnian model of theory-change in the sciences, anomalies within old paradigms can pile up indefinitely without providing much basis for criticism until a new option is offered. 'Immanent' criticism of the old paradigm is relatively ineffective. More specifically, the most effective way to criticize current descriptions of a given instance of the oppression of the weak as 'a necessary evil' (the political equivalent of 'a negligible anomaly') is to explain just why it is not in fact necessary, by explaining how a specific institutional change would eliminate it. That means sketching an alternative future and a scenario of political action that might take us from the present to the future.

Marx and Engels make this point in *The German Ideology* when they criticize Feuerbach for changing 'the word "communist", which in the real world means the follower of a definite revolutionary party, into a mere category'.¹ Their confidence that their criticisms of the German philosophical tradition substituted reality for illusion, science for fantasy, was greatly strengthened by the fact that they had a revolutionary party and a programme -- a concrete proposal about how to provide empirical verification of their claim that certain contemporary evils (e.g. income differentials, unemployment) were unnecessary ones. The difference between their situation and ours is principally that no one now wants the revolution they had in mind; no longer does anyone want to nationalize the means of production or to abolish private property. So the contemporary Left lacks the sort of party and the sort of scenario that backed up Marx and Engel's claim that their thought was 'scientific' rather than 'Utopian' -- the voice of reality rather than fantasy.²

The closest we leftist intellectuals in the rich democracies come nowadays to having such a party and a programme is the feminist movement. But on its political side feminism looks like a reformist rather than a revolutionary movement. For its political goals are fairly concrete and not difficult to envisage being achieved; these goals are argued for by appeals to widespread moral intuitions about fairness. So contemporary feminist politics is more analogous to eighteenthcentury abolitionism than to nineteenth-century Communism. Whereas it was very difficult in the nineteenth century to envisage what things might be like without private ownership, it was relatively easy in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to envisage a world without slaves and to see slavery as just a leftover of a barbarous age -morally repugnant to widely held intuitions. Analogously, it is relatively easy to envisage a world with equal pay for equal work, equally shared domestic responsibilities, as many women as men in positions of power, etc., and to see present inequities as repugnant to widely shared intuitions about what is right and just. Only in so far as feminism is more than a matter of specific reforms is it analogous to nineteenthcentury Communism.

Feminists are in the following situation: like Marx and Engels, they suspect that piecemeal reforms will leave an underlying, and unnecessary, evil largely untouched. But unlike Marx and Engels, they cannot easily sketch a revolutionary political scenario or a post-revolutionary utopia. The result is a lot of talk about *philosophical* revolutions, revolutions in *consciousness*; these revolutions, however, are not reflected at anything that Marx and Engels would recognize as 'the material level'. So it is easy to imagine Marx and Engels making the same kind of fun of a lot of contemporary feminist theory that they made of Hegel, Feuerbach, or Bauer. The feminist theorists, they might say, have made 'feminist' into 'a mere category'; nor can they hope to do more, as long as the term does not signify 'follower of a definite *revolutionary* party'.

These considerations lead one to ask whether feminists can keep the notion of 'critique of ideology' without invoking the distinction between 'matter' and 'consciousness' deployed in *The German Ideology*. There is a large and depressing literature about the equivocality of the term 'ideology', the latest example of which is the first chapter of Terry Eagleton's *Ideology*.³ Eagleton rejects the frequent suggestion that the term has become more trouble than it is worth, and offers the following as a definition: 'ideas and beliefs which help to legitimate the interests of a ruling group or class specifically by distortion and dissimulation'. As an alternative he suggests 'false or deceptive beliefs' that arise 'not from the interests of a dominant class but from the material structure of society as a whole'.⁴ The latter formulation incorporates the material/non-material contrast central to *The German Ideology*. But it is difficult for feminists to appropriate this contrast, which got whatever concrete relevance it had from the explication of 'material change' by reference to Marx's eschatological history of changes in the organization of mechanisms of production. That history is largely irrelevant to the oppression of women by men.⁵

If however, we drop the matter--consciousness distinction and fall back on the first of the two definitions of 'ideology' I quoted from Eagleton, we come into conflict with the philosophical views about truth, knowledge, and objectivity held by most of the contemporary feminist intellectuals who hope to put their gifts and competences to work criticizing masculinist ideology. For 'distortion' presupposes a medium of representation which, intruding between us and the object under investigation, produces an appearance that does not correspond to the reality of the object. This representationalism cannot be

squared either with the pragmatist insistence that truth is not a matter of correspondence to the intrinsic nature of reality, or with the deconstructionist rejection of what Derrida calls 'the metaphysics of presence'. ⁶ Pragmatists and deconstructionists agree that everything is a social construct, and that there is no point in trying to distinguish between the 'natural' and the 'merely' cultural. They agree that the question is which social constructs to discard and which to keep, and that there is no point in appealing to 'the way things really are' in the course of struggles over who gets to construct what. Both philosophical schools can agree with Eagleton that 'if there are no values and beliefs not bound up with power, then the term ideology threatens to expand to the vanishing point'. ⁷ But, unlike Eagleton, both find this a reason to be dubious about the utility of the notion of 'ideology' (at least if it is supposed to mean more than 'a set of bad ideas').

