

Beyond Dualism: The Challenge for Feminist Theory

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Philosophy

July 2020

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## Abstract

Since the 1970s, most feminist philosophical work, in some form or another, has sought to expose, define and/or combat the “maleness” of philosophy. This thesis is written from the position that the “maleness” of philosophy is not inevitable, but a feature of our dualised discourse. From this perspective, dualism and male bias are deeply implicated in current structures of thought. And yet, from this perspective, philosophy and theory construction should not be rejected as antagonistic to feminist aims, but reinvented through unthinking dualism.

This thesis explores the state of dualism within Western discourse in order to describe how feminists must approach the task of reinventing discourse. One aim of this thesis, then, is to examine to what extent feminist theory shares in the wider criticism of dualistic thinking: the critique of thinking in terms of domination. Thus this thesis sets up the problem of how to unthink dualism as being more complicated than many have thought, and as entailing the reinvention of both philosophy and feminist theory.

Chapter One begins by distinguishing the position toward dualism taken in this thesis from other prominent feminist approaches based on politics of equality and difference. From there Chapter Two provides an initial description of my account of dualism, based predominantly on Plumwood’s (1993) critique of dualism, as well as of the problem of how to unthink dualism. Chapters Three, Four and Five then describe the problem of how to unthink dualism in greater depth through an examination of Plumwood’s three principles of dualism: hyper-separation, denied dependency and relational definition. These middle chapters explore how resistant this problem is to a solution by addressing feminist theories’ own reliance on dualistic thinking. Central to this is the problem of difference which has been a major concern of contemporary feminist theory. Finally, Chapter Six draws on this discussion to describe the shape of a satisfactory solution to the problem of how to unthink dualism, and of the road ahead for feminist theory.

## Thesis Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint award of this degree.

I give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University's digital research repository, the Library Search and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time.

I acknowledge the support I have received for my research through the provision of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

Signature:

Date: 20/07/2020

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my supervisors, Professor Garrett Cullity and Dr Antony Eagle for their help and guidance throughout my undergraduate and postgraduate degrees at the University of Adelaide. Thank you to all of my fellow postgraduate students, and friends, from the philosophy department who were on the front lines of my tantrums and tears – and a very special thank you to Brigitte Everett who has been my biggest supporter and best friend throughout my candidature. I couldn't have done it without you.

Thank you to my parents, Belinda and Phil, for your emotional and financial support. Especially to Belinda for making a feminist out of me from an early age – I hope I have lived up to your lofty dreams for me. Another big thank you to Harry and my darling dogs, Linguine and Fettucine, for your tireless cuddles and love. I love you.

This thesis has been professionally proofread by Kerrie Le Lievre. I am very grateful to Kerrie for her help and wonderful work.

## Introduction

In this thesis I am going to describe a possible way forward for feminist thought. I will present a way of thinking (referred to as dualism) that is central to the maintenance of systems of privilege and oppression within Western discourse, and outline various challenges involved in overthrowing this logic of domination. It is in answering the challenges involved in overthrowing dualism that I think feminist thought must be based.

I do not want to make the complicated even more so. My aim is to explain this critique of dualism, the challenges it poses, and the response that I think we as feminists should take toward it, as simply as I can. I will outline three principles of dualism, which I have borrowed from Plumwood's (1993) groundbreaking critique in 'The politics of reason: towards a feminist logic'. These three principles of dualism – hyper-separation, backgrounding and relational definition – will structure my critique of dualism and my predictions for the future of feminist thought. From these three principles, and drawing on the work already done by feminist philosophy, I will build a critique of dualism based on feminist critiques of the maleness and male bias of philosophy. Rather than spreading myself too thin, I have tried to focus in greater depth on feminist critiques that are particularly demonstrative of these dualistic problems of exclusion, devaluation and reduction. My aim in this is to highlight ways in which feminist philosophers, despite and because of their differences, have recognised the same problems of exclusion, devaluation and reduction that affect not just women's status with respect to philosophy, but their everyday lives. To put it another way, I am going to connect a variety of feminist critiques of women's exclusion from, devaluation in and reduction in philosophy to an overarching critique of dualism in Western discourse.

I will not have time to extend this critique of dualism to all of the consequences that I think it might have for the future of philosophy, feminist theory and Western discourse. By the end of this thesis I will have outlined a way forward for feminist theory in light of the challenges posed by dualism, based on imagining new ways of thinking about sameness and difference, self and other. It would be interesting to address

the consequences these new ways of thinking might have for how we think about philosophy, specific concepts in Western discourse such as embodiment, and the use of gender as a category of analysis<sup>1</sup>. However, my aim in this thesis is not to solve the problems of dualism outlined above or to say definitively what feminists must do to solve these problems. My aim in this thesis is to highlight how hard the problems of dualism are to solve, the extent to which Western discourse and feminist thought are currently entangled with them, and some of the ways in which we can begin to work to solve them, having now recognised them.

In Chapter One I will introduce the critique of dualism as one kind of approach that feminist philosophers have taken toward the critique of the maleness and male-bias of philosophy. I will also introduce two other kinds of approaches that feminist philosophers have taken toward this critique of philosophy, which I am going to refer to as sameness feminism and difference feminism (which are both based on the critique of women's position *within* a dualised conception of discourse). Through introducing sameness and difference feminism I am going to introduce a more general theme of this thesis: the dualised relationship between positions of sameness and positions of difference in Western discourse. This dualised relationship takes the form of a double bind<sup>2</sup> between positions of sameness that accept a male-determined world outlook which has traditionally excluded women, and positions of difference which accept a male-determined conception of women that has traditionally been devalued. In order to overcome this double bind I am going to introduce the critique of dualism as an approach that critiques not just women's position within discourse, but also its masculine determination.

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<sup>1</sup> To name a few, it would be interesting to extend some of the lines of thought developed in this thesis to the works of Butler (1993, 2007), Haraway (1991) and Grosz (1994) on how feminists can use the mind/body distinction in ways that might disrupt dominant dualistic assumptions and stereotypes. It would also be interesting to extend this investigation to similar investigations of the sex/gender distinction by feminists such as Butler (1993, 2007), Gatens (1996) and Grosz (1994). For a similar project to my own that does investigate these areas of concern in more depth see Prokhovnik (1999). Prokhovnik (1999) makes an enlightening contribution to the feminist project of developing non-dualistic ways of thinking in terms of relation rather than hierarchy and opposition with which I am concerned in this thesis.

<sup>2</sup> This phrase, 'double bind', is used by Bowden and Mummery (2009) throughout their book.



Having marked the difference between the critique of dualism and feminist positions of sameness and difference, I will then introduce my own critique of dualism in Chapter Two. In this chapter I will describe dualism as a way of thinking that has permeated Western discourse such that our imaginations, as participants in discourse, are limited to dualism. In Chapter Two I will provide an initial outline, to be expanded in later chapters, of the three principles of dualism, the problems of dualism, and why this dualistic way of thinking is so hard to overcome.

Chapter Three moves on to the task of developing my critique of dualism in greater depth. In this chapter I explore the first principle of dualism, hyper-separation, as it has to do with the same type of problems of exclusion – not just of women from philosophy but also of some women from feminist thought. This chapter outlines a challenge for feminist thought, to develop a new basis for feminist communication and solidarities that is not based on a dualised conception of sameness, and is perhaps the most important with respect to demonstrating the depth of dualism in Western discourse.

In Chapter Four I focus on backgrounding as the second principle of dualism. Here I will argue that we come to think in terms of a dualistic form of hierarchy that positions the masculine as foreground and the feminine as background. This chapter discusses masculine and feminine spheres of civil society and moral orientations as examples of this foreground/background-type hierarchy in action. These discussions focus predominantly on Gilligan's (1982) attempt to revalue the moral orientation of care and Pateman's (1988) exposure of the sexual contract (an overlooked prior contract to the social contract). Through combining these two critiques with my critique of backgrounding, we will begin to see common problems of the devaluation of women and women's work in an effort to centre men and men's work in Western discourse. Ultimately this chapter reaffirms that it is the double bind between positions of sameness and difference which feminist thought must overcome. The challenge that is outlined is for feminist thought to reimagine rather than revalue concepts of sameness, difference, masculinity and femininity.

In Chapter Five I will address relational definition, the third and final principle of dualism, as it has to do with thinking about women as other to a male self in Western discourse. Because this way of thinking about women as other is perhaps the best example of the influence of relational definition on discourse, I am going to outline some of the most prominent concerns that feminists have raised over women's subjectivity in Western discourse. The two concerns that I will discuss in the most depth are de Beauvoir's (2011) concern with women's otherness and Irigaray's (1985) concern with women's reduction to other of the same. In this chapter I outline one further challenge for feminist thought: the need to reimagine the relationship between self and other such that the self is no longer centred and the other reduced.

In Chapter Six I will conclude my critique of dualism with an argument for, and an example of, what I think is the most promising way forward for feminist theory based on answering these challenges of dualism outlined in Chapters Three, Four and Five. Firstly, I will attempt to steer us away from the path of adopting positions of difference in response to the harm (the exclusion, devaluation and reduction) that positions of sameness have caused women in Western discourse. Instead, based on the critiques of hyper-separation, backgrounding and relational definition developed in earlier chapters, I am going to argue for a way forward that reinvents and reimagines feminist thought outside of dualistic parameters. Secondly, by way of clarifying this way forward, I draw out some of the promising ways in which feminist philosophers have already started to reinvent and reimagine the encounter between self and other and how we communicate across differences. My aim in this last chapter is to outline a possible, and I think promising, way forward for a collective feminist project of reinvention.

Before I begin, I want to make some points of clarification. Firstly, in this thesis I take it that gender is (at least currently) a distinction aimed at justifying social inequalities. Gender, in this sense, is one of many intersecting axes of power whereby the *meaning* of current conceptions of gender is complex and warped by dualistic hierarchy. As I have already noted, I think it would be interesting to look further into the implications of the critique of dualism lodged in this thesis with respect to the use of gender as a category

of analysis, but this will not be part of my project. Secondly, I take it that my focus on philosophy in this thesis can, in microcosm, illuminate and be interestingly extended to the tendencies of Western discourse more broadly. Thirdly, I have focused on women's oppression almost exclusively in this thesis not because I think that women's oppression is unrelated to various other intersecting spheres of oppression, but because I wanted to look specifically at the consequences this critique of dualism might hold for the future of feminist thought. This includes how feminist thought might respond to the call of intersectionality.

It is my hope that the arguments developed in this thesis for this way forward for feminist thought will be useful with respect to what ways of thinking feminists should be opposed to and how we might be able to challenge them. In the end, this thesis aims to provide a comprehensive feminist perspective on Western discourse and philosophy that highlights how dualism obstructs our path to the end of women's oppression. My ultimate concern in this thesis is to ask whether some of the key limitations of feminist thought have something to do with a more insidious limitation of how we think and perceive in Western discourse, and what this might mean for the future of feminist theory. If our future is to combat these limitations of both Western and feminist discourse, then this thesis explores exactly what we have been limited to and how that might inform the way forward.

# Chapter One – Dualism and Feminist Philosophy

## 1.0 Introduction

My aim in this chapter is to introduce dualism and some of the sorts of positions that feminists have taken toward it. We will see that dualism, despite being a common theme with respect to the feminist critique of traditional philosophy, has been thought about very differently among feminists. And we will see, through what I describe as a double bind between sameness and difference feminist positions toward dualism, why it is that I will be basing this thesis on a *critique* of dualism.

To begin with, I am going to look at the central role that the concept of dualism plays in the feminist critique of traditional philosophy and some of the different ways that feminists have referred to it. I will then focus on two divisions within the critique of traditional philosophy from feminist philosophers, based on the different sorts of positions feminists tend to take toward dualism. The division that I am going to address first is a division between feminist positions of sameness and feminist positions of difference – both of which focus on different ways of reacting to, and different aspects of women’s positioning within, the metaphysical system derived from dualism on which traditional philosophy and Western discourse are based. In particular, I will highlight a double bind between these two positions.

The second division that I am going to address is between feminist positions that focus on the dualistic metaphysical system, such as the positions of sameness and difference, and those that critique dualism more fully as a way of structuring thought in Western discourse and philosophy. Thus by the end of this chapter I will have led us to the type of approach to the feminist philosophical critique of traditional philosophy, the critique of dualism, that I am going to base this thesis on. I will briefly outline how this type of approach differs from and improves on the other two positions discussed in this chapter before I get specific about my own critique of dualism in the next chapter (Chapter Two).

## 1.1 Introducing dualism

Dualism is the central theme of this thesis; thus it is important to define it accurately. In this chapter I am going to be describing some of the things that divide feminist philosophers with respect to their position on dualism and critiques of traditional philosophy. Before I do so, I want to highlight some of the things that feminist philosophers agree about with respect to dualism and traditional philosophy – or rather, with respect to women’s exclusion from traditional philosophy. If dualism is a significant factor in why and how women are excluded from philosophy, then we can come to know more about dualism through knowing more about the nature of this exclusion. As we will see throughout this thesis, the exclusion of women from philosophy does not rest merely on the social fact that women have (and have had) less access to philosophy, but also on the centring of men and not women with respect to philosophical subject matter and conceptions of self.

Feminist philosophers have pondered the possibility of feminist philosophy in response to the assertion that philosophy, its basic conceptual categories and the problems that it focuses on are based in male bias (see Colebrook 1997; Holland 1990). As Holland (1990) puts it in her book, poignantly titled *Is women’s philosophy possible?*, there can be no such thing as women’s philosophy if philosophy has been defined as men’s philosophy (p. 4). It is on this sort of recognition – the recognition that traditional philosophy is based on ‘a primarily male sense of self’, through the overemphasis of certain kinds of ‘metaphysical, epistemological, and moral Individualism’ that deny women’s personhood (Holland 1990, p. 4), that feminist critiques of philosophy have been based. While, as we shall see, feminists take very different stances on how this exclusion of women from philosophy through the denial of women’s personhood can and should be remedied, most have recognised that this exclusion has something to do with dualism.

Feminist philosophy has exposed the gender bias of traditional philosophy – that is, it has exposed the extent to which the concepts and problems that have characterised philosophy are based in masculine self-interest. As Colebrook (1997) notes,

Fact-value distinctions, the mind-body split, the ideals of subjectivity or individualism, the opposition between the public and private spheres – along with a now-familiar complex of hierarchized dichotomies – have been shown to be inflected with a gender bias. (p. 80)

And to return once again to Holland (1990), feminist philosophers have noted how philosophy has been based on ‘a metaphysical system that relies excessively on hierarchical dualisms (all of which are isomorphic with the male/female dichotomy) as the basic conceptual categories’ (p. 4).

And yet, feminists have used the term “dualism” in different ways. In one sense, “dualism” refers to certain ways of thinking about concepts that are hierarchical. In another sense, “dualism” refers to a metaphysical system at the basis of Western discourse and traditional philosophy, based on these kinds of hierarchical ways of thinking. And “dualism” has also referred to the separate concept pairs that tend to be thought about in these hierarchical ways. Further, not all feminists refer to these same things as “dualism”. As Plumwood (1993) notes, ‘the terms “dualism” and “dichotomy” are used in the literature in manifold, unclear and ambiguous ways’ (p. 446). Some examples of this are Prokhovnik (1999) and Frye (1996) who refer to the same ways of thinking that I am referring to as dualism in this thesis as dichotomy and universal exclusive dichotomies respectively. My point is that the feminist account of what dualism is and why it may be detrimental to women has been vague and without widespread consensus. And yet dualism, or something like dualism, comes up again and again in feminist explanations of how and/or why women are excluded from philosophy.

What dualism is and the vagueness with which it has been presented by feminist philosophers will be returned to in the next chapter (Chapter Two), where I will fill out my own position on dualism. For now, let me just note that I will be referring to certain hierarchical ways of thinking as dualism, the metaphysical

system at the basis of Western discourse and philosophy born out of these ways of thinking as the dualistic metaphysical system, and the concept pairs that are thought about in these sorts of hierarchical ways as dualistic distinctions. It might be clear already, then, that what I am most concerned with in respect to these three senses of dualism is the dualistic way of thinking in terms of hierarchy. For this reason I am now going to focus primarily on a largely uncontroversial description of dualism as a way of thinking, but through this I will also expand on the other two senses of dualism, as they are common to this broader feminist philosophical critique.

We find a largely uncontroversial way of describing the problems of dualism, as a way of thinking, in Warren's (1988) account of the three features of oppressive conceptual frameworks. While my exploration of dualism to come will not be based on this account from Warren, it will be based on a similar and perhaps more detailed account provided by Plumwood in 'The politics of reason' (1993).

The three features of oppressive conceptual frameworks relevant to women's oppression, according to Warren (1988), are value-hierarchical thinking, value dualisms and the logic of domination. Warren (1988) describes value-hierarchical thinking, unlike hierarchical thinking, as the organisation of distinction into spatial metaphors of up and down – where 'greater value is always attributed to that which is higher' (p. 32). Thus, in terms of the male/female distinction:

Value-hierarchical thinking has put men "up" and women "down," culture "up" and nature "down", minds "up" and bodies "down", reason or intellect "up" and emotion "down". (Warren 1988, p. 32)

Warren (1988) also suggests that oppressive conceptual frameworks are characterised by the presence of value dualisms (p. 32). Taking value dualisms to be comprised of either-or concept pairs, where said concept pairs may otherwise be thought of in terms of continuity or mutuality, Warren (1988) highlights how this polarisation of concepts results in the valuing of one concept more than the other (p. 32). That is, oppressive conceptual frameworks, according to Warren (1988), are based on

the sort of “either-or” thinking which posits inappropriate or misleading or harmful *value dualisms*, i.e. either-or pairs in which the disjunctive terms are seen as exclusive (rather than inclusive) and oppositional (rather than complementary), and where higher value is attributed to one disjunct than the other. (p. 32)

For example, reason and emotion are often thought of in terms of exclusive disjuncts in Western discourse, and feminists have often highlighted how this way of thinking about these concepts has been harmful to women.<sup>3</sup>

Warren’s (1988) third and final feature of oppressive conceptual frameworks is the logic of domination, which ‘supplies the missing assumption that *superiority justifies subordination*’ (p. 32). As Garry and Pearsall (1989) put it, the result of value-hierarchical thinking and value dualism is a process of valuation which ‘lends itself to an attempt to justify domination of what is less valued’ (p. xii). The assertion is that when these three ways of thinking come together (value-hierarchical thinking, value dualism and the logic of domination), philosophers tend to think in terms of one higher order of dualistic relata in opposition to a lower order. That is, philosophers tend to create an overarching conceptual system that treats all higher-valued dualistic relata as if they were related to one higher order of being, and the other side of lower-valued dualistic relata as its inferior opposite. We can imagine the steps involved in this kind of dualistic thinking as follows. Firstly, when we observe difference (when we are thinking dualistically) we think of them in terms of value dualism and polarisation. Secondly, these differences can then be thought of in terms of value-hierarchical thinking as having innate hierarchies. Thirdly, we can think of these hierarchies in each binary pair as having their own source, or as having a common universal source of value which explains all binary hierarchies. Finally, when we think in terms of dualism we might also to assume that a single source explanation is better (that is, more powerful) than many-source explanation. Thus, when we think dualistically we tend to think that there is a single, fundamental division between higher and lower orders of being. Take for example humanism, where higher-valued dualistic relata (i.e.

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<sup>3</sup> See Lloyd (1984), Gilligan (1982) and the wider feminist tradition of the ethics of care for good examples of this.



male, reason, civilisation and so on) are often associated with human nature as a higher order of being, when compared to the rest of the natural world associated with lower-valued dualistic relata (i.e. female, emotion, nature and so on).

Feminist philosophers have then noted that thinking dualistically often generates a metaphysical system that plays an important role in justifying the domination and subordination of women (and sometimes other social groups) in relation to men because the feminine is valued less than the masculine in Western discourse. As Plumwood (1993) states,

Key elements in the dualistic structure in Western thought are the contrasting pairs of culture/nature, reason/nature, male/female, mind/body, master/slave, reason/matter (physicality), rationality/animality, reason/emotion, mind (spirit)/nature, freedom/necessity, universal/particular, human/nature (non-human), civilised/primitive (nature), production/reproduction (nature), public/private, subject/object, self/other ... to read down the first side of the list of dualisms is to read a list of qualities traditionally appropriated to men and to the human, while the second side presents qualities traditionally excluded from male ideals and associated with women. (pp. 443-444)

As we will see, it is not as though feminists think that the dualistic way of thinking must always lead to the lower valuing of the feminine and vice versa, but that it does in traditional Western discourse and philosophy because men have been in the position to speak and be heard in Western discourse, and in the position to practice and define philosophy, while women have not been.

Feminist philosophers, as well as maintaining a focus on dualism, have honed in on how this relationship between dualism, gender and philosophy is related by their connection to reason. As Haslanger (2012) puts it, 'one of the common themes in feminist research over the past decade has been the claim that reason is "gendered" or, more specifically, that reason is "male" or "masculine"' (p. 35). This line of thought, that the concept of reason is or has been associated with the masculine (and its opposite,

emotion, with the feminine) is another widely accepted theme within feminist philosophy.<sup>4</sup> Often the rise of influence that this line of thought has had on feminist philosophy is attributed to Lloyd's (1984) *The man of reason: "Male" and "female" in Western philosophy*, in which she argues that the philosophical conception of reason has been developed throughout history through its association with masculinity and its opposition and transcendence of femininity. Because of reason's masculine connotations and the specifically asymmetrical pattern of hierarchical thought (assuming that philosophers think about reason in the terms of dualism outlined above) through which we think about these polarised, gendered conceptions of reason and emotion, feminist philosophers have argued that 'the concept of reason, in its everyday sense, carries with it a claim of patriarchal power' (Nagl-Docekal 1999, p. 50).