The distinction that runs through *The German Ideology* between Marxist science and mere philosophical fantasy is an excellent example of a claim to have reached what Derrida calls 'a full presence which is beyond the reach of play'. ⁸ As a good Marxist, Eagleton has to echo the standard right-wing criticisms of Derrida when he says that 'the thesis that objects are entirely internal to the discourses which constitute them raises the thorny problem of how we could ever judge that a discourse had constructed its object validly' and goes on to ask 'if what validates my social interpretations are the political ends they serve, how am I to validate those ends?' ⁹ You cannot talk about 'distorted communication' or 'distorting ideas' without believing in objects external to discourses, and objects capable of being accurately or inaccurately, scientifically or merely fantastically, represented by those discourses.

Something, therefore, has to give. Feminist intellectuals who wish to criticize masculinist ideology, and to use deconstruction to do so, must (1) think of something new for 'ideology' to mean; or (2) disassociate deconstruction from anti-representationalism, from the denial that we can answer the question 'have I constructed the object *validly* (as opposed, for example, to usefully for feminist purposes)?'; or (3) say that the question of whether their criticisms of masculinist social practices are 'scientific' or 'philosophically well grounded', like the question of whether masculinism has 'distorted' things, is beside the point.

The best option is the last one. The first option is simply not worth the trouble, and I do not think that the second can be done at all. It seems to me unfortunate that some people identified with deconstruction have tried to reconstitute the Marxist matter--consciousness distinction -- as when de Man said that 'it would be unfortunate to confuse the materiality of the signifier with the materiality of what it signifies', and went on to define 'ideology' as 'the confusion of linguistic with natural reality, of reference with phenomenism'. ¹⁰ The way to rebut the accusation that literary theory, or deconstruction, is 'oblivious to social and historical reality' is to insist that 'constitution of objects by discourse' goes all the way down, and that 'respect for reality' (social and historical, astrophysical, or any other kind of reality) is just respect for past language, past ways of describing what is 'really' going on. ¹¹ Sometimes such respect is a good thing, sometimes it is not. It depends on what you want.

Feminists want to change the social world, so they cannot have too much respect for past descriptions of social institutions. The most interesting question about the utility of deconstruction for feminism is whether, once Nietzsche, Dewey, Derrida, *et al.* have convinced us that there is nothing 'natural' or 'scientific' or 'objective' about any given masculinist practice or description, and that all objects (neutrinos, chairs, women, men, literary theory, feminism) are social constructs, there is any *further* assistance that deconstruction can offer in deciding which constructs to keep and which to replace, or in finding substitutes for the latter. I doubt that there is.

It is often said that deconstruction offers 'tools' which enable feminists to show, as Barbara Johnson puts it, that 'the differences between entities (prose and poetry, man and woman, literature and theory, guilt and innocence) are shown to be based on a repression of differences *within* entities, ways by which an entity differs from itself'. ¹² The question of whether these differences were there (huddled together deep down within the entity, waiting to be brought to light by deconstructing excavators), or are there in the entity only after the feminist has finished reshaping the entity into a social construct nearer her

heart's desire, seems to me of no interest whatever. Indeed, it seems to me an important part of the anti-metaphysical polemic common to post-Nietzscheans (pragmatists and deconstructionists alike) is to argue that this finding-vs-making distinction is of little interest. So I do not see that it is to any political purpose to say, as Johnson does, that '[d]ifference is a form of *work* to the extent that it *plays* beyond the control of any subject'. ¹³ It just doesn't matter whether God ordains, or 'the mass of productive forces' dialectically unfolds, or difference plays, beyond the control of any of us. All that matters is what we can do to persuade people to act differently than in the past. The question of what ultimately, deep down, determines whether they will or will not change their ways is the sort of metaphysical topic feminists can safely neglect. ¹⁴