Before I move on with this chapter I want to briefly highlight how two other terms, femininity and Western discourse, are being used in this thesis. To begin with, I am aware that by using this term "Western discourse", as I have done and will continue to throughout the thesis, I engage in precisely the kinds of dualistic thinking and categorisation that I aim to challenge. Indeed, there is not one Western discourse, but many Western discourses, not all of which are properly understood as dualistic. I do not mean to suggest that we should think about these discourses reductively, but that there is a dominant way of thinking that has informed these Western discourses in different ways throughout their development and through the training of philosophers within the academy. Thus, the term Western discourse is used in this thesis as a way of interrogating a broader disciplinary matrix and not meant to discount the varied views that have been developed in the Western academy. The significance of this idea of a disciplinary matrix will become clearer in Chapter Two where I discuss Kuhn's (1962) theory of the history of scientific progress as it has to do with the sort of paradigm shift contemplated in this thesis.

Further, feminists have held varied views with respect to what femininity and masculinity are and how we as feminists should relate to them. I am not going to engage in any in-depth analysis of this difference

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<sup>4</sup> see Prokhovnik (1999) for an in-depth outline of the influence of the critique of the maleness of reason on feminist thought

between feminists, but I think it is appropriate for me to highlight how I will be understanding this idea femininity, how I think it impacts the lives of women and how I think that it should impact feminist thought. In this thesis, along the lines of theorists such as Haslanger (2012)<sup>5</sup>, I will be considering femininity and masculinity as relational properties. More specifically, I will be considering the current conception of femininity as a relational property of subordination and objectification. This, then, forms the basis for my reoccurring assumption that feminists should be concerned with this devaluation of femininity, as an entrenched and prescriptive social concept. I will now briefly discuss this claim before moving on. To be clear, I do not think that there is some sort of feminine essence with which feminists should be concerned. Rather, I think that feminists should be concerned with the devaluation of the feminine because femininity forms the standards to which women are held in society. Thus, feminists should be concerned with the status of femininity in Western discourse because it reflects and perpetuates the status of women. Femininity, then, should be approached by feminists in an ameliorative sense. That is, feminists should be concerned with noticing how current conceptions of femininity influence the lives of women and how these conceptions should then be rectified. In this sense I am not taking it that feminists should consider femininity as something that is inherently valuable, but as a current conception of gender that reflects and perpetuates the subordinate status of women, that we as feminists should aim to replace.

## **1.2 Sameness (a.k.a. equality) vs difference feminism**

I am now going to establish basic outlines of two types of opposing traditions within feminist philosophy based on different ideas about what is wrong with dualism and different, opposing, recommendations about how women's exclusion from philosophy can be rectified.<sup>6</sup> In the words of Colebrook (1997), sameness feminism asks that 'philosophy be more truly philosophical, that it be less gender-biased and

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<sup>5</sup> See in particular Haslanger's essay, 'on being objective and being objectified'

<sup>6</sup> Most will be familiar with the opposition between these two positions within feminism, more commonly referred to as equality and difference feminism. I present this division between sameness and difference feminism quite broadly here. It is not my intention to suggest that this division between sameness and difference feminism is as simple as it is presented here, but to highlight an opposition between some of their general commitments.

that it extend its privileged notions – of reason, subjectivity, rights, and so on – to include women’ (p. 80), while difference feminism asks that philosophy’s central notions be altered and other virtues included:

other virtues (such as caring or other-directedness); other aspects of the self (the body); other issues (the family, women’s position, sexual difference); and other methods and epistemologies (historic or perspectival). (p. 81)

I am also going to highlight what I take to be the most important risks associated with each of these positions, and through doing so describe a double bind between the two that I think the critique of dualism can overcome. As we will see, these risks associated with both sameness and difference feminism come back to the fact that neither position critiques dualism as a way of thinking, only women’s position within the traditional dualistic metaphysical system. By the end of this chapter I will explain how the result of this is that they both risk *reaffirming* women’s position within this dualistic metaphysical system, rather than challenging it.

### **1.2.1 Sameness (a.k.a. equality) feminism**

The sameness feminist position (sometimes referred to as equality or liberal feminism) on dualism is that it is through women’s positioning within the traditional dualistic metaphysical system that women have been excluded from philosophy, and that it is therefore this position that must be improved. And it is significantly the position of women within this system, and only this position, that sameness feminists are concerned with. Some prominent examples of this type of position are de Beauvoir (2011), Friedan (1963), and Wollstonecraft (1971).

Sameness feminists, at large, accept the dualistic metaphysical system as a genuine and sufficient “picture” of the world, so to speak. Thus they accept traditionally masculine ideals as genuine and sufficient human ideals, taking it that they can be extended to women. Referring to this type of approach as the ‘classical feminist’ stance, Jones (2004) describes its basic claim as that ‘what needs to be challenged are not available norms and ideals of rationality, but rather the supposition that women are

unable to meet them' (p. 302). That is, that the dominant conception of reason is both a 'genuinely' and 'sufficiently complete' account of human nature (Jones 2004, p. 303). As such, they attempt to improve women's position within this system through the denial of differences between men and women. It is for this reason that Plumwood (1993) refers to sameness feminism as the denial of difference approach (p. 457).

These sameness feminist positions look to extend the traditionally masculine conception of reason to women as a way of securing women's access to the kinds of rights traditionally enjoyed by men. This is why they are often labelled equality feminists – because they look to achieve equality between men and women by arguing that women and men should be treated similarly, through showing that men and women are the same.

For the purpose of this thesis we can think of sameness feminism as the position that while those gender differences that have justified women's lower positioning in the dualistic metaphysical system are avoidable (and often, products of social rather than natural construction), the dualistic metaphysical system itself is not. These theorists can accept almost the entirety of this dualistic metaphysical system, and only deny that the man/woman distinction is a hierarchical binary that lines up with the others.

The most important risk associated with this position, then, is the reaffirmation of a male-determined order of hierarchy within Western discourse from which women have traditionally been excluded. As Bowden and Mummery (2009) put it,

Despite the long tradition of women's subordination based on notions of their innate differences from the male standard, the denial of differences itself risks being little more than further support for men's monopoly on power. (p. 4)

### **1.2.2 Difference feminism**

Difference feminism (sometimes referred to as gynocentrism), on the other hand, is not based on highlighting how men and women are more similar than they are different, but in revaluing feminine

difference. In this respect difference feminism revalues the traditional differences between men and women rather than collapsing them. Often, having recognised how feminine ideals complement their masculine counterparts or how masculine ideals might be dependent on feminine ideals, difference feminists assert that women's differences from men should have the same social, economic and political power as men's differences from women. Some prominent examples (some of them more radical than others) of this type of position are Daly (1979, 1984), Daly and Caputi (1989), Gilligan (1982), Held (2006) and Ruddick (1989).

As such, the difference feminist position is that while male ideals might be genuine human ideals, they are 'insufficient accounts of human nature' (Jones 2004, p. 304). The dualistic metaphysical system, in this position, is either reversed so that feminine ideals take the place of masculine ideals, or turned on its side. That is, either what is traditionally lower and upper is reversed, or both the traditional lower and upper are considered as two non-hierarchical, opposing, but equally valued, sides.

The risk associated with difference feminism is the reaffirmation of women's association with traditionally lower-valued qualities. Again, as put by Bowden and Mummery (2009),

[A]ttempts to revalue female differences that themselves reflect the social stereotype of women's lives run the very dangerous risk of being re-appropriated by the same damaging tradition that they seek to challenge. (p. 23)

That is, if sameness feminism risks supporting men's monopoly on power, difference feminism reaffirms what men have always said about women. This risk is that difference feminism is particularly susceptible to being co-opted by the patriarchy and reused against its own wishes. Instead, as Hekman (1990) notes, these 'feminists will not succeed in privileging the female over the male because they have not attacked the dichotomy that constitutes the female as inferior' (p. 6).

While sameness and difference feminists take opposing positions toward the dualistic metaphysical system, one accepting the traditionally ascribed values and the other not, both risk reaffirming attitudes

to discourse that have been used to justify women's oppression. This is a risk that is not shared, and a double bind that is transcended, by the critique of dualism, in which it is not just aspects of the dualistic metaphysical system that are challenged, but dualism as a way of thinking and thus the dualistic metaphysical system in its entirety.

### **1.3 The critique of dualism**

I will now turn to the second division among feminist philosophical positions outlined to be challenged in the introduction of this chapter. The division is between those positions that challenge aspects of the dualistic metaphysical system and those that challenge dualism as a way of thinking. I have just outlined two positions that challenge aspects of the dualistic metaphysical system – sameness and difference positions of feminism – and the double bind that they represent. I will now outline the critique of dualism as a position that challenges dualism as a way of thinking, and through doing so challenges the entire dualistic metaphysical system. It is this type of position toward the critique of traditional philosophy by feminist philosophers that I will explore in this thesis in later chapters, based predominantly on the critiques made by Frye (1996, 2011), Jay (1981), Plumwood (1993) and Warren (1988).

To return to the earlier description of dualism in this chapter, we might think of this critique of dualism as the critique of ways of thinking such as value-hierarchical thinking and value dualism, rather than of women's position within the traditional dualistic metaphysical system. That is, through critiquing dualism as a way of thinking, the critique of dualism critiques this dualistic metaphysical system, and the versions of those concepts that tend to be thought about in terms of dualism, in full. It is the imposition of the dualistic metaphysical system *altogether* onto Western discourse that this approach challenges. Thus from this position, we must critically re-evaluate the definitions that have been given to these basic conceptual categories. For example, we cannot just attempt to revalue the feminine as it has been dualistically defined; we must critically redefine what the feminine is, how it relates to the masculine and whether this distinction between masculine and feminine is as sharp as has traditionally been presented

by dualism. Thus, the critique of dualism offers a deeper challenge to all three aspects of Western discourse that feminists have referred to as dualism than both sameness and difference feminist positions.

Sameness feminism has too often legitimised masculine superiority and neutrality as a human ideal, and difference feminism has too often confirmed women's uneasy place in Western discourse. I think that there is good reason to question the neutrality with which masculinity has been thought of, both in terms of superiority to and as maximally separate from femininity – where both of these ways of thinking about gender have seemed to serve the interest of men. It is precisely because the critique of dualism lodges a more radical critique of dualism and Western discourse that it overcomes the double bind between sameness and difference discussed in this chapter and can question both of these ways of thinking about gender. I am setting out on this more radical path because I think that it has the most interesting consequences for the development of philosophy, feminist thought and Western discourse more generally. If nothing else, this approach to dualism highlights the most demanding implications of the feminist analysis of dualism.

#### **1.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have introduced dualism, the central theme of this thesis, and provided a basic outline of what distinguishes the type of approach that I am going to take toward dualism. Firstly, I presented a double bind between two other approaches to dualism in Western discourse – sameness and difference positions. And I asserted that this double bind between sameness and difference is a result of the fact that neither position critiques dualism as a whole. This double bind between positions based on sameness and difference, as we will see in this thesis, is relevant not just to different kinds of feminist theory but to a broader range of positions based on sameness and difference. I then presented the critique of dualism as an approach to dualism that challenges dualistic ways of thinking and the entire metaphysical system that philosophy is based on. Having now described the sort of approach that I am



going to take in this thesis (a critique of dualism) and introduced the body of literature that this thesis contributes to (the feminist critique of traditional philosophy), I will outline my critique of dualism to be explored in this thesis in the next chapter.

## Chapter Two – My Critique of Dualism

*[W]hat is incisive and valuable in feminist work is precisely the kind of thinking that calls into question the settled ground of analysis. (Butler 1994)*

### 2.0 Introduction

In this chapter I am going to outline the critique of dualism that will be explored in this thesis, and an initial description of the project that we as feminists must collectively embark on if we want to challenge dualism. To begin with, I am going to outline and justify how it is that I will be thinking about and treating dualism in this thesis. As was discussed in the last chapter, I am interested in investigating dualism *as a way of thinking*, not just as a specific metaphysical system. Here I am going to expand on this idea of dualism as a way of thinking and on how I think it must be treated, and on the relationship that it bears toward philosophy and Western discourse. As a part of this discussion I am going to introduce three principles addressed by Plumwood in 'The politics of reason' (1993), as what I take to be the best way of thinking about dualism. These three principles will then form the basis of my critique of dualism, to be built on and deepened.

Having clarified the position that this thesis takes on dualism, I will then outline an initial description of the collective and continuous project that we, as feminists, must embark on if we wish to challenge dualism and reinvent both philosophy and Western discourse in feminist terms. I will compare this project to what I take to be the structurally similar projects of reinvention and paradigm shift. Whatever recommendations that I make here for the feminist response to this initial outline of the challenge posed by dualism will then be returned to in Chapter Six, after this challenge has been explored and deepened in subsequent chapters.

## 2.1 Dualism as I understand it

In this thesis I am taking it that dualism is the name for various patterns of hierarchical thought that structure Western discourse. Further, I am taking it that dualism is a logic of domination that seeks, through hierarchical thinking, to construe the world in terms of a certain kind of centre who is master and its necessary periphery who is slave. I am now going to quickly address some more fundamental questions about what dualism is, and more specifically what it is to Western discourse.

In the last chapter I noted that the concept of dualism, as it relates to the critique of traditional philosophy, enjoys little consensus among feminists. What feminists have referred to and critiqued as dualism has varied. As a part of this discussion I pointed out Warren's (1988) three features of oppressive conceptual frameworks as helpful ways of thinking about dualism in this context. These three ways of thinking were value-hierarchical thinking, value dualism and the logic of domination. Whereas value-hierarchical thinking leads to thinking about distinction in terms of hierarchy, value dualisms are based on thinking about concept pairs in terms of harmful or misleading exclusive disjuncts (Warren 1988, p. 32). And finally, the logic of domination provides that missing link by which the hierarchies that are created between concepts by value-hierarchical thinking and value dualism become justifications for social domination and subordination (Warren 1988, p. 32).

Dualism is something like what Warren refers to as those conceptual frameworks that form the contexts within which critical thinking takes place. Warren (1988) notes that in the way that '*Patriarchy* is the special interest of feminists, it is *patriarchal conceptual frameworks* and the bias they generate which is of special interest to a feminist critique of critical thinking' (p. 31). That is,

Contemporary feminists claim that, whether we know it or not, each of us operates out of a historically and socially constructed "frame of reference," "world view," or what I am calling "*conceptual framework*", i.e. a set of *basic* beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions which explain, shape, and reflect our view of ourselves and our world ... At any given time, a conceptual framework functions for an individual as a finite lens, a "field of vision", in and

through which information and experiences are filtered. As such, conceptual frameworks set boundaries on what one “sees”. (Warren 1988, p. 32)

Further, like patriarchy, dualism is not part of the conscious thoughts of individuals. Dualism is a set of patterns of thought, which we can say work together in “subconscious” ways. Most dualists do not mean to engage in ways of thinking that tend toward oppressing some and privileging others. Indeed, as we will see, some dualists are explicitly against such ways of thinking. As such, the best way of understanding dualism is to break it up into those seemingly separate processes of hierarchical thinking that we as feminists have recognised have something to do with processes of oppression and privilege. It is for this reason also that I think it is appropriate to talk about dualism in terms of metaphors. Dualism is not something that has been clearly laid out for us, but as we shall see, a way of thinking that we engage with without knowing and without realising what we are doing in Western discourse, now that Western discourse has evolved alongside it. Thus I think that the best way to see things that we do not yet have terms or models for is through metaphor. As we shall see below, I think it is also appropriate for us to talk about alternatives to dualism in terms of metaphors.

### **2.1.1 A/not-A**

In this chapter I am going to provide a more specific, but similar, account of my conception of dualism as a way of thinking. Here I want to address the question of what I am taking dualism to be in this thesis and how I am going to treat it – as a point of reference that we can return to at times throughout the thesis.

Throughout this thesis I will be referring to dualism as a way of reacting to distinction phrased as A/not-A.<sup>7</sup> As Jay (1981) notes, ‘all dichotomous distinctions are not necessarily phrased a A/not-A’ (p. 44). Indeed, this way of thinking about distinction bears particular features of domination. As Plumwood (1993) notes, ‘dualism must be seen as a quite special kind of distinction or dichotomy, one involving particular

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<sup>7</sup> Feminists have often discussed the impacts of phrasing the male/female distinction as A/not-A (for some examples of this see Beauvoir 2011; Frye 1996; Irigaray 1985; Jay 1981).

features which result from domination' (p. 446). Further, as observed by Gatens (1991) this way of thinking about distinction is 'not a neutral way of dividing up the world into categories' (p. 93). Rather, this way of thinking about distinction contains 'a set of implicit assumptions that assign a prominence and a dominant value to the term in the position of A at the expense of not-A' (Gatens 1991, p. 93).

I will firstly expand on how this A/not-A phrasing of dichotomous distinctions can be compared to Warren's three features of oppressive conceptual frameworks based on Jay's (1981) discussion in 'Gender and Dichotomy', and I will then use Plumwood's (1993) discussion in 'The politics of reason: towards a feminist logic' as a basis for how the features of dualism and the A/not-A distinction will be discussed in this thesis.

Jay (1981) asks us to 'consider some differences between the phrasings A/B and A/not-A' (p. 44). Where 'continuity between terms is a logical impossibility for distinctions phrased as contradictories, as A/not-A', 'A and B are mere contraries, not logical contradictories' (Jay 1981, p. 44). Further, Jay (1981) notes that 'in A/B distinction both terms have positive reality' (p. 44). Contrastingly, 'In A/not-A dichotomies only one term has positive reality; not-A is only the privation or absence of A' (Jay 1981, p. 44). That is, A/not-A distinctions close off the possibility of a third term (Jay 1981, p. 44). In terms of men and women this entails that 'everyone, "known and knowable," is either male or female, one or the other, but not both ... there is no third possibility' (Jay 1981, p. 44). A/B distinctions, however, 'are necessarily limited ... there is nothing about them that necessary prevents also considering C (a third possibility)' (Jay 1981, p. 44).

### **2.1.2 Plumwood's three principles**

I am now going to outline Plumwood's three principles of dualism, which I am going to use a basis for my own investigation into dualism to come. Before I do so I want to provide some context to Plumwood's (1993) argument in 'The politics of reason', where she discusses these three principles.

I am going to base my understanding of dualism as a way of thinking on Plumwood's description of three principles of dualism. Dualism, for Plumwood (1993), refers to 'the structure of a general way of thinking

about the other which expresses the perspective of a dominator or master identity and thus might be called a logic of domination' (p. 442), 'a particular way of dividing the world which results from a certain kind of denial of dependency on a subordinate other' (p. 443), and 'an alienated form of differentiation, in which power construes and constructs difference in terms of an inferior and alien realm' (p. 443). Based on this, I am going to think of dualism as a logic of domination which seeks, through hierarchical thinking, to construe the world in terms of a certain kind of centre who is master and its necessary periphery who is slave. In other words, as a way of thinking about distinction based on fantasies of dominance.

Plumwood (1993) describes three main principles of dualism and the effects that they have on dualism in discourse and the dualised identity of women. All three of these principles of dualism are ways of thinking about difference that turn it into hierarchy.

The first of these principles is radical exclusion, or hyper-separation.<sup>8</sup> Hyper-separation is the maximisation of the space between dualised relata. That is, the maximisation of the number and importance of the differences between dualistic relata such that any shared qualities become overlooked or seem inessential (Plumwood 1993, p. 146). Hyper-separation, therefore, results in the denial and/or minimisation of continuity and a polarisation between dualistic relata, leading to the consideration of said relata as different in kind rather than degree (Plumwood 1993, p. 146).

Hyper-separation, according to Plumwood (1993), has two important roles with respect to dualistic thinking overall (p. 146). Firstly, hyper-separation creates a false dichotomy between dualistic relata. That is, it creates beliefs about dualistic relata based in terms of either/or. For example, under hyper-separation, one is either a man or a woman.<sup>9</sup> That is, in the case of man/woman (under dualism) we can observe a binary where there are no borderline cases of this binary. In contrast, while we might think that

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<sup>8</sup> Plumwood (1993) addresses these three principles in a different order and provides different definitions of them. These are my interpretations of these three principles.

<sup>9</sup> This is an example of the sorts of false dichotomies that hyper-separation establishes.

everyone is tall or not tall, we might also think about borderline cases. Indeed, for any F, everything is either F or not-F. What hyper-separation adds to binary is this idea of polar opposites.

Given that the parties involved in hyper-separation are thought of as different in kind rather than degree, hyper-separation helps to establish relationships of superiority and inferiority (Plumwood 1993, p. 146). Imagining dualistic relata as different in kind helps to establish the belief that they are different in nature. For example, hyper-separation naturalises the different fates of the men and women who are now associated with maximally opposite natures (Plumwood 1993, p. 146). Therefore, we can think of hyper-separation as a way of thinking that creates an either/or-type relation between dualistic relata, which gives rise to false dichotomies and might justify social differences that in turn justify inequality.

The second of Plumwood's principles of dualism is backgrounding. Backgrounding is a process of creating a hierarchy based on mechanisms of focus and attention (Plumwood 1993, p. 447). In this process one member of a dualistic pair is presented as the foreground of a picture while the other is presented as the background (Plumwood 1993, p. 447). What this achieves is that the contribution of one relatum to the picture is thought of as important and the other as insignificant, thus translating what was initially a distinction between relata into a centre/periphery relationship. This form of hierarchy is particularly well suited to justifying master/slave relationships because it allows the master to ignore any dependency they might have on the slave and the slave's work. One way of thinking about this denial of dependency is through the distinction between making a contribution and being an enabling condition. The slave in fact makes a contribution to the fulfilment of the master's projects, but is treated as merely an enabling condition.