To sum up: anything that philosophy can do to free up our imagination a little is all to the political good, for the freer the imagination of the present, the likelier it is that future social practices will be different from past practices. Nietzsche's, Dewey's, Derrida's, and Davidson's treatments of objectivity, truth, and language have freed us up a bit, as did Marx's and Keynes's treatments of money and Christ's and Kierkegaard's treatments of love. But philosophy is not, as the Marxist tradition unfortunately taught us to believe, a source of tools for path-breaking political work. Nothing politically useful happens until people begin saying things never said before -- thereby permitting us to visualize new practices, as opposed to analysing old ones. The moral of Kuhnian philosophy of science is important: there is no discipline called 'critique' that one can practise to get strikingly better politics, any more than there is something called 'scientific method' that one can apply in order to get strikingly better physics. Critique of ideology at best, mopping-up, rather than pathbreaking. It is parasitic on prophecy rather than a substitute for it. It stands to the imaginative production of new descriptions of what has been going on (e.g. of what men have been doing to women) as Locke (who described himself as 'an under-labourer', clearing away the rubbish) stood to Boyle and Newton. The picture of philosophy as pioneer is part of a logocentric conception of intellectual work with which we fans of Derrida should have no truck.

One reason why many feminists resist this pragmatist view of the political utility of philosophy is that masculinism seems so thoroughly built into everything we do and say in contemporary society that it looks as if only some really massive intellectual change could budge it. So lots of feminists think that only by taking on some great big intellectual evil of the sort that philosophers specialize in spotting (something on the scale of logocentrism, or 'binarism', or 'technological thinking') -interpreting this evil as intrinsically masculinist and masculinism as standing or falling with it -- can they achieve the radicality and scope their task seems to demand. Without such an alliance with a campaign against some large philosophical monster, the campaign against masculinism seems to them doomed to some form of complicity in present practices. ¹⁵

This view seems to me to get the relative sizes all wrong. Masculinism is a much bigger and fiercer monster than any of the little, parochial monsters with which pragmatists and deconstructionists struggle. For masculinism is the defence of the people who have been on top since the beginning of history against attempts to topple them; that sort of monster is very adaptable, and I suspect that it can survive almost as well in an anti-logocentric as in a logocentric philosophical environment. It is true that, as Derrida has acutely noted, the logocentric tradition is bound up in subtle ways with the drive for purity -- the drive to escape contamination by feminine messes -- symbolized by what he calls 'the essential and essentially sublime figure of virile homosexuality'. ¹⁶ But that drive for purity and that 'sublime figure' are likely to survive in some still more highly sublimated form even if we philosophers somehow manage an overcoming (or even just a *Verwindung*) of metaphysics.

Pragmatism -- considered as a set of philosophical views about truth, knowledge, objectivity, and language -- is neutral between feminism and masculinism. So if one wants specifically feminist doctrines about these topics, pragmatism will not provide them. But feminists who (like MacKinnon) think of philosophy as something to be picked up and laid down as occasion demands, rather than as a powerful and indispensable ally, will find in pragmatism the same anti-logocentric doctrines they find in Nietzsche, Foucault and Derrida. The main advantage of the way pragmatists present these doctrines is that they make clear that they are not unlocking deep secrets, secrets that feminists must know in

order to succeed. They admit that all they have to offer is occasional bits of *ad hoc* advice -- advice about how to reply when masculinists attempt to make present practices seem inevitable. Neither pragmatists nor deconstructionists can do more for feminism than help rebut attempts to ground these practices on something deeper than a contingent historical fact -- the fact that the people with the slightly larger muscles have been bullying the people with the slightly smaller muscles for a very long time.

Notes

- [1.](#) Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd edn, New York 1978, p. 167.
- [2.](#) For a good expression of this fantasy-reality contrast, see Engel's "'Socialism: Utopian and Scientific'", in Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 693-4.
- [3.](#) For a deflationary account of the Marxist use of 'ideology', see Daniel Bell, "'The Misreading of Ideology: The Social Determination of Ideas in Marx's Work'", *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 35, 1990, pp. 1-54. This article helps to make clear why Marx would have found the phrase 'Marxist ideology' objectionable, and how inseparable Marx's use of 'ideology' was from his characterization of his own thought as 'scientific'.
- [4.](#) Terry Eagleton, *Ideology*, London 1991, p. 30. I cite the fifth and sixth of Eagleton's series of progressively fuller and sharper distinctions. For further discussion of this book, see Richard Rorty, "'We Anti-representationalists'", *Radical Philosophy* 60, 1992, pp. 40-42.
- [5.](#) As Catharine MacKinnon says, the history of the relations between men and women (unlike the history of sexuality -- 'the history of what makes historians feel sexy') is flat: '[U]nderneath all of these hills and valleys, these ebbs and flows, there is this bedrock, this tide that has not changed much, namely male supremacy and the subordination of women' (MacKinnon, "'Does Sexuality Have a History?'", *Michigan Quarterly Review* 30, 1991, p. 6). That subordination runs through the centuries like a monotone (and so usually inaudible) ground bass -- the sound of men beating up on women. No dramatic orchestration seems possible.
- [6.](#) I offer an account of pragmatism as anti-representationalism in a foreword to John Murphy, *Pragmatism: from Pierce to Davidson*, Boulder, CO 1990; and also in the introduction to Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, Cambridge 1992. For the parallels between Davidson's anti-representationalism and Derrida's anti-metaphysics, see Samuel Wheeler, "'Indeterminacy of French Interpretation: Derrida and Davidson'", in Ernest Le Pore, ed., *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, Oxford 1986, pp. 477-94.
- [7.](#) Eagleton, *Ideology* p. 7.
- [8.](#) Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, Chicago 1978, p. 279.
- [9.](#) Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 205.
- [10.](#) Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory*, Minneapolis, MN 1986, p. 11
- [11.](#) Wallace Stevens said that the imagination is the mind pressing back against reality. Derrida and Dewey both help us see that this amounts to pressing back against the imagination of the past.
- [12.](#) Barbara Johnson, *The Critical Difference*, Baltimore, MD 1980, pp. x-xi. See the use of the passage from Johnson by Joan Scott in her "'Deconstructing Equality--vs.-Difference: Or, the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism'", in Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller, eds, *Conflicts in Feminism*, New York 1990, pp. 137-8.
- [13.](#) Johnson, *The Critical Difference*, p. xi.
- [14.](#) I develop this analogy between contemporary feminism and the New Science of the seventeenth century at somewhat greater length in "'Feminism and Pragmatism'",