Plumwood discusses the master as being dependent on the slave in two respects (Plumwood 1993, p. 448). Firstly, the master is dependent on the slave in order to define their own boundaries as master, i.e. as centre and superior to an inferior (Plumwood 1993, p. 448). Being a master is a relational property. Secondly, the master develops a material dependency in part due to a desire of the master to use the

slave for his own ends, but also in a more unavoidable sense. Having divided the world in to two in an effort to create two kinds of things (a necessity for creating conditions of inequality), dualism must explain why the slave and their contribution is not as important as the master's (Plumwood 1993, p. 448).

The third principle of dualism that Plumwood (1993) discusses is relational definition (p. 450). There seem to be two parts to this principle of relational definition, which are nicely summed up in what Plumwood (1993) describes as its two corollaries – instrumentalisation (or objectification) and homogenisation (p. 451). Broadly speaking, it is through relational definition that dualism creates a slave for the master. Backgrounding is how we come to think of the master and their contribution as more important than the slave's, but relational definition is how we come to define the slave according to the master's perception of them. Relational definition reduces the slave to the master's gaze in two respects. First relational definition instrumentalises the slave and then it homogenises the slave.

The definitions of the master and slave in relational definition are based on an A/not-A-type relation where the master is A and the slave is not-A. Firstly, what is achieved by this is that both the master and slave are thought of in terms of the master and the master's interests (that is, in terms of A). What this ensures is that the slave's qualities become defined as complementary to the master's, which are primary (or centred), rather than as independent from the master (Plumwood 1993, p. 450). This is instrumentalisation. The second respect in which the slave is reduced by relational definition is homogenisation. Reduced to not-A, the heterogeneity among those who count as slaves is dismissed (Plumwood 1993, p. 451). That is, differences among slaves that are surplus to the master's interests are dismissed. Homogenisation, as such, can lead to thought of the slave as interchangeable, rather than as an end in themselves. As Plumwood (1993) puts it 'if you've seen one redwood, you've seen them all' (p. 452).



### 2.1.3 Building on Plumwood

At this point I want to respectfully distance myself from Plumwood. While these three principles will form the basis for my exploration of the critique of dualism in this thesis, rather than treating Plumwood as a canonical and sufficient source for the account of women's oppression and dualism, I want to try and take this perspective further than Plumwood did herself by highlighting how it can be extended to a broader range of traditionally opposed or relatively unrelated feminist perspectives and feminist-identified problems. Further, while I will be "adding" to Plumwood, so to speak, I will also will not be endorsing all of her views on dualism and its place in Western discourse.

Some of Plumwood's (1993) key claims from 'The politics of reason' will not be a part of the conceptual repertoire of this thesis. It is not that I do not agree with these claims, but that I do not think that this thesis needs to become embroiled in an effort to defend them. Indeed, the other aspects of Plumwood's argument that I am now going to list, I think, are surplus to the basic critique of dualism that we find in Plumwood that I want to build on. Indeed, most of these claims limit Plumwood's critique to a specific area of focus – most notably ecofeminism. I am, instead, trying to be as general as possible about the critique of dualism and feminist philosophical perspective on women's oppression. As we will see in later chapters, such attempts at generality are often not as successful as they are intended or as they might seem to be. I am going to take this risk, although I am aware that by doing so I remove some of the kinds of specificities that make a difference to feminists and women's lives.

Plumwood claims that 'the ideology of the domination of nature by reason has been common to various forms of oppression' (p. 442), that 'nature can be thought of as a sphere of multiple exclusions of various areas of difference marginalised as other' (p. 445), and that dualism forms an 'ideological structure which justifies many different forms of oppression, including male-centredness, Euro-centredness, ethnocentredness, human-centredness, and many more' (p. 453). While I agree with Plumwood that dualism has justified the domination of nature, in this thesis I am not going to defend this idea that the

domination of nature forms the foundation for other instances of domination such as the domination of women. With respect to this thesis I think I have more to gain in refraining from “ranking”, so to speak, these various spheres of domination that have been, and still are, justified by dualism.

Further, Plumwood (1993) argues for the adoption of alternative logics to classical propositional logic – in particular, she argues for a renewed interest in relevance logic (p. 454). As has already been made clear, this thesis looks to extend Plumwood’s critique of dualism past this focus on philosophical logic (and ecofeminism) to a more general analysis of philosophy as a microcosm of Western discourse. As such, I am not going to argue for the adoption of or for renewed interest in relevancy logic.

## **2.2 Things to be suspicious of**

Now that I have reiterated what it is that I am taking dualism to be in this thesis, I am now going to highlight what kinds of things that I think we, as feminists, should be suspicious of.

The first principle of dualism outlined in this chapter was hyper-separation, the creation of an either/or-type relation between dualistic relata which gives rise to a false dichotomy that then might naturalise social differences based in inequality. Thus, where we have observed instances of separation which serve to limit how we think to ways in which we oppress, we might wonder whether continuity between the separated relata has been obscured. We might question who benefits from and who is disadvantaged by the separation.

Further, when we observe that instances of separation are fixed hierarchically we might look for backgrounding, the second principle of dualism. I have defined backgrounding (or devaluing) as the creation of a foreground/background-type hierarchy which translates distinction in to centre and periphery. When we observe foreground/background-type hierarchies, i.e. hierarchies which deny dependency one aspect of “a picture”, we might question the traditional values ascribed to these concepts. That is, we might question the construction of one as essential and the other as inessential.

And finally, I have defined relational definition, and its two important corollaries of instrumentalism/objectification, as the defining of dualistic relata asymmetrically in relation to each other such that one side is reduced down to and objectified by the gaze of the other side. The obvious consequence of challenging the first two principles is that we also challenge relational definition. In this sense we must challenge what it means to be in relation, currently, under dualism. That is, if dualised distinctions are currently based on the objectifying gaze of the master (A), what might they be based on in order for the slave (not-A) to maintain an independent and positive definition?

### **2.3 Thinking collectively beyond our resources**

If philosophy and Western discourse are based on dualism, a peculiar feature of the project to replace these structures of thought with a logic compatible with feminist aims is that we must learn to use the resources currently available to us against themselves. This is the central challenge that has been thrown up by dualism to feminists' who want to move beyond dualism and sameness and difference feminism. I am now going to look at different descriptions of projects structurally similar to this in order to emphasise the difficulty of this problem posed by dualism, and in order to illuminate how we might proceed to address this problem.

The two descriptions that I am going to look at are Kuhn's (1962) theory of the history of scientific progress and Daly's (1979, 1984)(Daly & Caputi, 1989) radical feminist project of meaning-making. I take it that these are descriptions of projects similar to the one that I am recommending and contributing to. I do not mean to suggest that my project is identical to these descriptions or that it responds to the same problems with which these theorists are concerned.

### 2.3.1 Kuhn and challenging the disciplinary matrix

Kuhn's (1962) account of the history of scientific progress is based firstly on the notion of disciplinary matrices.<sup>10</sup> If science is to be understood as a mode of instruction then for Kuhn (1962) a disciplinary matrix encompasses the foundational commitments, goals and methods in which scientists are trained. Normal scientific phases are then characterised by Kuhn as periods in which there is a general consensus within the discipline regarding the soundness and virtues of these foundational commitments, goals and methods (Preston 2008, p. 29). Thus, Kuhn observes that during these conservative, normal phases the established disciplinary matrix remains largely undisputed (Preston 2008, p. 29). When anomalies arise during these phases that cannot be explained by the established disciplinary matrix, they are set aside (Preston 2008, p. 31). As Kuhn (1962) notes, 'paradigm-testing occurs only after persistent failure to solve a noteworthy puzzle has given rise to crisis' (p. 145).

It is through the build-up of these anomalies to the point of crisis that revolutionary phases of scientific history are born. Revolutionary phases of science are when foundational commitments, goals and methods are challenged on the basis of the anomalies that this established disciplinary matrix cannot explain (Preston 2008, p. 46). These phases are instead directed toward developing new standards par excellence, which are capable of retaining much of the explanatory power of the previous disciplinary matrix and more. While these new and old scientific paradigms can be compared in respect to their explanatory fruitfulness, they cannot be compared in respect to their commitments, goals or methods (Preston 2008, p. 44). When new paradigms are being developed during revolutionary phases they should not be held to the standards par excellence of the old paradigm they seek to replace and exceed (Preston 2008, pp. 44-46). Rather, the new and old paradigm are 'incommensurable ways of seeing the world' (Kuhn 1962, p. 4). Indeed, 'paradigm changes do cause scientists to see the world of their

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<sup>10</sup> Preston (2008) suggests that Kuhn uses this term interchangeably with "paradigm" (p. 23).

research-engagement differently ... we may want to say that after a revolution scientists are responding to a different world' (Kuhn 1962, p. 111).

We can interpret the feminist critiques of traditional discourse discussed in this thesis as highlighting various anomalies that cannot be explained by Western discourse. That is, highlighting how our current, dualistic conception of distinction results in false dichotomies, foreground/background-type hierarchies and asymmetrical relational definitions. Further, we can imagine that the build-up of these anomalies is owed to the relatively recent enfranchisement of women in Western societies. Femininity has been "othered" in Western discourse and associated with disfavoured sides of dualisms. On the other hand, Western discourse claims universality and impartiality for its norms of morality and rationality. When women are explicitly excluded from the sphere of reason and thus public action, the tension between these features of Western discourse is revealed. Women are both excluded from and newly enfranchised participants in reason and the public realm. The fact that we have recognised this anomalous treatment of women in discourse then suggests that we have moved in to a new, revolutionary phase.

Therefore, we might think about this project to critique dualism as responding and contributing to a Kuhnian-type revolutionary phase of Western discourse. Given that the aim of this project is to replace the fundamental commitments, goals and methods of current discourse, this project should not be held to the standards that it aims to replace. It should not be constrained to what is viable with our current resources, but should be permitted to anticipate new resources.

### **2.3.2 Daly, Frye and new meaning**

However, the Kuhnian story of the development of science does not fully reflect the depth of the problem that we face in overcoming dualism. For further help, we need to turn to Daly's project of feminist meaning-making (1979, 1984)(Daly & Caputi 1989). For while Kuhn's revolutionary phase may be a handy analogue for the anticipation of new conceptual categories and resources, the anomalies discussed in this thesis are not just inexplicable within current discourse, but created by current discourse.

These anomalies are evidence not just that Western discourse has failed to live up to its goals of universality and impartiality, but also that it has succeeded in constructing a self-fulfilling patriarchal representation of reality. In this sense we are not limited just to the resources of current discourse, but to resources antithetical to our aims.

In her controversial works *Gyn/ecology: the metaethics of radical feminism* (1979), *Pure lust: elemental feminist philosophy* (1984) and *Webster's first new intergalactic wickedary of the English language* (Daly & Caputi 1989) Daly deals with exactly *this* kind of problem of limitation. Having determined that the meanings of words and the systems within which our words exist are patriarchal, Daly attempts to develop new, feminist meanings from the refuge of patriarchy.<sup>11</sup> In a review of *Pure lust*, Frye (1992) confirms the necessity of this approach: 'you can't just make words mean what you want them to mean' (p. 98). In order to explain a new meaning of a concept, one must rely on concepts that are held. If dualism dominates Western discourse and to that extent Western imagination, most if not all concepts held are informed by dualism. And this is the project which feminists such as Daly and Frye (1992) have recognised as the central feminist project of 'the work of creating new meaning' (p. 98): we need to use our current imaginations in a way that makes possible the formation of new boundaries. We need to define the project of meaning-making which makes possible the forming of thoughts which we cannot currently form and make it harder to think some of the dualised thoughts we (currently) form all too easily.

In order to create new meaning of the sort desired by feminists, we must use current meanings in a way that breaks them. If dualised discourse is patriarchal in the sense that has been discussed in this thesis, how can we turn patriarchal meanings in to feminist meanings? If our imaginations are constrained by a hegemonic logic of domination, then we might turn to Wittgenstein for inspiration on how to deconstruct these limits of our imagination. According to Frye (2011), Wittgenstein 'understood that we can be captured by a metaphor, a picture, which constrains our imagination' (p. 87). Further, he 'understood that

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<sup>11</sup> Moreover, she positions herself as one voice in a necessarily collective project towards new meaning.

one cannot be liberated from the power of a metaphor ..., a picture, without being provided with *other* metaphors [and] pictures' (Frye 2011, p. 87). As such, one way to approach the project that I have just called for is to recognise which metaphors we are currently restrained to and what it is they restrain us to, and then to develop alternatives. Kuhn's example of the pendulum provides us with an interesting example of how the ways that things are spoken about can open up new possibilities. Kuhn (1962) notes that:

To the Aristotelians, who believed that a heavy body is moved by its own nature from a higher position to a state of natural rest at a lower one, the swinging body was simply falling with difficulty. Constrained by the chain, it could achieve rest at its low point only after a tortuous motion and a considerable time. Galileo, on the other hand, looking at the swinging body, saw a pendulum, a body that almost succeeded in repeating the same motion over and over again ad infinitum. (p. 118-119)

That is, where the Aristotelian sees constrained fall, the Galilean sees repeated motion.

With respect to the feminist project to dismantle dualism, then, I am suggesting that we approach such a project through anticipating an endpoint – an alternative to dualism that is not yet visible. To move toward such an endpoint, we must push the boundaries of our current imaginations, of the current limitations on how we think at the points where we have located the harms of patriarchy. This, then, is to approach these boundaries with an anticipatory mindset. We must view apparent limits as irrelevant to possible future meanings and boundaries. Thus the problem of women's exclusion from discourse boils down to the current limiting of our imaginations to dualism. In order to maintain what is then an essential feminist deconstruction of reason and dualism we must foster a specific kind of attitude to current discourse which is open to its eventual overthrowing. An attitude which violates/subverts the patterns of this current discourse so as to open up new possibilities. Importantly, then, this anticipatory mindset is not passive. Instead it looks to deconstruct patriarchal meanings through recognition of what they are (that is, patriarchal), and therefore through the recognition that they are not all that is possible. It may yet be possible for discourse to be something other than patriarchal.

Such a project must be thought of as a collective one. As Frye (1992) wrote in defence of Daly, the 'new meaning form, like a new art form, will arise in the different works of many creators, not by the fiat of one' (p. 98). Indeed, my goal in this thesis is to show how by interpreting the feminist critique of traditional discourse as a critique of the dualised space between sameness and difference we can begin to anticipate the reinvention of this space. Further, as noted in the previous chapter, I take it that dualistic thinking instantiates more than just male-centredness, including at least also 'Euro-centeredness, ethno-centeredness, [and] human-centeredness' (Plumwood 1993, p. 453). Thus whereas the scope of *this* thesis is limited, I hope that it contributes to the wider, collective project to deconstruct dualism and its many centres.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

I have now outlined my critique of dualism to be explored in this thesis. Further, I have described in greater depth what I take to be the nature of dualism and subsequently the nature of the challenge that the critique of dualism faces.

My critique of dualism, which I will in following chapters describe in greater depth, is based on a critique of three ways of thinking. In Chapter One I described dualism as a way of thinking in terms of value-hierarchical thinking and normative dualism, but in this chapter I have provided more specific outlines of what I will be focusing on as dualism. Dualisms, the ways of thinking hierarchically about distinction outlined in this chapter, are not the conscious thoughts of individuals, but patterns of thought which we collectively engage in within Western discourse. Part of what we as feminists must challenge about dualism is its dominance of Western discourse. And yet, as I have noted in this thesis, this will not be an easy task, but will involve thinking beyond the current limits of Western discourse.

In the following chapters I am now going to take these three Plumwoodian principles of dualism apart so that we can explore them, and the extent to which Western discourse is based on them, in greater depth. In order to do this, I am going to highlight in particular how we can relate various feminist critiques of



Western discourse to the critiques of these three ways of thinking and the problems of exclusion, devaluation and reduction.

## Chapter Three – Hyper-separation in Western Discourse and Feminist Thought

*The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war. (Anzaldúa 1987, p. 79)*

### 3.0 Introduction

In the next three chapters I will move on to explore each of Plumwood's three principles of dualism in greater depth, and through doing so, arrive at a more complete picture of the task set for feminist theory. In this chapter, I am going to focus on the resistance of Western discourse and dualism to change and the extent to which we, as participants in Western discourse, depend on dualistic ways of thinking. I am going to do this by focusing on how feminist theory, too, depends on dualism.

My focus in this chapter is hyper-separation – the first of Plumwood's principles. As was foreshadowed in the last chapter, I will be exploring and building on these three principles, and in this chapter on hyper-separation in particular, by extending them to different feminist critiques of Western discourse. In this chapter, then, I will be extending Plumwood's idea of hyper-separation to problems of exclusion, through dualised conceptions of abstraction and sameness within both Western discourse and feminist theory.

In the last chapter I developed a definition of hyper-separation as the construction of an either/or-type relation between dualistic relata which gives rise to false dichotomies. In this chapter I am going to interrogate the construction of an either/or-type relationship between concepts of sameness and difference, in general, in Western discourse, which gives rise to a false dichotomy between sameness and difference. Importantly, what this false dichotomy between concepts of sameness and difference achieves is the privileging of certain perspectives over others. I will show that by hyper-separating

concepts of sameness and difference in Western discourse we arrive at a concept of sameness which is exclusive, and then by basing theories (such as theories of human nature and the category of women) in ideals of sameness, we exclude some perspectives and privilege others.

I am going to begin this chapter by outlining the traditional feminist critique of male bias in philosophy as it has to do with abstraction and abstract concepts. I argue that this traditional feminist critique of male bias is based on two claims. Firstly, that abstraction privileges some perspectives over others. Secondly, that privileging some perspectives over others is prone to maintaining oppressive status quos by overlooking the nature of oppression. I will then address a significant controversy in feminist theory – the problem of difference – and its implications for theory construction. I will first address this problem by outlining the critique of white, middle-class and heterosexual feminism and then I will address a similar postcolonial critique of feminist theory as imperialist. I argue that *this* critique of traditional feminism can be construed as a critique of traditional feminists' own reliance on the kinds of abstraction it critiques. I take it that this extension of the problem does exactly this job of highlighting the deeper relationship between abstraction, oppression and privilege in Western discourse due to dualism.

In this chapter, then, I will be presenting an argument that when we abstract and think about sameness and difference through hyper-separation we fail to execute the task of arriving at sameness, and instead privilege certain perspectives as if they were the standard for sameness. Thus I conclude that the trouble with hyper-separation as a way of thinking about sameness and difference in Western discourse is the subsequent inability to treat sameness and difference as if they are continuous with one another. After exploring this first principle of dualism, and its relationship to Western discourse and feminist theory, I will move on in the next two chapters to explore the remaining principles. From these explorations I will return to the discussion that I began in Chapter Two over what the project to reinvent dualism in Western discourse and philosophy might look like.

### 3.1 The feminist critique of abstraction

I want to begin this chapter by providing a general overview of the feminist critique of abstraction as a type of critique of women's exclusion from philosophy and Western discourse. As a part of this general overview, I am going to highlight some of its common lines of argument with hyper-separation. These comparisons will become important in later points of the chapter, when I argue that feminist theory faces these same kinds of problems of exclusion thanks to how we think about sameness and difference in Western discourse in general.

Before I describe the feminist critique of abstraction, I want to quickly describe abstraction and its role in Western discourse. Abstraction is the practice of 'leaving out, by not attending to, the apparently irrelevant distinguishing features ... of the several individuals falling within a class' (Flew 1979, p. 3). O'Neill describes abstraction as 'a matter of selective omission, of leaving out some predicates from descriptions and theories' (1988, p. 711) and of the 'bracketing of certain predicates' (1996, p. 40). Thus we can think about abstraction as the process of bracketing off supposedly irrelevant features, predominantly differences, with the goal of isolating those common features that are most important and most relevant to the matter at hand. For example, we might decide that the most important features of triangles are their three sides and three angles and, through abstraction, describe triangles as 2-D objects with three straight sides and three angles. Indeed, we do not get the required generality if we do not abstract: we just get equilateral triangles, scalene triangles, isosceles triangles and so on. We do not get the class of triangles unless we abstract everything other than three sided-ness and angled-ness.

Abstraction is a necessary feature of thought and category-making. Flew (1979) claims that 'classification must involve some abstraction' (p. 3), and O'Neill notes that abstraction is a 'precondition for logic, [and] for scientific reasoning' (1988, p. 711) and that it is 'unavoidable in all reasoning: no use of language can be fully determinate' (1987, p. 55).

The significance of abstraction to moral and political philosophy in particular is nicely articulated by Rawls in *Political liberalism* (1993):

the work of abstraction ... is not gratuitous: not abstraction for abstraction's sake. Rather it is a way of continuing public discussion when shared understandings of lesser generality have broken down. We should be prepared to find that the deeper the conflict, the higher the level of abstraction to which we must ascend to get a clear and uncluttered view of its roots. (pp. 45-46)

Rawls's sentiment is confirmed by O'Neill (1987): 'if ethical principles are to be relevant to a wide range of structures or of agents, they surely not merely *may* but *must* be abstract' (p. 55). Thus abstraction seems to be an important aspect of ethical discourse. That is, it seems to be necessary for the kinds of impartiality and inclusivity that we look for when we deal with ethical concerns. Thus abstraction seems to be a necessary feature of category-making (i.e. triangles as tri-sided, tri-angled shapes), and a necessary basis for communicating across and coping with difference.

I will now describe the feminist critique of abstraction and conclude this section of the chapter by describing it as a critique of the hyper-separation of sameness and difference in Western discourse. Feminists have long argued that under Western discourse the masculine becomes associated with other higher-valued qualities such as reason, mind, universality, impartiality, permanence and transcendence. One reason for why these concepts have been higher-valued in Western discourse is for the fact that they are all based on ideals of sameness in Western discourse. Jaggar (1983) notes that traditional conceptions of human nature in Western discourse have been based on abstract individualism – an abstraction away from the specificities of human lives and toward an internal commonality of rationality (p. 29). As Jaggar (1983) put it, abstract individualism, is based on the belief that

Logically if not empirically, human individuals could exist outside a social context; their essential characteristics, their needs and interests, their capacities and desires, are given independently of their social context and are not created or even fundamentally altered by that context. (p. 29)

For those who base conceptions of human nature on abstract individualism, those ideas associated with abstract individualism, such as mind, reason, transcendence, universality, impartiality and permanence, are ideas based on sameness. It is fair to say that philosophy and Western discourse at large, having been based on these ideas, have attempted to be based in sameness rather than difference. The feminine, on the other hand, has been associated with the lower-valued qualities of difference, i.e. particularity, emotionality, relationality, contingency, immanence and so on.

For Holland (1990) and other feminist theoreticians like her, discourse is defined in opposition to the feminine. That is, it is based on principles of sameness which are opposite to and transcend principles of difference. Western discourse presents a partial picture of human nature which excludes women by denying their personhood. Thus feminists, noting the reliance of theories of human nature which base political and moral philosophy on abstraction, have sought to draw attention to how ideas such as abstract individualism work to 'erase women's lives and concerns and perspectives from view' (Spelman 1990, p. 4).

At this point you might wonder how abstraction and this critique of it relate to hyper-separation. My assertion here is that the conception of abstraction – of striving for sameness through bracketing, or getting away from, difference – exemplifies a hyper-separation of sameness and difference in Western discourse. That is, in the conception of abstraction we see that sameness and difference are being thought about in terms of either/or. And further, while it might seem that the solution to the problem of exclusion caused by abstraction could be to not look for sameness (i.e. to think and talk in terms of difference rather than sameness), this type of response has its own problems. If we were to reject sameness for difference, we would lose too much. We would lose the ability to talk about categories of groups and the ability to engage in these kinds of ethical discussions based on universality and impartiality. If abstraction runs the risk of erasing women's lives from view, embrace of difference keeps women all too visibly unempowered as partiality reinforces existing power imbalances.

It seems then that represented in the choice between sameness and difference in Western discourse is a choice between two unethical options. As I will show in this chapter, the best prospect for a solution to the problems of exclusion caused by abstraction is to attempt to rethink sameness and difference in Western discourse in terms of and/both rather than either/or.

There are two important levels to this type of feminist critique of abstraction. The first level of this critique is that abstraction privileges some perspectives over others. To put this differently, by bracketing some differences (i.e. emotions) that are associated with one social group in the process of abstraction, we privilege the perspective of those whose differences are not bracketed, but treated as the standard for sameness.<sup>12</sup> Refer back to the descriptions of abstract individualism above. In basing accounts of human nature on abstract individualism we present an account of human nature which is masculine. Note that the qualities of abstract individualism are, in a sense, qualities of most humans: i.e. both men and women are capable of human rationality. However, the assertion from this level of the critique of abstraction is to point out that through bracketing feminine differences we privilege a masculine perspective. Thus, we bracket the specifically feminine experience of the world when we base human nature on abstract individualism.

The second level of this critique comes from the position that the differences between us are not insignificant but crucial to how we live our lives and how we understand the hierarchies which permeate our social context.<sup>13</sup> This way of privileging some perspectives and excluding others can overlook conditions of inequality. That is, because we end up treating these differences differently by treating one not as a difference but as a standard of sameness, and the other as a difference, we overlook the relation that these differences might have with one another. More to the point, we overlook that one perspective –

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<sup>12</sup> Here I am thinking about emotionality as a difference socially associated with femininity and rationality as a difference associated with masculinity. That is, socially femininity and masculinity are different in that one is associated with emotionality and the other with rationality. Emotionality and rationality are thus feminine and masculine differences respectively.

<sup>13</sup> Think, for example, of how social stereotypes of women as emotional and men and rational have affected men and women's lives.

one difference – in this process is being privileged over another. When the perspective that is being privileged is a perspective already based in social privilege (i.e. masculinity) – when privilege always corresponds with oppression – then we treat privileges based on oppression as the neutral norm. When abstract individualism presents a masculine account of human nature, this is to present not just a biased account of human nature, but an account which overlooks *the nature of oppression* and thus maintains the oppressive status quo.

And here is where these two levels of the critique of abstraction relate back to the association of masculine qualities with sameness and feminine qualities with difference in discourse. If sameness is masculine then abstraction will always privilege the masculine over the feminine.

### **3.2 The problem of difference**

And yet (for some), it has also seemed politically and ethically impossible for us as feminists to give up thinking and talking in terms of sameness. Recall that sameness and abstraction are necessary features of category-making (including the category of women), and of ethical discourse. Thus we arrive at a double bind that has troubled many feminists, a version of which we observed between sameness and difference feminism in the first chapter of this thesis: the choice between exclusive, masculine styles of thinking and the loss of feminist thought as we know it. Having provided a general overview of the feminist critique of abstraction and women's exclusion from Western discourse (and more specifically from accounts of human nature in Western discourse), I will now show how this critique of abstraction and exclusion applies to feminist theory as also being based on sameness. I will highlight how this critique of exclusion, of the hyper-separation of sameness and difference in Western discourse, compares with the critique of exclusion in feminist thought.

The category WOMEN is, according to Frye (2011), 'a necessary analytic category of feminism' (p. 85). And according to Spelman (1990), it seems 'essential to the possibility of any feminist theory and any feminist political activity focused on and intending to change the condition of women as women' (p. 2).



Indeed, Spelman (1990) asks whether 'feminist theory will be recognizable if it doesn't talk about women as women?' (pp. 16-17). And yet the use of the category of WOMEN has faced the same sort of critiques based on the same sort of exclusions that feminism has traditionally accused Western discourse of entertaining. In order to make categories and communicate across differences, feminists, like the philosophers they have critiqued, have repressed important differences among women.

The rest of this chapter will focus on the problem of difference as it has to do with theory construction, which has emerged in response to these critiques of feminist theory as it seems to highlight problems of exclusion in theory thanks to the hyper-separation of sameness and difference. As the dialogue around the problem of difference has been developed most famously in the context of U.S. feminism and between white women and women of colour, I am now going to focus on this dialogue. I will then relate this problem of difference as it has developed in the U.S. context to the postcolonial critique of feminism's reliance on dualistic ideals of sameness. However, I want to take this opportunity to note that the problem of difference has spanned across a number of exclusions in feminist theory. For example, while women of colour such as Anzaldúa (1987), hooks (1984), Lorde (1984) and Lugones (2003) have highlighted the "whiteness" of Western feminism, feminists such as Wittig (1992) and Frye (1983, 1992) have highlighted its heterosexual bias.

I am going to focus my discussion of the U.S. problem of difference on Spelman's (1990) key text *Inessential woman: problems of exclusion in feminist thought* in conjunction with Frye's (1996) critique of abstraction in 'Metaphors of being a  $\Phi$ '. For Spelman and Frye, the problem of difference represents what appears to be a more general choice between respecting sameness or respecting difference in Western discourse. Through this, both identify with a need to theorise difference in order to resolve the various exclusions that characterise Western feminist thought. For Frye (1996), this involves 'locating and opening up political/conceptual space ... where plural identity can (indeed, must) be conceptualized' (p. 992), and for Spelman (1990) this involves the representation of difference in the very structure of theory.

I take it that both of these feminist critiques of abstraction within feminism are concerned with the *kind* of sameness that we achieve when we abstract, and as such with the form of the generalisations which traditional feminism is based on. Further, I take it that another common argument between these two theorists is that the current conception of abstraction fails by its own standards, and that its practical function is to privilege the experience of certain groups over others. Thus we can interpret this common argument as having to do with the hyper-separation between sameness and difference which gives rise to a false dichotomy between the two. And from there we can interpret Spelman and Frye as arguing that a “true” or “truer” conception of sameness would recognise continuity with difference, and that the function of this current hyper-separation of sameness and difference in discourse is to maintain those social hierarchies which are themselves maintained by the differences bracketed during abstraction.

In the 1970s, white feminist philosophers came to the realisation that they were ‘among the enemies of women of color’ (Garry 1992, p. 156). That is, white feminists came to the realisation that when they were talking and theorising about “all women”, they were only ever talking and theorising about *some* women: themselves. This problem emerged from the call of U.S. women of colour to develop a feminist theory capable of overcoming racism and of talking about women and women’s experiences in ways which do not position some women as outsiders and others as insiders (See Anzaldúa 1987; hooks 1984; Lorde 1984; Lugones 2003).

This call to develop a feminist theory that overcomes racism has since been sanitised by white feminists into what we call the problem of difference: a problem with how theorising difference relates to theory construction (this reaction of white feminists to difference has been of central focus for Garry 1992, Lugones 2003, Spelman 1990, and Spelman and Lugones 1983). White feminists have, in the words of Spelman (1990), responded to the problem of difference with a paradox (p. 3). They have responded to the problem of difference with the assumption that the ‘way to give proper significance to differences among women is to say that such differences simply are less significant than what women have in

common' (Spelman 1990, p. 3). Further, white feminists have continued to position themselves as insiders and women of colour as outsiders by adopting strategies toward inclusion such as tolerance and listening which reaffirm white women's control over feminist theory (Spelman 1990, pp. 162-164). According to Spelman (1990), 'some ways in which we have expressed our need to talk about differences reveal the privileges meant to be called into question' (p. 162). For example, the 'attempt by insiders to "bring in" outsiders ... reflects and preserves the outsider's status as outsider' (Spelman 1990, p. 162). Thus, the attempt to bring outsiders in without radically changing the structure of the relationship between sameness and difference represents a setting of tolerance and tolerance only. Tolerance, according to Spelman (1990), 'requires looking but not necessarily seeing, hearing but not necessary listening, adding voices but not changing what has already been said' (p. 162). The setting of tolerance is not an interactive attempt to theorise difference, but one in which the privilege of insiders is maintained. Instead, we might think of tolerance as a necessary but insufficient attitude towards resolving problems of difference.

### **3.2.1 WOMEN, cans of peas and Uncle Theo**

According to Frye (2011), the project of category-making is plagued by a choice between an oppressive and false category of WOMEN or gender scepticism. For Frye (2011) the apparentness of this choice is based on the problems of definition and identity (p. 85-86). The former lies in the recognition that as feminists we struggle to fix the reference of the term WOMEN and at the same time include all who we think should be included as women in that reference (Frye 2011, p. 86). The latter is over whether we can conceive of sameness between women without repressing differences between women (Frye 2011, p. 86). In this chapter I am more concerned with the problem of identity, which is a problem of having to choose between respecting sameness or respecting difference. For feminism, this is a choice between the category of WOMEN or nothing, where WOMEN consists of the conditions of the privileged position of some women rather than the position of all women.

We can expand on Frye's description of the problem of identity through Spelman's pebble analogy, which highlights the effects of the hyper-separation of sameness and difference in Western discourse. That is, it highlights how sameness and difference are not thought of as possibly co-dependent features of the world but as features of the world that are different in kind. In *Inessential woman*, Spelman (1990) explains this problem of identity through reference to Iris Murdoch's fictional character Uncle Theo and the pebbles at the beach (pp. 1-2). Uncle Theo's experience at the beach is a disturbing one. The beach is littered with pebbles, all different shades, shapes and sizes, threatening Uncle Theo's unified world outlook – that is, his desire for sameness. Uncle Theo's discomfort caused by the manyness of the pebbles stems from a desire for conceptual tidiness (Spelman 1990, p. 2). But in recognising that all the pebbles are instances of pebble-hood, Uncle Theo's discomfort can be relieved and the pebbles all reduced to one (one kind of thing) (Spelman 1990, p. 2). Uncle Theo's dilemma, according to Spelman (1990), has constituted a more general disposition in for Western discourse;

A problem that appeared in Western philosophical literature long before Plato: what is the world really made of? Do we get closer to an answer to this question by noting the manyness of the pebbles, or by reflecting on the fact that though there are many pebbles, there is only one kind of thing ... a pebble? Does their significance stem from their distinctness from one another, despite the fact that all are pebbles, or does it reside in what they share in common as pebbles, despite the fact that in other ways they are distinct from one another? (p. 1)

Thus for Spelman (1990), the problem of identity is a problem with a reality scale and significance scale with Western discourse: a choice between what all the pebbles have in common, their pebble-hood, and their random multiplicity; a scale between commonality and differences (p. 2).

One way of interpreting Spelman's (1990) broader argument in *Inessential woman* is that Western discourse is based on a certain weighting of these scales. That is, as per the traditional feminist critique of abstraction described earlier in this chapter, Western discourse is based on ideals of sameness as opposite and transcendent of difference. That is, Western discourse is written from an "Uncle Theo" perspective.

Spelman's (1990) central claim, however, is that much of Western feminism is also written from this perspective:

I wish to suggest that much of Western feminist theory has been written from a viewpoint not unlike that of Uncle Theo: that is, as if not just the manyness of women but also all the differences among us are disturbing, threatening to the sweet intelligibility of the tidy and irrefutable fact that all women are women. (p. 2)

However, to restate, Western discourse is based not just on sameness, but on conceptions of sameness, difference and abstraction which do not lead to what we all have in common, but to the privileging of some positions over others. For Spelman, much of Western feminist theory shares in this criticism. While it is the intention of traditional feminist theories 'not to talk only about one woman, but about women – any and all women', by repressing differences among women feminism does not arrive at generality but continues to talk only about some women (Spelman 1990, p. 3).

According to Spelman (1990),

This leads us to the paradox at the heart of feminism: Any attempt to talk about all women in terms of something we have in common undermines attempts to talk about the differences among us, and vice versa. (p. 3)

To not recognise how the differences among women affect their experience "as women" is to not address the condition of all women "as women". That is, we 'exclude crucial dimensions' of the experience of women "as women" if we do not talk about the differences among women (Spelman 1990, p. 14). Spelman (1990) asks, 'if I am interested in knowing about all pebbles, how can I disregard those features of each pebble that may distinguish it from others?' (p. 3).

For Frye (2011), the reason why the category WOMEN troubles feminists boils down to the metaphoric image through which we think about social categories. That is, 'the metaphoric image of a social category as a *set* and its exemplars as *set members*' (Frye 2011, p. 85). It is within this metaphoric image that feminists have argued that the category WOMEN repress differences among women (problem of identity)

and cannot include all of the other commitments we make about gender (problem of definition). Frye (2011) describes the metaphoric image through analogy with a can of peas (p. 86). In this metaphoric image, the fixed walls of the can sharply separate the peas inside the can from everything else outside the can. In respect to sameness and difference, the fixed walls of the can create a fixed conception of sameness. Frye (2011) goes on to assess different metaphors for social categories which do not construct sharp boundaries between inside and outside – sameness and difference – and concludes that

If we think of social categories as socially produced “species”, as correlational densities of that particular sort, we will be able to imagine social-categories coherence not as a matter of similarity or exact likeness among the individual exemplars of the category, but as a matter of complicated webs of relations. (p. 94)

Thus ‘only if categories are thought of as sets or containers can it seem a necessary truth that categorical identity represses difference’ (Frye 2011, p. 91). With a concept of social categories without fixed boundaries, we open up the possibility of a non-fixed account of sameness which is to be built on both the difference and commonalities between members. This ‘real category’ would consist of ‘internal complexity’ which requires ‘variation among its elements’ (Frye 1996, p. 1001). Thus a ‘category of women can be constructed ... by working differences into structures’ (Frye 1996, p. 1001).

According to Spelman (1990),

The focus on women “as women” has addressed only one group of women – namely, white middle-class women of Western industrialized countries. So the solution has not been to talk about what women have in common as women ... it has been to conflate the condition of one group of women with the condition of all and to treat the differences of white middle-class women from all other women as if they were not differences. (p. 3)

Spelman recognises that the inability of abstraction to represent all experiences of women “as women” has not been reciprocal. That is, it ‘is not as if ... just any group of women has been taken to stand for all women’ (Spelman 1990, p. 4). Indeed, the problem of identity, according to Spelman (1990), lends itself to a problem of privilege (p. 4). From this perspective ‘the real problem’ of traditional feminism is that it

confuses 'the condition of one group of women with the condition of all' (Spelman 1990, p. 4). Thus Spelman accuses the "Uncle Theo" version of feminism of supporting the same form of bias that traditional discourse was criticised for supporting in the outline of the traditional feminist critique of abstraction in the first half of this chapter.

Spelman's argument is then not just that the intersections of women's lives must be included in a viable account of women "as women", but that by treating women's differences differently we maintain social hierarchies between women. The "Uncle Theo" version of feminism includes the difference of whiteness within its account of women "as women" and thus to bring difference into this account of women is to bring in not whiteness but blackness. Therefore, the feminist appeal to commonality and a sense of shared identity 'has implicitly demanded that Afro-American, Asian-American, or Latin American women separate their "women's voice" from their racial or ethnic voice without also requiring white women to distinguish being a "woman" from being white' (Spelman 1990, p. 13). It is in this sense that the "Uncle Theo" version of feminism preserves 'the privileged status of some women over others' (Spelman 1990, p. 16).

There are reasons why the "Uncle Theo" version of feminism confuses the conditions of white middle-class women with the conditions of all women that can be paralleled with why Western discourse treats the conditions of men as the conditions of everyone (Spelman 1990, p. 165). This reason is summed up nicely by Spelman (1990) when she says,

if I am interested in pebbles as pebbles, then I best not be distracted by the flatness of some or the roundness of others ... For it is their pebbleness I said I was interested in, not their shape or their color. (p. 3)

There are clearly some assumptions behind this mindset.<sup>14</sup> The first assumption made by the "Uncle Theo" mindset, which again, is a mindset based on the hyper-separation of sameness and difference and

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<sup>14</sup> See Spelman 1990, pp. 164-166 for the basis of this discussion.

then on the preference for sameness, is that pebbles can be talked about as pebbles. Secondly, pebbleness can be isolated from other elements of identity such as roundness, greyness, flatness and so on. As such, we can compare the situation of objects known as pebbles to round objects and so on. Differences between pebbles are recognised by saying that all pebbles are the same as pebbles but that their identities as round, grey and flat are not the same.

Then “Uncle Theo” feminists – concerned with talking about gender as feminism must do – make assumptions which lead them to isolate the oppression of gender from the polluting effect of the other forms of oppression faced by women. Likewise, traditional accounts of human nature abstract away from the polluting effects of non-ideal conditions (such as femininity). Thus “Uncle Theo” feminists do not deny the different racial or class identities of different women, but construe them as separate from the concerns of the specifically feminist project.

This apparent choice between sameness or difference, where sameness has been implicated in systems of oppression, has tended to point toward the adoption of difference, as I noted at the end of the last section. That is, it tends toward the adoption of a sort of anti-theoretical hyper-particularism. For Frye (2011), because there appears to be ‘no set of conditions that are necessary and sufficient for *x* to be a *woman* ... the word “woman” is indefinable, meaningless’ (p. 86), the conclusion is made by some feminists that there is no such thing as gender categories. That is, ‘that gender categories are illusory, not real, that the impression that one “is” a woman (or a man) is an illusion’ (Frye 2011, p. 86). For Frye (2011), this gender scepticism can then be easily extended to a broader scepticism of social categories in general (p. 86).

### **3.2.2 Anti-imperialist feminism**

The preceding discussions of Frye’s and Spelman’s critiques of feminist theory expand on how the critique of abstraction can be interpreted in terms of a critique of hyper-separation and highlight how both of these critiques of abstraction in Western discourse and feminist theory are based in the same sorts of



problems of exclusion. As I have now mentioned several times in this chapter, the problem of difference and critique of abstraction have seemed to point toward the solution of adopting difference and hyper-particularism. Thus I am now going to address the anti-imperialist critique of traditional Western conceptions of universalism, and highlight once again why the solution of adopting difference is misleading. Through this, I will highlight once again how it is that this hyper-separation of sameness and difference in Western discourse leads to a false dichotomy, and why this means that an adequate solution to these problems of exclusion involves undoing this hyper-separation and this false dichotomy. Thus I will argue that the solution of difference is misleading by discussing in greater depth why feminist communication cannot be based in either sameness or difference while they are hyper-separated.

I am going to base my discussion of this anti-imperialist critique on Chandra Mohanty's (2003) *Feminism without borders: Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity*<sup>15</sup>. And, as in my discussion of other key texts in this chapter, I will be more concerned with how we can interpret Mohanty's critique in relation to the others discussed here and in relation to a critique of hyper-separation and thus dualism than with presenting a fully detailed rendition of her views. This last section of the chapter is therefore about adding more weight to the relationships and commonalities that have already been established in this chapter.

Mohanty (2003) observes that her aim in 'Under Western eyes' is to highlight those 'analytic principles' and 'textual strategies' in feminist theory which limit the possibility of coalitions between women, due to their construction of the 'priority of issues around which apparently all women are expected to organise' around the experiences of Western women and white women only (p. 18). To elaborate, these analytic principles and textual strategies that Mohanty (2003) refers to refer to the construction of women as a category of analysis which is not sufficiently context-sensitive, and off of which "easy" universals<sup>16</sup> are made (pp. 21-22). The textual strategies that Mohanty (2003) references, in the case of Western and

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<sup>15</sup> In particular on her famous essay 'Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourse' included in this book.

<sup>16</sup> By easy universals I mean to refer to 'the uncritical way "proof" of universality and cross-cultural validity are provided' when categories are insufficiently context-sensitive (Mohanty 2003, p. 22).

non-Western women, assume the experience of Western women as the norm and codifies non-Western women as “other” (p. 22). Thus the differences between Western and non-Western women become ‘the basis of the privileging of a particular group as the norm of referent’ (Mohanty 2003, p. 22).