Michigan Quarterly Review 30, 1991, pp. 231-58.

15. A good example of this charge of complicity is Drucilla Cornell's criticism of Catharine MacKinnon in *Beyond Accommodation: Ethical Feminism, Deconstruction and the Law*, New York 1991, ch. 3. Cornell thinks that although MacKinnon 'superficially rejects the dream of symmetry, which measures us against the male norm', she nevertheless 'cannot but fall into that very old dream given the limits of her own theoretical discourse, which necessarily repudiates the feminine as femininity because she can only 'see' from her own masculinist perspective' (p. 151). Cornell thinks that more philosophical reflection (of a specifically deconstructionist sort) than MacKinnon wishes to engage in will be needed to avoid complicity with masculinism. She also thinks that MacKinnon betrays feminism's distinctive ethical standpoint by reducing feminism to a power grab. My sympathies are with MacKinnon. I cannot see anything wrong with power grabs, and am less sanguine about the political utility of deconstructionist philosophy than is Cornell. (For more doubts about this utility, see Thomas McCarthy, "'The Politics of the Ineffable: Derrida's Deconstructionism'", *The Philosophical Forum* 21, 1989, pp. 146-68. For MacKinnon's view that 'men are the way they are because they have the power' and that 'women who succeed to male forms of power will largely be that way too', see Catharine MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified*, Cambridge, MA 1987, p. 220.)
16. I agree with Cornell that one of Derrida's central contributions to feminism is that 'he explicitly argues that fundamental philosophical questions cannot be separated from the thinking of sexual difference' (*Beyond Accommodation*, p. 98). Indeed, I should go further and say that Derrida's most original and important contribution to philosophy is his weaving together of Freud and Heidegger, his association of 'ontological difference' with gender difference. This weaving together enables us to see for the first time the connection between the philosophers' quest for purity, the view that women are somehow impure, the subordination of women, and 'virile homosexuality' (the kind of male homosexuality that Eve Sedgwick calls 'homo-homosexuality', epitomized in Jean Genet's claim that 'the man who fucks another man is twice a man'). Compared to this insight (which is most convincingly put forward in Derrida's *'Geschlecht I'*), the grab bag of easily reproduced gimmicks labelled 'deconstruction' seems to me relatively unimportant.

11

Ideology, Politics, Hegemony: From Gramsci to Laclau and Mouffe

Michèle Barrett

Gramsci is something of a paradox in radical political thought. On the one hand, his work is much admired as the most sympathetic treatment, within the classical Marxist tradition, of cultural and ideological politics. He has become the adopted theorist of, for example, the Eurocommunist strategy in Italy, Spain and other countries and, in Britain, the inspiration for many of those who wish to realign Labour politics in a new and realistic mode. His approach to ideology, his theory of hegemony, his account of the role of intellectuals, his insistence on the importance of tactics and persuasion and his detailed attention to questions of culture, and the politics of everyday culture, have all been taken up enthusiastically by a generation sick of the moralizing rules and precepts of both the Marxist-Leninist and Labourist lefts.

Yet, in theoretical terms, Gramsci's work has posed many unresolved questions in the area of a theory of ideology -- partly because (like Marx, perhaps) his brilliant insights often stand alone or in some tension with each other. It is not clear, to take an example I shall discuss in more detail, exactly how his approach to ideology ties in with the now celebrated definition and use of the idea of hegemony. More generally, Gramsci's thought