Mohanty’s (2003) critique is that ‘Western feminists alone become the true “subjects” of this [feminist] counter history (p. 39). Third world women, in contrast, never rise above the debilitating generality of their “object” status’ (Mohanty 2003, p. 39). This, then, is the privilege that the traditional feminist critique of abstraction recognises is awarded to men. Recall the argument that abstract theories of human nature based on abstract individualism constitute men’s experience (i.e. masculine qualities such as independence, rationality and so on) as the norm and women as other. Further, this is the privilege that Spelman and Frye recognise as having been awarded to white, middle-class women in the U.S. Recall that the notion of women “as women” (abstract theories of women’s nature) constitutes the white, middle-class experience of some women as the experience of all women. In both cases, abstraction fails to address all humans or all women through the inequitable treatment of differences. That is, it treats some differences as the norm of referent and others as differences.

Mohanty confirms that the bias of abstraction in Western discourse lends itself to ethnocentrism. Liberal, abstract individualist assumptions in abstraction codify not only men at the centre, but also the West. Remember that it is not as though this colonisation of non-Western women by Western feminism can be resolved by placing non-Western women as the norm, at the centre. To do so would be to present a particularised experience of the world as a universal experience. This is the same way that women, associated with difference, cannot “get away with” claiming their experience as the norm of human experience. Non-Western women do not have the privilege of claiming universality where there is none. And Mohanty (2003) seems to recognise precisely this problem in her critique of “easy” universals. That is, in her exposure of a particular methodology in which Western experiences are uncritically construed as universals (Mohanty 2003, p. 22).

Mohanty (2003) refers to the harm of these “easy” universals as a form of colonisation (p. 18). This “definition” of colonisation provided by Mohanty bears strongly on how oppression has been defined in this thesis. According to Frye (1983), oppression is the effect on a group of people of living within systematically related barriers which mould, immobilise and reduce. According to Mohanty (2003), colonisation at the least implies ‘a relation of structural domination and a suppression ... of the heterogeneity of the subjects in question’ (p. 18). By suggesting that traditional Western discourse functions so as to, and/or is based on methods which, maintain social hierarchy through construing some difference as sameness at the centre and other differences at the periphery, Spelman and Mohanty’s arguments can be interpreted as arguments exposing, and against, dualism. That is, they can be interpreted as exposures of the hyper-separation of sameness and difference through the critique of the lack of context sensitivity involved in current conceptions of sameness. Further, both Spelman and Mohanty can be interpreted as exposing the resulting false dichotomy through their critique of the inequitable treatment of differences and of the resulting centre/periphery-type relation that maintains social hierarchies.

### **3.3 Feminism, sameness and difference**

My aim in this chapter was not just to describe an interpretation of common themes of the critiques discussed here. My aim was also to highlight the potential in providing such an interpretation. The critique of abstraction detailed here has made a point of recognising that sameness and ideas based on sameness are necessary features of communicating across difference and are therefore particularly important aspects for feminism and social commentary, and yet they have excluded the perspectives of women that we as feminists should not exclude. I am now going to highlight once again why sameness is so important to feminism, and why I think feminism *cannot* be based in difference. Through this, we will see that it is the hyper-separation of sameness and difference that we as feminists should reject, not the goal of sameness itself. For example, in the case of Frye’s critique of category-making it is the sharp boundaries of the can that must be rejected, not category-making in and of itself. In the case of Spelman’s

critique of the Uncle Theo mindset it is the reality and significance scales between sameness and difference that leaves us unable to respect the significance of difference within ideas of sameness. I will return to this discussion in greater depth in Chapter Six.

According to O'Neill (1988), abstraction is

needed if we are to reason in ways that can be taken seriously by others who disagree with us. By abstracting we may succeed in reasoning in ways that are detachable from commitment to the full detail of our own beliefs. (p. 711)

Further, Martha Nussbaum (2000) argues that the adoptions of moral and cultural relativism would be unacceptable solutions to the anti-imperialist critique of universalism. Such a solution would entail the loss of legitimate cross-cultural communication and, as Mohanty (2003) asserts, the loss of the 'urgent political necessity of forming strategic coalitions across class, race, and national boundaries' (p. 18).

A common reaction to the critique of the category of WOMEN is the appeal to a shared experience of oppression as the basis for new feminist coalitions.<sup>17</sup> However, as explained by Mohanty (2003), such a basis for women's commonality continues to be insufficiently context-sensitive, and instead seems to rely on some sort of 'universal patriarchal framework' or 'international male conspiracy or a monolithic, transhistorical power structure' (p. 20). Mohanty (2003) notes that if experiences of oppression cut across one another, then to isolate the oppression specific to gender will still privilege the experience of only some women (p. 31). Further, this appeal to shared oppression continues to construe power in the binary terms of with and without, failing to address the complex intersection that concerns the theorists discussed in this chapter. That is, it fails to address the complex relations of power *between* women. As Mohanty (2003) asserts,

[when women are] constituted as a coherent group, sexual difference becomes coterminous with female subordination, and power is automatically defined in binary terms: people who

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<sup>17</sup> See Serene Khader's (2008) account of modified universalism.

have it (read: men), and people who do not (read: women). Men exploit, women are exploited. (p. 31)

Without a basis of shared oppression or of the category of WOMEN, what then can we base feminist coalitions on? No doubt it will be very difficult for feminism to give up its basic conceptual commitments such as shared oppression and the category of WOMEN. If we are to respect all differences among women and develop feminist theories which do not reinscribe women to structures of power *between* women, we must begin to interactively engage with difference. This, then, is a call to reinvent how we think about sameness and difference in Western discourse and traditional feminist theory.

Indeed, feminists such as Frye, Spelman and Mohanty have never thought that hearing and seeing the differences among women would result in the collapse of feminist theory. They have already noticed that if differences are significant then it makes sense to think that theory can withstand them. It is only those who have sanitised the problem of difference in to a problem of theory construction who might think that difference threatens feminist theory. As Spelman (1990) notes,

The end of privilege means the end of institutional support for one's concerns above those of others, the end of one's being able to discount, however unintentionally, the experiences and perspectives of others. It's only from a position of privilege that it would seem that the end of focus on white middle-class women has to mean the end of feminism. (p. 172)

Perhaps it is only theory built on maintaining the oppressive functions of these differences that cannot withstand hearing and seeing them. Perhaps it is only for dualised theory that the problem of difference is a problem. Without hyper-separation between sameness and difference we might find a conception of sameness that requires difference in its structure.

That is, if the critique of abstraction is really a critique of the hyper-separation of sameness and difference in discourse, then we need not adopt relativism in the rejection of universalism. To return to Frye (2011), the gender scepticism that arises from the recognition that projects toward sameness repress difference is a consequence of one kind of view of what social categories are (p. 86). If, instead, we do away with

Spelman's reality/significance scale and Frye's sharp boundaries, we might find a conception of sameness capable of recognising continuities and discontinuities, responding to Mohanty's (2003) call 'to see how difference allows us to explain the connections and border crossings better and more accurately, how specifying difference allows us to theorize universal concerns more fully' (p. 226). Thus, the challenge outlined for feminist thought in this chapter is not to reject sameness, but to base feminist thought on a new, non-dualistic conception of sameness that is no longer hyper-separated from difference.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

This chapter began the work of exploring the three principles of dualism in greater depth by relating my critique of hyper-separation of sameness and difference in Western discourse to the feminist critique of abstraction and the problem of difference. This chapter also bore the particularly important burden of highlighting feminist theories' own dependency on dualism. More so, of highlighting feminist theories' dependency on sameness, having initially described one solution to this dependency, the adoption of difference, as inadequate. I will return to the matter of feminist theories' complicity in dualistic ways of thinking and what I *do* think of as an adequate solution to the critique of dualism set up in this thesis in Chapter Six. For now, however, I will continue to expand on my critique of dualism by addressing the remaining two principles of dualism – backgrounding and relational definition – and how they have related to other feminist critiques of Western discourse.

To summarise, then, in this chapter I outlined the feminist critique of abstraction and the problem of difference both as problems of exclusion and as critiques of the hyper-separation of sameness and difference. Through this I outlined the significance of sameness within Western discourse and why feminist theory has itself relied on sameness. And further, I described a common problem of exclusion in Western discourse in which, through relying on dualistic conceptions of sameness, Western discourse excludes some perspectives in order to privilege others. Thus this chapter and this discussion of hyper-

separation have highlighted a common problem of exclusion in traditional philosophy and feminist theory. In Chapters Four and Five I will be turning to the other two principles of dualism – backgrounding and relational definition – and the problems of devaluation and reduction that they are associated with. By the end of this exploration of the three principles of dualism, when we arrive at Chapter Six, I will return to the lessons that we have learnt in each discussion in order to highlight a possible way forward for feminist theory. There we will see that the problems of exclusion outlined here present the clearest difficulties with respect to disentangling feminist theory from dualism.

## **Chapter Four – Creating Foregrounds and Backgrounds out of Men and Women**

### **4.0 Introduction**

In the last chapter I described how the conception of sameness, as hyper-separated from difference, is a conception of sameness that privileges some through oppressing others. Through this I described problems of exclusion within both masculine Western discourse and feminist theory. In this chapter I am going to address problems of devaluation in Western discourse, based on Plumwood's second principle: backgrounding.

In Chapter Two I described backgrounding as a way of thinking through mechanisms of focus and attention that presents one side of a dualistic concept pair as more important than the other, through the denial of dependency. In this chapter I will highlight how the dualistic principle of backgrounding holds an economy of importance, centrality and insignificance in place. If discourse is split into two sides as in the last chapter – sameness and difference, universal and particular – then one of these sides is more important than the other. Moreover, one of these sides has come to define discourse. My aim in this chapter is to arrive at a more complete picture of the obscured continuity between sameness and difference by describing how it is that dualism thinks of some qualities and contributions as more important than others, despite what is clearly its dependency on them. Thus my aim is to highlight how dualism construes masculine qualities of sameness, despite their dependency on feminist qualities of difference, as more important than their feminine counterparts. This, then, might add weight to the conclusion of the last chapter that we should, as feminists, rethink the relationship between sameness and difference in Western discourse.

Therefore, in this chapter I am going to focus on showing how we might interpret Western discourse as based on a foreground/background-type hierarchy between masculine and feminine qualities. For this, I am going to focus on two related crystallisations of the relationship between ideals of sameness and difference in discourse that have been significant to the development of both moral and political



philosophy – the distinctions between justice and care as moral frameworks and between the public and private spheres of civil society. Both of these examples of the background/foreground-type hierarchy as it has impacted on the lives of women will be well known not just to feminist philosophers, but to philosophers in general.

I will begin this chapter by expanding on the nature of foreground/background-type hierarchies as outlined in Chapter Two, and its role with respect to dualistic thinking more generally. From there I am going to highlight how this type of hierarchy has informed the distinction between justice and care in Western discourse, which has made a masculine moral orientation of justice seem more important than a feminine moral orientation of care, despite the complementary relationship between them. I will then build on the consideration of masculine qualities as more important than feminine qualities in Western discourse through this kind of hierarchical thinking with respect to the division of the public and private spheres, which has devalued women's "work" with respect to men's. The upshot of these investigations into the justice/care and public/private distinctions in terms of foreground/background-type hierarchies is that as feminists we should work to recognise how both sides of these distinctions depend on each other, and furthermore, how they might be more helpfully thought about in terms of inclusive rather than exclusive disjuncts, and how this requires the reinvention of these concepts that have been crafted in hierarchical opposition to each other.

#### **4.1 Economies of discourse**

Before I investigate the distinctions of justice/care and public/private and the hierarchical form of foreground/background, I want to quickly remind the reader of a note that I made at the end of the previous chapter. The discussions to follow in this chapter, and the next, focus on aspects of women's lives and oppression relative to men that are more, if not only, relevant to white middle-class women. This is firstly because, as was a major point of discussion in the last chapter, much of feminist theory and attention has been directed toward the lives of white middle-class women – and this thesis looks to extend Plumwood's three principles of dualism by linking them with other feminist critiques of Western discourse

and feminist-identified problems. I am aware that what will be described as “women’s” experiences and femininity in this chapter and the next are specifically not the experiences or gender identities of all women, and that by focusing on these problems and characterisations of women’s lives I might be reinforcing hierarchies among women.

I will now move on to describe the nature of the foreground/background-type hierarchies that I am critiquing and connecting to Western discourse in this chapter. According to Schutte (1991),

Every time the slash [/] representing the mark of difference occurs between masculine and feminine, we must ask ourselves the question, where does the value, in particular the excessive value, attributed to the masculine term come from? Is it the case that it attains its superiority or predominance precisely because it extracts its value from what originally belongs to the other. (p. 70, square brackets in original)

This quote from Schutte,<sup>18</sup> in its recognition of how privilege is held in place by oppression, reminds us to be wary of the devalued when it coincides with predominance. When we observe relations of superiority and inferiority between concepts, we might wonder who is benefitted. When we observe concepts within foreground/background-type hierarchies, we might wonder who becomes centred and how they depend on their periphery.

To return to Plumwood’s (1993) outline of backgrounding, there are two ways in which the centre depends on its periphery (p. 447-448). Firstly, the centre depends on its periphery in order to define its boundaries as the centre (Plumwood 1993, p. 447). This first dependency is, then, a particular feature of the kind of centre dualism seeks to create. The foreground is in need of a background if it wishes to refer to itself as a foreground.

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<sup>18</sup> Here Schutte (1991) is responding to Irigaray’s (1985) formulation of the ‘phallic economy of castration’, which is likewise based on the logic of either/or and where value is attached to one object (A) and its lack (not-A) is perceived as valueless (p.70). From an Irigarayan perspective, this phallic economy is an economy in which feminine silence secures a masculine appropriation of language.

The second dependency of the centre on the periphery is material. The centre is dependent on the contributions of the periphery in the same way that the foreground of the picture depends on its background. Both are essential aspects of the picture. When we can see how both aspects are essential we might wonder why they are presented to us hierarchically. Perhaps this is where the analogy becomes misleading. It would be odd to look at a picture and see hierarchy: to consider the foreground more important than its background. If foreground and background are both aspects of the same picture, then why would we think of one as more important, more fundamental than the other? We might wonder whether the dependency of the foreground on the background is denied precisely so as to present us with hierarchy where there is not any.

What I identified in the last chapter, was a denial of the dependency of universalism on particularism, as concepts based on sameness and difference respectively. That is, if the current conception of sameness depends on the current conception of difference definitionally and materially, then Western discourse is based on sameness through the devaluing (backgrounding) of difference. And the current conception of sameness *does* depend on difference, definitionally and materially. To return to Frye's (2011) can of peas, to be what is inside the can (peas) means to be what is not inside the can (not-peas)(p. 86). Further, the can of peas and what is left outside the can of peas both make up "the picture", so to speak. Likewise, the current conceptions of universalism and particularism form the two aspects of "the picture". And yet, in order to base discourse on universalism (that is, to make universalism superior), Western discourse devalues particularism. The foreground/background relation between universalism and particularism constructs universalism as superior to particularism, in the sense that it transcends particularism and the denial of dependency is initiated. Thus meaningful ways of talking about the world in Western discourse are based in universalism.

There are a few key points to take from this description of the nature of these foreground/background-type hierarchies, which we will see link this type of hierarchy to key distinctions on which Western

discourse has been based. Firstly, these hierarchies are based in an effort to deny dependency on things that might threaten the master's superiority and centrality. For example, as we will see below, they can deny men's dependency on women so that Western discourse can operate under the myth of male absolute centrality. Secondly, by imposing this form of hierarchy on some distinctions, one side of a dualistic distinction is defined as unimportant relative to the other and vice versa. Because of this, how we think of concepts that are parts of dualistic distinctions in Western discourse is based on this hierarchy.

The two distinctions in Western discourse that we can see as based on these kinds of mechanisms of focus and attention that I am going to focus on in this chapter are the distinctions between justice and care as moral attitudes, and between the public and private as spheres of civil society. My reason for focusing on these two distinctions is that they bear particular affinities with the masculine/feminine distinction, and because they have significantly impacted Western moral and political philosophy. In this respect, my focus on these two distinctions is based on a desire to begin the work of extracting the dualised, masculine bias from philosophy. That is, I am going to highlight, by accusing these traditional distinctions in Western discourse of backgrounding, how women's work has been devalued and why it should no longer be, and why men's work should no longer be overvalued as the standard for work. At the moment I am going to focus on the justice/care distinction, in respect to how justice as a moral orientation does depend on care, before turning to the division of public/private and the prior sexual contract that the public social contract is based on.

#### **4.2 Justice and care and the centring of men's moral orientation**

The justice/care distinction refers to Carol Gilligan's (1982) work *In a different voice: Psychological theory in women's development*, in which she exposed a second moral voice. *In a different voice* is based on Gilligan's (1982) critique of the Kohlberg/Kantian picture of moral development as prioritising only one of two moral voices. These two voices, according to Gilligan (1982), are the voices of justice and care. By prioritising the moral voice of justice through the language of independence and rights, Gilligan (1982) noticed that the Kohlberg/Kantian picture of moral development prioritised what appeared to be the moral

development of most boys and very few girls (p. 19). In her own studies, Gilligan (1982) exposed the neglected moral voice of care based in the language of relationality and dependency, which was most often developed in girls (pp. 18-19). Thus Gilligan, and the broader field of the ethics of care which followed her, took it that given that there are two moral voices, a better (more inclusive, and presenting the full picture) moral framework would be one in which both are respected (see Held 2006; Kittay 1999; Noddings 1984; Ruddick 1989).

Selya Benhabib (1987) lodges a similar argument to Gilligan and the ethics of care, asserting that moral philosophy must account for both the “generalised” and “concrete” other. Benhabib (1987) argues that traditional universalistic ethical theories attempt to restrict the moral point of view to the perspective of the ‘generalized other’ (p. 86). She associates this “generalised other” with a Kohlberg-type preference for neutrality, justice, commonality and independence (Benhabib 1987, pp. 87-91). As such, this view of the “other” requires us to ‘abstract from the individuality and concrete identity of the other’ (Benhabib 1987, p. 87). The argument is that what is considered to be of moral importance and worthy of consideration in the encounter with the “other” in traditional theory becomes about what we all have in common. We consider the “generalised other” by what they have in common with all moral subjects, and assume that they will do the same for us. This is analysed as a fundamentally liberal and individualistic conception of the “other”, which is supposed to ground intuitions of the nature of morality as universalisable and reversible. As such, Benhabib (1987), along with feminist ethical theorists such as the proponents of the ethics of care, notes the importance of the perspective of the ‘concrete other’ (p. 92). This standpoint requires that we consider the relationality and concrete needs of the “other”, and as such that we ‘abstract from what constitutes our commonality’ (p. 87). This, by contrast, leads to a complementary reciprocity in which the individualities of both the “self” and the “other” are respected.

However, Benhabib (1987) also notes what would be the problematic consequences of endorsing the perspective of the “concrete other” over and above the “generalised other” (p. 92). She asks ‘whether,

without the standpoint of the generalized other, it would be possible to define a moral point of view at all' (Benhabib 1987, p. 92). This is to ask whether, without the notion of the "generalised other", we can communicate across differences and create alliances at all. Benhabib suggests that we 'recognize the dignity of the generalized other through an acknowledgement of the moral identity of the concrete other' (Benhabib 1987, p. 92). As such, Benhabib (1987) considers the self-other relation as consisting of a symmetrical reciprocity that involves consideration of both the generalised and the concrete "other".

Clearly, then, we can see how we might interpret Benhabib, Gilligan and the ethics of care as denial of dependency-type critiques. There are two aspects of this picture of morality, and thus neither should be denied. There are two aspects of the other, commonality and difference, and thus neither should be ignored.

#### **4.3 Sexual and social contracts and the division of public and private**

The feminist engagement with the public/private distinction has likewise focused on exposing the gendering of distinctions between ideas based on sameness and difference that have been figured into this kind of foreground/background-type hierarchy. This engagement has thus exposed the exclusion of the feminine from discourse through the denied dependency of the masculine public sphere on the feminine private sphere. That is, on the denied dependency of the social contract on the sexual contract.

Feminists of the second wave famously argued that what happens in the private sphere is far from apolitical. For ease of discussion I am going to focus here on the public/private distinction as it has had to do with social contract theory. Modern social contract theory attempts to rationally justify political obligation to a specific form of government, and in doing so attempts to establish the legitimate powers of the state. The key historical texts within this modern tradition of social contract, most notably those presented by (in chronological order) Thomas Hobbes (1996, originally 1651), John Locke (2016, originally 1689), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (2012, originally 1762) and Immanuel Kant (1996, originally 1797), have hugely influenced political philosophy and served as major justifications for

contemporaneous forms of government in Western societies. The basic structure within these key historical texts of social contract theory has been to ask

- a) what are the natural conditions of humanity prior to government (i.e. what is the natural condition of humanity)?
- b) related to this, what are our natural interests in agreeing to be governed (if we would agree to be governed at all)?
- c) from b), what kind of restrictions to our freedoms as rational individuals would we then agree to (i.e. what would we rationally agree are the legitimate powers of the state over us)

And yet these key historical texts have also been the subjects of feminist criticisms pertaining to their endorsement of natural differences between the sexes and of the natural inferiority of women. The basic position of this feminist critique is that the sexist attitudes upheld within the key historical texts of this body of literature are actually essential to the major ideas represented by these theories. That is, that these theories are based on a gendered public/private distinction which entails the exclusion of the feminine from the public sphere. In *The Sexual Contract* Carol Pateman (1988), in particular, argues that all modern social contract theories are based on a prior sexual contract, and because of this are all based on the assumption that women are not candidates for civil freedom. Further, she notes that by denying the social contract dependency on this sexual contract, we mask a patriarchal appropriation of civil society (Pateman 1988, p. 2).

As noted by Pateman (1988), the terms of the original contract for social contract theorists depend on what one takes to be the rational interests of the candidate for citizenship in question, which are conflated with their natural interests:

The device of the state of nature is used to explain why, given the characteristics of the inhabitants of the natural condition, entry into the original contract is a rational act. (p. 5)

The feminist critique of social contract theory is that the sexism of past key texts cannot be written off as a mere feature of the times in which they were written, but as essential to the proper reading of the text (see Lange 2002; Hirschmann 2008; Okin 1979; Pateman 1979, 1988). This line of critique has taken many different forms. In *Women in Western political thought*, Susan Miller Okin (1979) argues that Western philosophical discourse is based on an attitude of “functionalism” with respect to women. That is, Western philosophical discourse asks ‘what are women *for*?’ rather than what they are, as it does for men (Okin 1979, p. 10). Lloyd (1984), in *The man of reason: "Male" and "female" in Western philosophy*, argues that concepts such as reason and individualism have been historically constructed alongside masculinity and through opposition to femininity. As such, the basing of Western discourse on reason and individualism, for Lloyd (1984), becomes the privileging of the masculine over the feminine. And Pateman (1988) in *The sexual contract* claims that the concept of individualism, as it has been represented in Western discourse to date, is based on the prior assumption that women undertake roles of relationality and care (p. 21). For Lange (2002) this is that the key texts within the social contract tradition depend on women having different but complementary roles to men (p. 7). And women are excluded from the public, civil sphere by virtue of their natures, which render them suitable only for lives of dependency and servitude (Pateman 1979, p. 157). Women become unable to develop the capacities necessary for self-mastery, and hence for equality and political obligation (Pateman 1979, p. 157).

The critique is then that women are represented in social contract theory only in so far as they serve a purpose for patriarchal society, by tending to those aspects of society which must be transcended by the free and equal individual. That is, women are only represented as a background against which social contracts are made. This critique is then not just that women are excluded from counting as individuals, but that individualist thought relies on women attending to matters of dependency so that men can attend to matters of independence. Men are able to become independent citizens only because women attend to matters of relationality, care and dependency within the private sphere.



To expand on the idea of the sexual contract, Pateman (1988) argues that the social contract (based on individualism) is dependent on a prior relegation of women to the sexual contract. The sexual contract is understood by Pateman (1988) throughout her works as a marriage contract, or rather, a contract in which women are relegated to the private sphere and to those qualities/domains which must be transcended by the free and equal individual. Women's inclusion in the public sphere and civil freedom is then not an 'add women and stir' type problem (Okin 1990, p. 659). Rather, how civil freedom is currently defined is based on a prior establishment of patriarchal right (Pateman 1988, p. 2). Therefore, Pateman (1988) concludes that the social contract represents and establishes the specifically modern form of patriarchy, which is essentially fraternal (pp. 2-3).

Pateman (1988) notes that while social contract theorists define women as naturally lacking the capacity to make contracts, they also require them to enter into the sexual contract (pp. 5-6). As such, a distinguishing feature of this sexual contract is that it is made specifically between an individual and his natural subordinate. Once again, the claim being made is that the public sphere is based on the exclusion of women and is only representative of the experience of men when women occupy the private sphere. If women were to be included in the public sphere then this would require them to abandon femininity in order to adopt a masculine role. As we see today, in order for women to achieve civil freedom they are required to negotiate the two contradictory natures of the private and public spheres. Women must be both mothers and individuals (Lange 2002, p. 38).

#### **4.4 Beyond backgrounding**

According to Gilligan, Ward & Taylor (1988),

The commitment of a democratic society to an ideal of social justice based on a premise of individual equality makes evidence of difference disturbing. Within an educational system committed to the goals of equal opportunity and individual freedom, ideals of no difference are often sustained by practises of not listening and not seeing. (p. 291)

The common element to these separate but related feminist critiques of dualistic distinctions is that they are based on ideas about human nature that are explicitly masculine. But more than this, they are critiques which expose the dependency of justice on care and public on private. These critiques are that neither focusing solely on justice or solely on the public presents a full picture of the moral or political landscape. Instead, to focus on justice or the public is to present a masculine perspective in which feminine contributions are assumed and assumed to be inferior. These assumptions were perhaps made more explicitly once, when the visibility of the social inequality between men and women was more tolerable. The visibility of these conditions has now become less tolerable, in line with the recent strides in women's enfranchisement. And the suggestion in this chapter is that all that has changed in response is the visibility of these dualistic assumptions.

If discourse is masculine through denied dependency on the feminine, then women have to bring their differences into theory. But perhaps more significantly, women leave their gender behind in ways that men do not when they enter in to the public sphere, which has been newly opened to them but which does not include them. This public sphere, instead, continues to presuppose that someone still makes those inferior background contributions of care and relationality to the picture. And this seems to be the core of some of the most pressing inequalities between the middle-class, white men and women who best represent justice/care and public/private distinctions such as the gender pay gap. As matters of care in the private sphere are constructed as inessential, their contributions to society are not *treated* as essential.

Having observed the slash between masculine/feminine, justice/care and public/private, we have observed how the concepts involved are warped by patriarchy into this foreground/background hierarchy. As was recommended in the previous chapter, we might anticipate new, non-dualistic conceptions of the concepts involved. I want to highlight that this is a step further than the traditional ethics of care type approach discussed in this chapter.

The typical ethics of care approach takes it that both justice and care are genuine human ideals. From an ethics of care perspective the major work to be done involves merely revaluing care to reflect this. And yet, if the problem with the justice/care distinction is one of backgrounding and not mere devaluation we must reinvent and revalue both justice and care. The problem will not be resolved through including women in the traditionally defined moral orientation of justice or in revaluing the traditionally defined moral orientation of care. In the words of Frye (1996), 'I wholly reject the idea that there is anything to be gained by trying to appropriate and revalue any parts or aspects of patriarchally constructed femininity' (p. 998). While we might still approach theories which expose and critique denied dependency such as the ethics of care as helpful deconstructive strategies, we must take these critiques further in order to dismantle the dualistically warped relationship between justice/care, public/private and so on.

To conclude, I am going to spell out the relationship of this chapter to Chapters Three and Five and to the other two principles of dualism (hyper-separation and relational definition) discussed within them. Through interrogating these three principles of thought as parts of a broader dualistic way of thinking, we learn lessons about which feminist strategies insufficiently challenge dualism and what types of things feminists must reimagine free from dualistic parameters. In this chapter we have learnt lessons of both kinds, both of which we will return to in Chapter Six.

When we encountered the problem of women's exclusion from traditional philosophy in Chapters One and Three, I noted that an initial reaction to this problem of exclusion comes in the form of difference feminism. That is, I noted that an initial reaction to women's exclusion from traditional philosophy has been to advocate for the inclusion of the feminine into what it has traditionally been excluded from. Yet as I suggested in both Chapter One and Chapter Three, a question remains as to whether difference feminism is enough to resolve these problems of exclusion. I will return to this question in Chapter Six, but I want to briefly expand on this idea that while difference feminist positions such as the ethics of care

do not go far enough, and that they can be important tools for deconstructing elements of dualistic thought, such as backgrounding, which is how they have been used in this chapter.

And I do think that difference feminist positions, as they have been defined in this thesis, fail to go far enough in challenging dualism. If we are to take hyper-separation seriously as an element of dualism along with backgrounding, it is not just the devaluation of the feminine that feminists should be concerned with, but also the maximisation of the space between the feminine and masculine. The problem of the devaluation challenge outlined in this chapter is not just that the feminine has been devalued, but that it has been warped within its relationship with the masculine. The point that I am trying to make is that we cannot underestimate the extent to which the concepts that we are working with have been warped by dualism. Resolving the problems of exclusion and devaluation discussed in this chapter and the previous is not a matter of plucking concepts out of their current hierarchical order and repositioning them, but of wondering what about these concepts has been altered by their placement in dualistic hierarchies in the first place.

The discussion of backgrounding in this chapter, in relation to the broader thesis, has outlined a challenge for feminist theory – to reimagine Western discourse without foreground/background hierarchy, and thus to reimagine the concepts currently embroiled within said hierarchies. This challenge, then, is for feminist theory to think beyond its current resources. In the context of this chapter, this means that rather than revaluing the private sphere and the moral orientation of care, feminists must reimagine masculine/feminine, public/private and justice/care based on new, non-hierarchical forms of relation. If we are to take hyper-separation and denied dependency seriously, this might involve wondering whether masculine and feminine, public and private, justice and care, are as separate as they have traditionally been presented to us by Western discourse.

## 4.5 Conclusion

Here I have described a kind of hierarchy and shown how it has been the basis for some of the key distinctions in Western discourse. These distinctions that I have discussed are the distinction between the moral orientations of justice and care, based on Gilligan's development of the ethics of care, and the distinction between the public and private spheres of civil society, through Pateman's exposure and critique of the sexual contract. I have focused on these distinctions because they highlight particularly well the extent to which Western discourse has centred men and men's work by making a periphery out of women and women's work. Through Gilligan and Pateman, then, I have argued that the harm of backgrounding lies in the denial of dependency or the masking of the contribution of women and women's work, which justifies Western discourse's treatment of women and their work as inessential. Through these two arguments I have looked to highlight that a better way of thinking about these distinctions in Western discourse would be to acknowledge the importance of both contributions.

I now have only one principle of dualism left to explore – relational definition – which I will discuss in the next chapter. Based on what I am currently developing as extended critiques of dualism as a way of thinking, I will eventually, in Chapter Six, describe what shape I think the future feminist response to dualism should have.

## Chapter Five – Relational Definition and Women

*[M]en's philosophy can consider itself the philosophy of all humanity because its own definition of the human denies full personhood to women. (Holland 1990, p. 4)*

### 5.0 Introduction

In this chapter I am going to address the final form of hierarchical thinking to be discussed in this thesis: relational definition. In Chapter Three we discussed how either/or-type thinking is particularly prone to privileging some perspectives over others, and endorsing ways of thinking which disguise such privilege. In Chapter Four we discussed a way of thinking based on a foreground/background-type hierarchy which construes the masculine as central to Western discourse and the feminine as peripheral, despite a masculine dependency on femininity. In this chapter, relational definition will be discussed as just another way in which dualistic patterns of thought help make social hierarchy appear natural.

Relational definition is a way of thinking about the relationship between self and other, and the duties that they have to one another, which supports thoughts of domination by centring the self and reducing the other. This is a particular sense of reduction in which the other's value is limited to the 'desires, needs and lacks' of the self (Plumwood 1993, p. 451). A particularly apt metaphor for this relation between self and other in Western discourse is the asymmetrical A/not-A distinction. In the A/not-A distinction, A's boundaries are determined *against* not-A, while not-A's boundaries are defined negatively as a lack of A.

In this chapter I will first expand on this concept of relational definition as a way of imagining the relationship between self and other. Or, rather, as a *lens* through which the categories of other and woman are seen. I am going to associate this way of thinking about the self and other with two types of problems of reduction that have concerned feminists, because the best example of how we think through relational definition is how women are thought about in Western discourse. In this chapter, I will then highlight how these processes of (and kinds of) reduction that feminists have been concerned with relate to a more general way of thinking about women and men's dominance over women that can be linked

back to dualism and relational definition. I will show that the most appropriate way of thinking about relational definition is through fantasies of one valued centre and its necessary valueless periphery, represented by this A/not-A relation, and the harm it can cause when applied to metaphysical definitions of social groups.

I am going to begin the chapter by exploring the two types of problems of reduction based on the two corollaries of relational definition – instrumentalisation and homogenisation – in greater depth by returning to Plumwood’s critique from Chapter Two and Frye’s can of peas analogy. I will note that while it is not quite clear how these two types of problems should fit together in one coherent picture of how we think about women, many have thought of them as being related, and in this thesis, we can think of them as being related as products of relational definition. Here I will describe instrumentalisation and homogenisation as types of reduction that reduce women to the space they enclose for men and to *only* this relation that they have with men respectively. Thus I will describe how both instrumentalisation and homogenisation lead to the failure to recognise the other, and women who are other in Western discourse, as independent from the male self.

Next in this chapter, I will continue to relate these two types of reduction through relational definition to the feminist critique of subjectivity and how we think about women. Here I will further highlight some of the consequences of relational definition for dualised identity, based on de Beauvoir’s (2011) critique of the process of othering as an example of the critique of women’s exclusion and Irigaray’s (1985) critique of saming as exemplars of how this exclusion relates to the reduction of women in to the relation in which they stand to men.

Finally, then, by the end of this chapter, I will have highlighted what we can see as the feminist concerns with the problems of reduction associated with relational definition. Further, by the end of this chapter I will have highlighted how we can interpret a number of feminist concerns relating to problems of exclusion, devaluation and reduction as effects of dualistic ways of thinking. This chapter, then, will mark

the end of my deeper exploration and extension of the critique of dualism and dualistic ways of thinking. In the next chapter I will draw on these explorations of hyper-separation, backgrounding and relational definition in order to describe, in fuller detail than I did in Chapter Two, how we as feminists should move forward in an attempt to reinvent not just Western discourse but also feminist theory.

### **5.1 Relational definition in greater depth**

We might think of dualistic relational definition as a way of imagining the relationship between self and other and the subsequent duties that they have in respect of one another. That is, as a way of imagining how the self must or should respond to the other and difference. Specifically, we might think of dualistic relational definition as a way of imagining the relationship between self and other where the other becomes an object for the self to dominate. The defining feature of this relational definition, and a necessary component of relationships between the dominating and the dominated, is its asymmetry. As noted by Plumwood (1993);

Although each side of a dualistic pair is dependent on the other for identity and organisation of material life this relation is not one of equal, mutual or symmetrical relational definition. The master's power is reflected in the fact that his qualities are taken as primary, and as defining social value, while those of the slave are defined or constrained in relation to them, as negations or lacks of the virtues of the centre. (pp. 450-451)

Whereas the upperside defines itself against the underside (defines itself as upper by virtue of there being an under), the underside is defined in relation to the upperside as *a lack* (Plumwood 1993, p. 451). This is a specifically asymmetrical relationship in which self and other do not oppose each other. That is, the other is not a threat to the self's world view, because it is reduced to how it fits *into* the self's world view. This, then, is a way of thinking about the other in terms of the self's ends rather than as having any independent or intrinsic value of its own.

This asymmetrical relationship between self and other is nicely articulated by Frye as based on the ideal of the arrogant perceiver. According to Frye (1983),



The arrogant perceiver's expectation creates in the space about him a sort of vacuum mold into which the other is sucked and held ... His [the arrogant perceiver's] perception is arrogating; his senses tell him that the world and everything in it (with the occasional exception of other men) is in the nature of things there for him, that she is by her constitution and telos his servant. (p. 69)

Under the arrogant eye, the self sees the other as something to be fitted into the self's own worldview and not as a site of independent or intrinsic value (Frye 1983, p. 69). Instead, the other is only valuable insofar as it *relates to* and supports this worldview of the arrogant, centred self (Frye 1983, p. 69).

From this way of imagining self/other relations come two related but separate concerns regarding the dualised identity of the other, that are both best exemplified by how feminists have argued that we think about women. The first is a concern of instrumentalism. In Plumwood's (1993) description of relational definition, the other is defined in relation to the self as a lack (p. 450), i.e. not-A is defined in relation to A as a lack of A. For example, feminists have long argued that women, in Western discourse, rather than occupying an independent space of their own, are thought of as not-men. In this sense Plumwood (1993) asserts that the other is 'never considered in positive light' or as an independent other (p. 451). Indeed, the self in Western discourse conceives of the other only in terms of the self's 'desires, needs and lacks', as a resource (Plumwood 1993, p. 451). That is, 'the upperside is an end in itself, but the underside has no such intrinsic value, is not for-itself but merely useful, a resource' (Plumwood 1993, p. 451). For example, Western discourse has rarely thought of women or women's work as valuable in and of themselves, but only as valuable in terms of relation to men, i.e. as mother, wife, daughter, carer. Thus the concern of instrumentalism is that through lacking any value in and of itself in this imagined relationship between self and other, the other's value is reduced to its role as a resource for the self. The other is only something for the self, not something in and of itself. This concern of instrumentalism within relational definition is only the first kind of reduction of the other, and women, that feminists have noticed and critiqued.

The second kind of concern is a concern of homogenisation. If relational definition instrumentalises the other by reducing it to a function, homogenisation makes sure this reduction is successful by ignoring surplus features of the other (Plumwood 1993, p. 451). Within dominating/dominated relationships the differences among the dominated class are only important insofar as they relate to the 'desires, needs and lacks' of the dominating class (Plumwood 1991, p. 451). Thus the diversity and multiplicity of members of the dominated class under relational definition which are surplus to the dominator's world view are ignored. In respect to women, this idea is that Western discourse has tended to overlook the differences between women, and their individuality, leading to the frequent treatment of women as if they are interchangeable.

### 5.1.1 Returning to Frye

Before I move on to relate this description of relational definition to the feminist critique of subjectivity and women's dualised identity in Western discourse, I want to quickly reaffirm these two aspects of reduction noticed by Plumwood by relating them to aspects of reduction noticed by Frye. Recall my earlier discussions of Frye's (2011) analogy of the "set/container" view of social categories as a can of peas, the walls of which erect hard boundaries between what is inside and what is outside:

The individual is "in" the category, like peas are in the can; the criteria of membership in a category are the walls of the container that sharply separate what is inside (the  $\Phi$ ) and everything else (the undifferentiated universe of the not- $\Phi$ ). (p. 86)

This quote from Frye emphasises the reduction of what is left outside of the can (not-A) to what is inside the can (A), and thus the effects of homogenisation on dualised identity. The A/not-A universal exclusive dichotomy,<sup>19</sup> according to Frye (1996), is not really a binary structure at all (fn 11, p. 998). The can divides

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<sup>19</sup> Whereas Frye (1996) and Plumwood (1991) are talking about the same phenomenon – what Plumwood and I call dualism – Frye (1996) describes the A/not-A relationship in terms of a universal exclusive dichotomy (UED). Frye's reason for using this term over dualism is to highlight the monism that is created by the A/not-A distinction that results from relational definition. Referring to the problem of women's exclusion, Frye notes that it is the implicit monism within this dichotomous construction of man/male/subject as the A of an A/not-A structure which becomes problematic for the possibility of women's subjectivity (Frye 1996, p. 999).

the world, but paradoxically does 'not split it into two' (Frye 1996, p. 1000). Instead, it splits the world into the can and what is outside of the can, reducing the world in terms of the can of peas. In this sense, to be 'not-A is not a "something" one can be', only a relation one can be in (Frye 1996, p. 999). Once again, this relates to how we come to think about women predominately through the sorts of relationships they have to men, rather than as valuable in and of themselves, i.e. as a wife to a husband or a mother to a child.

Frye (1996) asks us to imagine that A signifies vanilla (p. 999). If vanilla is A then not-A is everything that is not vanilla, i.e. 'strawberry, chocolate, and peppermint ripple but also triangles, the square root of two, the orbit of Haley's comet, and all the shoes in the world' (Frye 1996, p. 999). Not-A is not "something", but a lack of A. For Frye this is the price of securing the absolute unity and centrality of vanilla. Thus the dualistic distinction *A/not-A* is *monistic* rather than *pluralistic*; it does not construct two things, but one thing and the rest.

## **5.2 The feminist critique of subjectivity**

The feminist critique of subjectivity is based on the argument that dominant conceptions of subjectivity are in opposition to the feminine, such that to be a woman is to be other (or not-A) in respect to the male self of Western discourse. I will now highlight how these two types of reduction just discussed – instrumentalisation and homogenisation – can be extended to this critique of subjectivity and as such add weight to this idea that women, in Western discourse, are subject to a reduced, dualised identity. First, I will highlight how Frye describes the problem of feminine identity, or lack thereof, and then I will extend this critique to a general overview of de Beauvoir's and Irigaray's foundational critiques of subjectivity.

In respect to the dominant conception of subjectivity, Frye (1996) explains that 'when woman is defined as not-man, she is cast into the infinite undifferentiated plenum' (p. 1000). As such, women are othered and denied a positive subjectivity of their own at the expense of men fixing their own permanent subjectivity. We can characterise this concern with the state of feminine otherness as this: if

man/male/subject is A, then woman/female/object is not-A, and woman is defined by a complementary lack of masculinity. Woman is opposite to man (in the sense of hyper-separation), man's inferior complement (in the sense of foreground/background), and is reduced to the perspective of male dominance (relational definition). That is, she is reduced to her relationship to man, which is a relationship between the master and slave. Dualism, therefore, is not just about privileging the masculine, but about constructing the world from the masculine perspective when masculinity is mastery of femininity.

In Chapter Three we addressed how women are excluded from dominant accounts of human nature in order to position certain differences at the norm (as the standard for sameness), while bracketing others. And in Chapter Four we addressed how these differences, positioned as the norm, are construed as valuable through a process of devaluing. This chapter addresses how dualism does not just exclude women from what is valuable, but reduces women to the space they enclose for men (instrumentalisation), and to men's limited view of them (homogenisation): or rather, to the master's limited view of the slave.

Feminists have long argued that 'under the social arrangement known as patriarchy the subject is exclusively male: masculinity and subjectivity are co-extensive notions' (Schor 1994, p. 62). Or, as supported by Frye (1996), 'under the social arrangements known as patriarchy the category of men operates as an A/not-A structure' (p. 998). Thus feminists have argued that women are other.<sup>20</sup> That is, that women are the negation against which men construct themselves, and moreso, against which they construct their superiority.

I want to stress here that the feminist critique of subjectivity is based on two aspects of feminine otherness that correlate with these two aspects of relational definition. I will base this discussion on de Beauvoir's

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<sup>20</sup> De Beauvoir's and Irigaray's accounts of woman's otherness discussed in this chapter are both good bases for the history of this claim, which has been a common theme for modern feminist theory.

(2011) critique of othering and Irigaray's critique of saming (1985), as outlined by Schor (1994).<sup>21</sup> Whereas de Beauvoir's critique highlights the instrumentalisation of women in Western discourse through the denial of their personhood (i.e. by defining them as other rather than self), Irigaray's critique highlights the homogenisation of women to men's limited view of them. That is, Irigaray highlights how Western discourse fails to recognise more than one kind of subjectivity and frame of reference.

I will now move on to comparing and contrasting these two predominant critiques of subjectivity. Schor (1994) describes de Beauvoir's *The second sex* (2011) and Irigaray's *Speculum of the other woman* (1985) as 'two exemplary positions' toward the feminist problem of subjectivity (p. 45). As always, what one takes to be a resolution to a problem depends firstly on how the problem is described. As noted by Schor (1994), despite having the same 'fundamental grounding conviction' that subjectivity has been appropriated by masculinity and that the subject is male, de Beauvoir and Irigaray approach the problem of subjectivity from opposing frames of reference (p. 45). Whereas de Beauvoir emphasises the maleness of the absolute subject of Western discourse, Irigaray emphasises the phallogentric character of the current conception of subjectivity (pp. 45-51).

### **5.2.1 De Beauvoir and othering**

De Beauvoir's frame is characteristically existentialist. From this perspective the individual subject 'can be posed only in being opposed' (Frye 1996, p. 993), and it is transcendence from immanence (the repetitious version of life that does not act upon the world but reacts to it) which is the 'main attribute of the subject' (Frye 1996, p. 993). Men are able to 'recognize the other, each regarding himself and the other simultaneously as object and as subject in a reciprocal manner' (de Beauvoir 1953, cited in Frye 1996, p. 993). Thus the male subject recognises the relative other. And yet, this recognition demands a relationship of reciprocity, as the relative other opposes the self at the same time. The role of "woman" in

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<sup>21</sup> It will already be clear to some readers that these are simplified descriptions of what are the very detailed views on masculine subjectivity presented by de Beauvoir and Irigaray. Indeed, what follows should not be thought of as a full account of the separate views of these theorists. I mean only to highlight the two aspects of dualistic reduction – that is, of the relational definition between A and not-A – through a comparison of the broad differences between de Beauvoir's and Irigaray's focus and through Schor's (1994) assertion that the two be addressed together (p. 48).

Western discourse, then, is to be man's absolute other. As an object which is not also subject, women become the absolute other off of which the male subject poses his absolute unity and sovereignty.

For de Beauvoir, it is the casting of woman as the male subject's absolute other (not-A) which specifically defines women in opposition to subjectivity. Women become the immanence that men transcend in order to pose themselves. As expressed by Schor (1994), 'consigned by the masterful male subject to passivity and repetition, woman in patriarchy is a prisoner of immanence' (p. 63). Furthermore, 'liberation for women in Beauvoir's liberationist micronarrative consists in emerging from the dark cave of immanence "into the light of transcendence"' (Schor 1994, p. 63). Thus de Beauvoir's critique of feminine otherness is of women as other. That is, of women as excluded from subjectivity as necessary opposite to the absolute subject.

In terms of dualism and relational definition, this process of othering ensures a masculine master identity. That is, by constructing women as other to men, dualism sets up a master/slave relationship between men and women. Women, through othering, are reduced to the complementary inferior of men, off of which men can construct their own dominance.

### **5.2.2 Irigaray and saming**

Schor (1994) notes that 'since othering and saming conspire in the oppression of women, the workings of *both* processes need to be exposed' (p. 48):

If othering involves attributing to the objectified other a difference that serves to legitimate her oppression, saming denies the objectified other the right to her difference, submitting the other to the laws of phallic specularity. (p. 65)

One way of characterising the differences between these two positions is that de Beauvoir asks us to reinvent gender and Irigaray asks us to reinvent subjectivity, and thus revalue gender. According to Schor (1994), 'for Beauvoir the goal is for women to share fully in the privileges of the transcendent subject, for Irigaray the goal is for women to achieve subjectivity without' rejecting her sex (p. 47). Further, Irigaray,

like other key French feminists such as Cixous (1976), does not critique the either/or relationship between men and women per se.

Irigaray's critique of the process of saming is based on a frame of postmodernism and post-structuralism. The problem of subjectivity, for Irigaray, is not that 'one cannot be a woman and a subject' (Frye 1996, p. 993), but that what it means to be a subject (currently) is phallogentric. Her concern is the phallogentric denial of feminine subjectivity that supports the myth of a (one) universal male subject. Irigaray is more concerned that women are other of the same, than that she is other. That is, she is more concerned with the reduction of the feminine to the 'fetishized femininity as constructed by the male gaze' (Schutte 1991, p. 66).

For Irigaray, the male subject is positioned as "the same"<sup>22</sup> of Western discourse, an attribute that guarantees his continuity, permanence, and stability' (Schutte 1991, p. 68). For Irigaray, in order to realise a feminine subjectivity – that is, to recognise a pluralistic subjectivity – we must break the hegemony of phallogentric discourse (Schor 1994, p. 66).<sup>23</sup>

In respect to relational definition, saming highlights the homogenisation of the slave and why this is necessary in order to ensure the master's grasp on dominance. Recall that dualism looks to create a certain kind of centre who is master, and its necessary periphery who is slave. In order to construct a view of the world based on the master's dominance, as discussed in Chapter Four, the master must deny that the slave is an independent other and deny the importance of the slave's work. The master risks being de-centred if the importance of the slave's work (i.e. the dependency of the master's work on the slave's work) and the independence of the slave (which would mean not being a slave) were to be acknowledged. In this sense, difference and particularity become threats to the master's position.

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<sup>22</sup> That is, the male subject is positioned as the standard for sameness in Western discourse, as discussed in Chapter Three.

<sup>23</sup> Note that Irigaray's argument in particular is more complicated than is outlined here. Crudely, In *Speculum of the other* woman, Irigaray (1985) assumes that the significance of our bodies is such that we *cannot* all be men and therefore cannot give up our differences. And thus she takes it that de Beauvoir's approach to extend a monistic notion of subjectivity to those we call women is impossible.

Therefore, the master who desires absolute certainty in his domination denies his dependency on the slave for fear of breaking the illusion of centrality. Thus dualism constructs only one, allegedly universal, vision of subjectivity in which the subject/master need not acknowledge the work or independence of the slave from his own gaze. In this sense, the dualistic conception of subjectivity is essentially monistic. The master admits no equals – that is, no other visions of subjectivity which might demand that he give up his centrality.

### **5.3 Reimagined self/other**

Through hyper-separation, dualism creates the masculine and feminine as opposite poles. It then positions the masculine at the centre of Western discourse as the absolute subject. In order to centre masculinity, dualism positions the feminine at the periphery. Through backgrounding, the feminine as other is devalued in order to maintain a myth. The myth is that masculine subjectivity is an adequate conception of subjectivity. And finally, out of dualised identity women are policed into the occupation of a dangerous, essentially inferior and instrumentalised position relative to men. Femininity is defined by its role for the male subject as mother, wife, lover and daughter, rather than by the qualities of the subject. Thus relational definition constructs the feminine as a slave for the masculine, reducing the feminine in terms of, and terms of usefulness to, the masculine.

In Chapter Three I argued that we, as feminists, should question the separation of masculine and feminine concepts in Western discourse, and in Chapter Four I argued that we should reimagine masculine and feminine concepts outside of dualistic parameters. Through this, Chapter Three highlighted the extent to which feminist thought relies on concepts of sameness and the difficulty involved in disentangling feminist theory from dualism, while Chapter Four highlighted the need for feminists to reimagine rather than revalue dualised concepts. To that end, both Chapter Three and Chapter Four highlighted insufficient feminist approaches to the problems of dualism, as well as highlighting aspects of Western discourse that feminist thought must tackle. In this chapter, I have highlighted a further aspect of Western discourse that must be tackled by feminist thought – the definitional relationship between self and other.



I now want to draw out the reasons why feminist theory must take on this challenge of reimagining the self/other relationship. In this chapter, we have discussed a certain, dualistic way of thinking about self and other, as well as about masculine and feminine. If we extend the problems of reduction involved with this way of thinking to the problems of exclusion and devaluation already discussed in earlier chapters, then this discussion of relational definition highlights the need for feminists to reimagine how we communicate across difference.

The point that I have tried to make in this chapter is that when we think about self and other in terms of an A/not-A definitional relationship, we instrumentalise and homogenise the other. To instrumentalise and homogenise the other is to think about the other in terms of the self. If we think about relational definition more generally, not just in terms of men and women, we arrive at concerns over how we approach various other spheres of otherness. The concern is that from privileged positions we react to and communicate with the other in terms of the self – in ways that continue to centre the self – rather than in ways that might respect the other as independent from the self and valuable in their own right. That is, this concern is that the dualised conception of the self is a conception of the self as centre. The challenge that I take it has been highlighted for feminist thought, then, is the challenge to reimagine the relationship between self and other, so that the self is no longer centred, and so that feminist thought is not prone to the same kinds of exclusion, devaluation and reduction that it critiques. This is an integral step toward rewriting the kinds of exclusion within feminist thought discussed in Chapter Three and building new feminist solidarities. I will return to this discussion in the next chapter (Chapter Six).

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

I have now finished exploring the three principles of dualism that I outlined in Chapter Two. In the next chapter I will draw on the lessons learnt during my exploration of these three principles to describe a possible way forward for feminist theory that I think is most likely to defeat dualism.

In this chapter I discussed relational definition based on its two corollaries as outlined by Plumwood (1993) – instrumentalisation and homogenisation. Further, throughout this chapter I discussed how we think of women in Western discourse as being based in these two processes (kinds) of reduction that are a part of relational definition and the *A/not-A*-type relation. Thus I related both of these process of reduction – the reduction of the other to its relationship to the self and to only this relationship to the self – to the kinds of things feminists have been concerned with, with respect to dominant conceptions of subjectivity. More specifically, I related them to two separate concerns, well demonstrated by de Beauvoir and Irigaray, of othering and saming. Within this chapter, then, I have extended my critique of dualism and the feminist critique of women’s otherness in Western discourse.

## Chapter Six – A Way Forward

*[C]omplexity and diversity of experience need not undermine the possibility of theory itself; they undermine only the kind of theory that purports to speak for people it cannot. (Garry, p. 158)*

### 6.0 Introduction

In this thesis I have explored a range of feminist concerns with respect to women's oppression, and connected them all to three principles of dualistic thinking. I have also explored a number of feminist arguments that we can use against dualism. What we have also seen in previous chapters (most notably in Chapter Three) is that while it seems that feminist thought must challenge the harms caused by the dualised conception of sameness, it has seemingly relied on these dualised concepts of sameness. However, what we have also seen in previous chapters is that dualism has so permeated, and is so dominant within, Western discourse that the dualised versions of certain concepts and ideals are what we think of as *those concepts and ideals*. When we think of sameness, we think of dualised sameness.

In this chapter, I am going to clarify the position that I think feminism should take toward dualism in light of feminist theories' own reliance on dualised sameness. This position is that it is not sameness that we as feminists should reject, but only the dualised conception of sameness which is based in hyper-separation from, devaluation of, and reduction of difference. That is, I think that we as feminists should look to develop alternative, non-dualistic, conceptions of both sameness and difference where these two concepts are thought of in terms of inclusive disjuncts and as equally or similarly valued. From this, I think that we as feminists can develop new ways of relating to others based in mutuality rather than dominance.

In this last chapter I first want to highlight once again that not only do we think of dualised sameness when we think of sameness, we also think of dualised difference when we think of difference. Because dualism (all three principles of dualistic thinking discussed in this thesis) turns any distinction between two "things" into hierarchy, both of these "things" are constitutionally affected (affected with respect to how they are valued and defined) by this imposition of dualism. Thus I am going to highlight why the

solution of adopting difference over sameness as a way of defeating dualism is mistaken. And secondly, having made this point, I am going to describe the task ahead for feminism in defeating dualism as a project of reinventing discourse on non-dualistic conceptions of sameness and difference. To conclude this chapter and this thesis, I will then describe some promising ideas that feminists have already developed that we can begin to use as templates for developing new principles of reacting to distinction.

I will explain why the adoption of difference is mistaken by addressing three reasons why I think this is so. In this order, I am going to argue that the adoption of difference approach reaffirms the dominance of dualism, is based on a dualised conception of difference, and misses the point of the critique of dualism. I will then move on to describe the shape of the task ahead for feminist theory and the alternative ways of thinking about distinction – the loving eye, asymmetry, apprenticeship, wonder and generosity – that I think we can be helpful templates moving forward. While I will not claim to have solved the problems of dualism that I have discussed in this thesis, I hope, by the end of this chapter, to have made clear my suggestion for what the shape and direction of the collective and continuous feminist project moving on from dualism should look like.

### **6.1 The adoption of difference approach**

Before I move on to reiterate what the adoption of difference approach is and why it is mistaken I want to draw out the lessons that we have learnt in this thesis with respect to dualism. I am then going to point to some examples of the adoption of difference approach in action in feminist theory, so that I am not accused of making a “strawman” argument. I will then argue that this method of adopting difference is mistaken because it accepts dualistic ways of thinking rather than defeating them, and through doing so limits the possibility of feminist speech. I am going to show that this adoption of difference approach effectively entails the rejection of feminist theory. And then I will argue that defeating dualism does not entail rejecting feminist theory, but using it as a basis for the development of new feminist ways of thinking.

This thesis has broken the critique of dualism down into three parts: the critique of the process of hyper-separation through the discussion of problems of exclusion; the critique of the process of backgrounding through the discussion of problems of devaluation; and the critique of the process of relational definition through the discussion of problems of reduction. Thus the problems of dualism that have been discussed in this thesis are problems of exclusion, devaluation, and reduction.

Further, in this thesis I have highlighted that these problems of dualism are problems with how we think about, and how we react to and treat, distinction in Western discourse. With respect to hyper-separation, we have seen how dualism stretches distinction, interpreting concepts such as sameness and difference, universalism and particularism in terms of exclusive disjuncts. Further, through backgrounding we have seen how dualism devalues one side of this distinction in order to centre the other side, thus making some dualised concepts seem central to Western discourse and others seem insignificant. And finally, through analysis of relational definition we have seen how dualism presents the world from the perspective of the master and reduces difference to how the master sees it.

In this thesis we have observed feminist critiques of different ways of reacting to distinction that privilege one difference (often by not treating it like a difference at all), and oppress (by excluding, devaluing and reducing) the other. We have seen that when these differences are associated with certain social groups they privilege some social groups by oppressing others.

At first glance, it has seemed like these problems of exclusion, devaluation and reduction are problems with how we think about sameness (rather than problems with how we think about distinction). For example, in Chapter Three it seemed that the problems of exclusion that were discussed were problems that had to do with the fact that ideals of sameness are always partial (or always prone to being partial). Thus the problem seemed to be with thinking and talking in terms of sameness where there is none. As such, one way that feminists have tried to overcome the problems that we have discussed in this thesis as problems of dualism is by adopting difference.

The adoption of difference approach is the approach of revaluing ideals of difference (which are also associated with femininity), such as particularity, emotionality and dependency, as the basis for a new feminist discourse. We can compare this adoption of difference approach to what we discussed in Chapter One as difference feminism. Continuing with this comparison, we can think of sameness feminists as attempting to use ideals of sameness, such as universalism, impartiality and individuality, to liberate women. As we have seen in previous chapters, however, these ideals of sameness are not neutral, but geared toward (or at least prone to) privileging some and oppressing others. Thus, assuming that these ideals of sameness are antithetical to feminist aims, we might be tempted to adopt a difference feminist approach.

I have already discussed some of the most prominent examples of this adoption of difference approach, although I did not clearly mark them as such. The ethics of care approach to moral philosophy, which I discussed in Chapter Four, is often based in the assumption that feminine qualities of difference and care that have been devalued in Western discourse are as important as the moral masculine justice. Further, Daly's (1979, 1984)(Daly & Caputi 1989) project of meaning-making discussed in Chapter Two is a radical example of this sort of reversal/adoption of difference tactic.<sup>24</sup>

Now before I move on to discuss three reasons why I think the adoption of difference approach is mistaken – that it reaffirms the dominance of dualism, is based on a dualistic conception of difference and misses the point of the critique of dualism – I want to note that this approach of rejecting sameness is also a rejection of feminist theory. The best way to understand the adoption of difference approach is as the adoption of a sort of hyper-particularism and anti-theoretical position. This approach assumes that the oppressive conception of sameness that we arrive at under dualism is true of all conceptions of

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<sup>24</sup> My goal here is not to suggest that these approaches to the “maleness” of philosophy should be thrown out as completely useless to the feminist project. Firstly, I have clearly only provided very brief and sweeping descriptions of these approaches, which are much more complicated than represented here. Secondly, because these approaches are, in some way or another, based in revaluing aspects of discourse that dualism devalues, I think that they can be utilised as important strategies for deconstructing dualism. So I do not think that they are useless, only that they are incomplete by themselves, and that we should draw on them as challenges to the overvaluing of masculine ideals of sameness, but should not base a new feminist discourse on them alone.

sameness, and thus that we as feminists must reject the use of tools such as universalism, impartiality and category-making. As we will soon see, however, to reject these tools would be to limit feminist speech.

My conjecture then is that this response falls into a trap set by, rather than mounting a serious challenge to, dualism. Firstly, it assumes that dualism is the only way to think about theory, thus reaffirming its dominance. Secondly, it does not critically revalue difference, but is based on the dualised version of this concept. And further, it misses the point of the critique of dualism. That is, it fails to address what is actually being called for by those who have highlighted and opposed the oppressive effects of dualistic thinking: giving those who have been excluded, devalued and objectified the power to have their voices heard. I am now going to explain each of these three points in greater detail.

### **6.1.1 Reaffirming the dominance of dualism**

What I have looked to highlight in this thesis is the idea that dualistic conceptions of sameness and difference are only one version of these concepts – that we can replace them in Western discourse with new, non-dualistic conceptions which might be quite different from how they are now, and perhaps unrecognisable, but which will not be subject to the same sorts of oppressive patterns of thought.

The adoption of difference approach, however, assumes that the dualised versions of sameness and difference are *the* concepts of sameness and difference. If part of what is oppressive about dualism is its limiting of Western discourse to dualistic parameters then this adoption of difference approach does not successfully challenge dualism. Instead, it reaffirms that dualism and oppressive thinking are unavoidable features of thought. This adoption of difference approach then rejects sameness rather than dualism, and embraces difference as a new basis for communication.

If it is the aim of dualism to limit our imaginations to dualism, and if feminism faces problems of dualism (that is, if feminism itself faces problems that are dualistically inspired, such as the problem of difference),

then feminist theory must oppose these limitations of our imagination, and it is precisely in the attempt to overcome these limitations that feminism is based.

By this I do not mean that feminism should assume that the limitation of feminist theory to dualism should be overlooked. I mean that the limitation of feminist theory to dualism is a symptom of dualism, and that to oppose dualism is to challenge these limitations rather than accept them, *and* that rejecting feminist theory on the basis of them *would be* to accept them. Problems such as the problem of difference are created by dualism because their existence as problems serves the purpose of the form of privilege that feminists oppose and dualism maintains. They *are* problems, but problems caused by the logic we as feminists seek to deconstruct. Once this problem is deconstructed they will not be the same problems. Recognising them as problems and seeking to resolve them are necessary steps toward this deconstruction of dualism. Thus the problem of difference highlights the breadth of dualistic thought and the requirement for traditional feminist theory to do better than it has done.

### **6.1.2 Based on a dualised conception of difference**

Furthermore, the adoption of difference approach fails to address what was discussed in Chapter Four as the economy of dualism. Put simply, it fails to address the complex relationship that exists between concepts of sameness and difference. It instead uncritically adopts a devalued conception of difference (the partner of an overvalued conception of sameness) and revalues it superficially. It does not change or reorientate the relation between sameness and difference, but attempts to reverse it. I am suggesting here that while difference must be revalued in a new feminist discourse – and that while this new feminist discourse cannot be based on the dualised conception of sameness – this new feminist discourse must also not be based in a revalued but fundamentally dualised conception of difference. It must be based on a reconceived relationship between sameness and difference in which these two concepts are thought of in terms of inclusive disjuncts: that is, a relationship where sameness and difference are not hyper-separated. As discussed in Chapter Three, this might then enable us to arrive at a conception of sameness which does not collapse or bracket difference, but includes it.



As a result, the adoption of difference approach starts to look a lot like what Plumwood (1993) has described as the reversal syndrome: the uncritical reversal of the structure of dualised discourse (p. 457). Plumwood's best illustration of the reversal syndrome comes in the form of an excerpt from Memmi's account of counter mythologies.

Suddenly, exactly to the reverse of the colonialist accusation, the colonized, his culture, his country, everything that belongs to him, everything he represents, become perfectly positive elements ... We shall ultimately find ourselves before a counter mythology. The negative myth thrust on him by the colonizer is succeeded by a positive myth about himself suggested by the colonized, just as there would seem to be a positive myth of the proletariat opposed to a negative one. To hear the colonized and often his friends, everything is good, everything must be retained among his customs and traditions, his actions and plans; even the anachronous or disorderly, the immoral or mistaken... The colonized's self assertion, born out of a protest, continues to define itself in relation to it. In the midst of revolt, the colonized continues to think, feel and live against, and therefore in relation to the colonizer and colonization. (Memmi 1975, cited in Plumwood 1993, pp. 457-458)

The point is that although this counter mythology approach attempts to unsettle the superiority of the master identity, it is likely to be unsuccessful on two fronts. Firstly, it risks reaffirming what the master has devalued about the slave all along. And secondly, it continues to accept the world as it has been divided and defined by the master. Likewise, if sameness and difference are a dualistic concept pair then uncritically revaluing difference as counter mythology is likely to reaffirm what Western discourse has taken to be the inferiority of difference all along. That is, what Western discourse has taken to be the inability of difference-style communications to lead to meaningful discussions about the world, rather than getting caught up in the existence of mere, unrestrained differences amongst us.

This adoption of difference approach therefore falls into a trap of once again reaffirming that only in positions of sameness can we act politically and pay attention to what we have in common. As Plumwood (1993) notes, approaches such as this are based in 'the conclusion that the only escape route from binary

oppositions is the dissolution of identity, despite the numerous problems for political expression and action this creates' (p. 458).

The point is that the adoption of this sort of hyper-particularist, anti-theoretical position is the adoption of dualistically defined, traditionally devalued difference. But 'remedying the systematic inferiorisation of the underside of dualism calls for critical affirmation of what has been devalued and critical reclamation of the qualities and aspects of culture associated with it' (Plumwood 1993, p. 457). Having not challenged the dominance of dualism, this approach is itself based on dualised concepts.

### **6.1.3 Missing the point**

We might also accuse the adoption of difference approach of missing what is being called for in the critique of dualism. This approach is not just itself based in dualistic parameters, but also turns political problems caused by dualism into theoretical ones.

Here I am going to refer to Garry's (1992) critique of the sanitisation of the problem of difference under postmodernist approaches. Garry (1992) notes that 'postmodernists (among others) had turned the criticisms made by women of color against white feminists into a sanitized, abstract "problem of difference"' (p. 156). Indeed, if we recall our discussion of this problem of difference in Chapter Three, the call from women of colour and postcolonial feminists was that the differences among women must be accounted for within feminist theory and, as Garry (1992) puts it, 'not ... swept away as just another implication of relativism' (p. 157). Indeed, responding to the problem of difference with particularism 'takes away the power from the voices of women of color now that the dominant group of academics has decided that it is time for women of color to speak' (Garry 1992, p. 157).

Those who are concerned with dualism are aware of the importance of one's voice being heard. They are concerned with the expression of moral and political positions and problems. To suggest that the problem of difference points to the rejection of feminist theory and all that goes along with it, such as

important coalitions between women and the power to name systems of oppression, misses the point. Instead, as Scott (1988) notes,

We need theory that will let us think in terms of pluralities and diversities rather than of unities and universals. We need theory that will break the conceptual hold, at least, of those long traditions of (Western) philosophy that have systematically and repeatedly construed the world hierarchically in terms of masculine universals and feminine specificities. We need theory that will enable us to articulate alternative ways of thinking about (and thus acting upon) gender without either simply reversing the old hierarchies or confirming them. And we need theory that will be useful and relevant for political practice. (p. 33)

What is being called for is for difference to become a part of the structure of theory, so that we as feminists are capable of challenging the problems of dualism. Thus, what is being called for are new ways of thinking about theory, sameness and difference which are not antithetical to feminist political aims.

To the extent that the rejection approach misses the moral and political basis of critiques of dualism, we might wonder whether it is itself an approach based in privileged perspectives. According to Spelman (1990), it is only from the position of privilege that one can assume that if one's theories do not include difference, none can. That is, 'it's only from a position of privilege that it would seem that the end of focus on white middle-class women has to mean the end of feminism' (Spelman 1990, p. 172). Rather,

it is not a threat to the coherence of feminism to recognize the existence of many kinds of women, many genders. It may in fact help us to be more willing to uncover the battles among women over what "being a woman" means and about what "women's issues" are. (Spelman 1990, p. 176)

Thus this sort of anti-theoretical hyper-particularism is not as successful a challenge to dualism as it may at first seem. We as feminists do not need to reject sameness in light of problems such as the problem of difference; we need to think of sameness non-dualistically.

## **6.2 A reimagined and non-dualistic feminist discourse**

The approach of reinventing feminist theory assumes that feminist theory can survive the rejection of dualism, but that it will be based on very different conceptions of sameness and difference and how they interact. That is, this reinvention approach assumes that we can overcome the logic of domination that is dualism and replace it with something new. This is the task ahead for feminists, which I have argued for in this thesis: reinventing, rather than rejecting, feminist theory and Western discourse.

In this thesis I have tried to do for feminist theory what Plumwood attempted for philosophical logic. Recall that in 'The politics of reason', Plumwood's (1993) aim is to combat the feminist approach to the maleness of philosophical logic which takes it that logic must be rejected. Plumwood's critique of dualism is based on this assertion that logic is detachable from dualism, and that it is only the dualised conception of logic that is antithetical to the feminist project. To reject philosophical logic altogether would be to assume that logic can only ever be dualistic, and to feed dualism's dominance rather than challenging it.

To defeat dualism, feminists must reinvent feminist theory (given what we have seen is feminist theories' own reliance on dualistic principles) and Western discourse based on a way of thinking, or ways of thinking, about distinction that are not hierarchical, and which are based not in domination but in mutuality.

In Chapter Two I noted that, as has been the practice of this thesis, the best way of talking about dualism is through metaphor. At that time, I also noted that it would also be most appropriate to discuss alternatives to dualism through metaphor – especially because these are alternatives that stretch beyond our dualised imagination. For the rest of this thesis I am going to discuss some alternative metaphors that feminists have developed for how we, as feminists, should communicate across difference, all of which aim to treat differences among women respectfully and non-hierarchically. I am going to examine these feminist alternatives concerning how to think about distinction, asking how they might function as templates for new, non-dualistic foundations of feminist theory and feminist concepts which then might also be extended to philosophy and Western discourse at large.

The main alternatives that I am going to discuss are the loving eye, asymmetry and apprenticeship, and wonder and generosity. Having discussed a number of different principles of dualism in this thesis, I think that all of these feminist metaphors for the self/other relationship are compatible ways in which we might think about and react to those who are different from us. These alternative metaphors of the loving eye, asymmetry and apprenticeship, and wonder and generosity highlight how, through changing how we think about subjectivity and communication, we open up space to develop alternatives to dualism. However, I want to stress that the project of reinventing discourse away from the logic of domination, i.e. dualism, must be a collective project. Furthermore, the reinventing of Western discourse must be a continuing project. It cannot be left to the work of one theorist to alter the structures of thought and organisation. Indeed, feminists must collectively challenge the boundaries of dualism so that we can more clearly see and develop its alternatives. Reinventing Western discourse requires the restructuring of discourse and those areas of life based on Western discourse. Indeed, to challenge dualism is to challenge some of the basic organisational distinctions of Western society. Thus I do not claim to have defeated dualism in this thesis, or even to have outlined the ways of thinking that feminists should adopt to do so. I only claim to have outlined the kind of shape that I think this task ahead should have, as a sounding board for further feminist testing of boundaries.

### **6.2.1 The loving eye**

I have tried to lead us to the argument that if feminist theory is to defeat dualism, it must nurture alternative metaphors based on mutuality rather than domination. In this thesis I have argued that under dualism, sameness and difference are thought of in ways that are particularly prone to and/or based in maintaining ways of thinking in terms of social hierarchy. As we have seen in previous chapters, these ways of thinking are prone to becoming ways of thinking in terms of social hierarchy because they do not respect difference, but treat it as a threat to privilege which must be silenced.

If we take the self/other distinction as the canonical example of the importance of difference, how we react to it and how we communicate it, then feminist theory must reinvent itself to be based on new

metaphors for how the self encounters the other. As has already been pointed to in this chapter and in Chapter Five, one particularly apt way of thinking about the *dualistic* encounter between self and other is through the metaphor of the arrogant eye, where differences are only relevant insofar as they serve one's ends. In place of this arrogant eye, Frye (1983) calls for the adoption of the loving eye which does not centre the self in the encounter with the other.

The loving eye knows the independence of the other. It is the eye of a seer who knows that nature is indifferent. It is the eye of one who knows that to know the seen, one must consult something other than one's own will and interests and fears and imagination. One must look at the thing. (p. 75)

Indeed, feminist theory must be reinvented such that it is not based on what the self imagines of the other, but on decentring the self and recognising respect for the other.

### **6.2.2 Asymmetry and apprenticeship**

And yet to decentre the self in feminist theory is not as straightforward as it might seem. As we saw in Chapter Three, this does not just involve reversing the attitudes of the privileged toward the oppressed – say, replacing intolerance with tolerance. It involves displacing both the self and the privilege. Tolerance, for example, does not by itself displace privilege:

to tolerate someone is simply to let her have her say; I needn't listen to her, I needn't respond to her, I needn't engage with her in any way at all. (Spelman 1990, p. 182)

That is, when the privileged tolerates or "hears" the oppressed (for the self to hear the other), they need not surrender their dominant position. Indeed, these terms imply that the self is still encountering the other *from* a position of privilege by implying the power to bring in – to decide who is heard.

To tolerate leaves us the same; that is, it does not challenge the hierarchies between us which are maintained by how we treat difference. Tolerance does not require the subject to engage with and listen to the object. That is, tolerance does not always, by itself, entail self-reflection. In the same vein, mere

imagination of the other and the other's speech is also at risk of appropriating the other. To imagine the other is to continue to centre yourself. As noted by Spelman (1990),

[I]f I only rely on imagination to think about you and your world, I'll never come to know you and it. And because imagining who you are is really a much easier thing for me to do than find out who you are ... I may persist in making you an object simply of my imagination.  
(p. 179)

Instead of tolerating or imagining the other's speech, we must theorise difference interactively with the other – that is, in ways which change and de-centre the self who interacts – or else risk reaffirming hierarchical thinking.

In a similar vein, Young (1997) notes that acting as though there is symmetry between the "self" and the "other" does not respect the irreversibility of the subject position (p. 343). That is, according to Young (1997), the preferencing of symmetry in the relation between the self and other resubmits us to the reducibility of the other. Young (1997) criticises conceptions of reversibility between self and other which centre the "self" in the encounter with the "other". She notes that it is unlikely that such 'putting one's self into the place of the other' actually leads to an adequate understanding of the "other's" perspective, significantly because it is unlikely that the "self" can understand the perspective of the "other" (Young 1997, p. 343). Instead, reversibility privileges the "self's" interpretation and appropriation of the perspective of the "other", much like what Spelman described as imagination of the other (Young 1997, p. 343). By putting one's self in the place of the "other" we ignore the irreducibility of their perspective. What is preferable to reversibility is recognition of asymmetrical reciprocity between the "self" and the "other" (Young 1997, p. 346). In Young's (1997) account, moral respect lies in the acknowledgement of asymmetry at the beginning of the ethical encounter (p. 343).

Spelman (1990) went on to argue that apprenticeship is a better basis for feminist communication than tolerance and/or imagination (p. 178). Apprenticeship, as a basis for communication with the other, 'is at odds with having political, social and economic power over them' (Spelman 1990, p. 178). That is, with

apprenticeship we might be able to overcome social hierarchies. While apprenticeship *does* imply a power imbalance, it also entails a willingness to listen to the other on their own terms. Thus we might helpfully think about the self as communicating with the other through apprenticing itself to the other.

Apprenticeship is based on acquiring knowledge of an other who cannot be objectified. When we apprentice ourselves *to* the other and *to* difference, we are required to listen rather than hear and see rather than look. Lugones and Spelman (1983) therefore suggest that the only motive for white feminists to hear and see those whose outsider status has positioned them as insiders is the motive of friendship (p. 576). According to Lugones and Spelman (1983), approaching friendship entails a willingness to 'suffer [the] alienation and self-disruption' that must occur through such a task (p. 576). Imagination might be a necessary component of the ethical encounter, but is not enough for the building of political solidarities. Where imagination is the possession of something that never talks back, apprenticeship does not reduce the other's speech to the self's understanding. Apprenticeship strives for knowledge but does not appropriate it.

### **6.2.3 Wonder and generosity**

Irigaray's framework for a new relationship between men and women is based on co-partnership. Instead of placing male and female at the two opposite poles of a continuum, Irigaray (1985) imagines that each sex defines its own limits and subjectivity (its own language). Further, Irigaray (1991) notes that to 'arrive at the constitution of an ethics of sexual difference, we must ... return to what is for Descartes the first passion: wonder' (p. 171). This conception of subjectivity admits the consideration of the "other" as essentially different from the "self", allowing for the space within which attraction occurs but difference is maintained (La Caze 2002).

La Caze (2002) suggests that if we couple the passion of wonder with that of generosity we can safeguard against the overemphasis of difference (p. 14). Generosity is, according to La Caze (2002), the basis 'for respect' and involves gifting equal worth and respect to the "other" despite the unknowability of their



difference (pp. 13-14), whereas wonder unrestrained can lead us into regarding the “other” as alien or exotic (La Caze 2002, p. 14). As such, where wonder is followed by generosity we can secure the consideration of the equal worth of each subject *despite*, and perhaps based on their difference.

It is in this respect that these alternative ways of thinking about distinction and the other can still embark on the important feminist task of denouncing injustice. That is, these alternative, feminist conceptions of distinction are not just based in respecting the independency of the other from the self (rather than centring the self). They are also based in approaching and communicating with the other as someone worth approaching and communicating with, in the knowledge of their irreducible difference from the self.

In traditional conceptions of communicating across difference we think of other people as worthy of respect because they are like us, the same as us. For example, humans (perhaps only men, however) are worthy of respect because they are all, like me (if I was a man), rational. However, these alternative conceptions (as highlighted through these ideas of asymmetrical reciprocity, wonder and generosity) entail that we respect others not just because they are the same as us, but because we respect irreducible difference.

Thus from this position, injustice should be challenged on the basis of this respect for difference. Because of this respect for difference, denouncing difference can no longer take the form of “easy” universalism. As highlighted in Chapter Three, these kinds of universalisms, based on the self’s interpretation of injustice, do not respect what others have to say about their own experience. These are universalisms that centre the self and are insufficiently context-sensitive. For example, Western feminists think about the experience of third world women in terms of their own Western liberal values and context. These “easy” universalisms and forms of communication practised by Western discourse and traditional feminist theory are “easy” because they require no context sensitivity; as discussed in Chapter Four, they are certain because they rely on the illusion of centrality; and as discussed in Chapter Five, they are comfortable because they do not require those making such universal claims to decentre themselves.

Instead, “easy” forms of communication allow the speaker to project their experiences, values and views onto others.

As with Frye’s arrogant eye, then, differences in dualism are only relevant in so far as they serve the ends of those in positions to make such claims and be heard. Instead, making universal claims based on the loving rather than the arrogant eye, for example, will not be comfortable, but necessarily context-sensitive and decentred. Feminist theory must be based on these new, less comfortable and less certain conceptions of sameness based on alternative metaphors and patterns of thought.

### **6.3 Conclusion**

My primary goal in this chapter has been to return to and combine the challenges outlined for feminist thought in the previous chapters of this thesis, in order to highlight a possible way forward for feminist theory. In Chapter Three we discussed a way of thinking that causes problems of exclusion – hyper-separation – and a subsequent challenge for feminist thought to be reinvented on the basis of new, non-dualistic conceptions of sameness. Then, in Chapter Four, we outlined a challenge for feminist theory to reimagine rather than revalue masculine and feminine concepts. And finally, in Chapter Five, we arrived at a problem of definition in dualised Western discourse, where dualism phrases the definition of dualised concepts in terms of domination. Most importantly for feminist thought, this definitional relationship results in a conception of the self as centred.

In this chapter, I have returned to the challenges outlined in Chapters Three and Four by building on my assertion that the adoption of a difference approach does not adequately resolve dualistic problems of exclusion, but reaffirms dualistic parameters in Western discourse. Having shown that the critique of dualism lodged in this thesis points to the need to reimagine and reinvent feminist theory and Western discourse, I highlighted how addressing the challenge identified in Chapter Five to reimagine the self/other relation might enable feminist theory to build the kinds of feminist solidarities and coalitions that *can* resolve the sorts of dualistic problems discussed in this thesis.

Thus in this concluding chapter I have sought to describe an approach to adopting difference that, despite being initially attractive, I do not think will be a sufficient basis for feminist theory, and what I think is the most promising way forward for feminist theory. With regards to the former point, this is because I think that, firstly, this approach of adopting difference gives up more of feminist theory than what is necessary, and secondly because I have sought to describe the problems feminists must challenge as problems with dualism, not sameness. Thus because this adoption of difference approach is based on a dualised conception of difference, I do not think that it is capable of resolving the problems that have been highlighted in this thesis. It may, however, provide a fruitful basis for the deconstruction of the overvaluing of sameness in Western discourse. Wanting to highlight what I mean when I say that both sameness and difference must be reinvented as a basis for feminist theory, I then described alternative, non-dualistic metaphors for the self/other relationship. While my claim is not that the alternatives discussed in this chapter must be the alternatives that future feminist theory is to be based on, I think we can use them as examples of what this new basis might look like.

## Conclusion

This thesis has been about exploring a specific account of the critique of dualism, based on three ways of thinking about distinction that I think can be avoided. It has also been about describing how we can think about this more specific account of the critique of dualism in terms of various well-known, separate feminist critiques of philosophy.

In Chapter One I introduced the broader body of literature that is this critique of traditional philosophy by feminist philosophers. Over the course of this thesis this critique of traditional philosophy for its maleness and male bias has been discussed and separated in to terms of problems of exclusion (i.e. the exclusion of women from philosophy through the definition of personhood in ways that privilege masculine perspectives over feminine perspectives), problems of devaluation (i.e. the construction of masculinity as the centre, or the foreground, of Western discourse and the feminine as the periphery or background), and problems of reduction (i.e. the reduction of women to their relationships, and to only those relationships, to men).

In Chapter One I highlighted a double bind that we have observed several times throughout this thesis, between positions of sameness and positions of difference. In that first chapter, with respect to approaches to feminist theory, I argued that this double bind – a choice between accepting a male-determined world outlook that has traditionally excluded women or accepting a male-determined conception of femininity that has traditionally been devalued in Western discourse – is a feature of a failure to fully and correctly critique dualism. I therefore set myself the task of exploring this critique of dualism and extending it to the various concerns that feminists have held with respect to traditional philosophy.

It was in Chapter Two that I developed my own account of the critique of dualism, which I thought would be capable of meeting this task. In Chapter Two I outlined three principles of dualism – three ways of thinking about distinction that we observe in Western discourse – on which I structured my critique of

dualism in this thesis. Further, I made some initial comments in this chapter about what I take to be the consequences of the depth of dualism in Western discourse for the ways in which we as feminists can come to critique dualism and reimagine Western discourse. If Western discourse is based on dualism to the extent that what we think of as the basic conceptual categories of discourse are dualised (i.e. to the extent that we think of a dualised conception of sameness when we think of sameness), then part of what we as feminists must challenge is the dominance of dualism. That is, we must challenge our current limitations to dualism in an effort to begin to think in terms of mutuality rather than domination. If the path we as feminists are to take is one in which we must challenge these limitations to dualism, then we must collectively begin to stretch our imaginations beyond dualism and toward something new.

Chapter Three marked the beginning of my attempt to extend and apply what I identified as the three principles of dualism in Chapter Two to more feminist critiques of philosophy, and in greater depth. In Chapter Three I focused on the principle of hyper-separation – where we come to think about distinction in terms of exclusive disjuncts, and through doing so create false dichotomies. Here I noted how both traditional philosophy and feminist theory have been based in this way of thinking, through accepting a choice between hyper-separated concepts of sameness and difference. I noted two separate critiques, the feminist critique of abstraction and the problem of difference, as being based on the critique of the same problems of exclusion that arise from adopting positions of sameness. In addition, I noted that these critiques are critiques not just of positions of sameness, but of the hyper-separation of sameness and difference and thus of *dualistic* positions of sameness.

Moving on to Chapter Four, I addressed a form of hierarchy specifically well suited to justifying master/slave relationships. This form of hierarchy and second principle of dualism – backgrounding – takes two contributions to “a picture” and presents one as a foreground and the other as a background. Through this, the principle of backgrounding denies one contribution’s, the foreground’s, dependency on the other, the background, in an effort to make it seem more important. That is, in an effort to centralise.

In Chapter Four I extended my critique of this principle to two kinds of distinctions in Western discourse that feminists have recognised as having been warped by this type of hierarchy – justice/care and public/private. Here I focused my discussion on Gilligan’s critique of traditional moral philosophy and Pateman’s critique of traditional political philosophy in terms of this critique of foreground/background hierarchy. Here I outlined a challenge for feminist thought to not simply revalue what has been traditionally devalued, but to engage in a more thorough reinventing of the relevant concepts outside of dualistic parameters.

In Chapter Five I concluded my extension and exploration of my critique of dualism through discussing the third principle of dualism – relational definition – specifically with respect to how we in Western discourse think about women. I argued that through relational definition we think in terms of two processes of reduction. The first, instrumentalisation, explains why we have come to think about women predominately with respect to the relationships that they have with men, rather than as independent or intrinsically valuable in their own right. The second, homogenisation, explains why we tend to reduce the heterogeneity among women and treat them as if they are interchangeable. To extend this critique of women’s dualised identity as it has to do with relational definition, I then discussed de Beauvoir’s (2011) critique of women as other and Irigaray’s (1985) critique of women as other of the same. In this chapter I also identified an important challenge for feminist thought: to reimagine the self/other relationship in terms of mutuality rather than domination such that we can imagine a new basis for feminist thought.

Finally, in Chapter Six, I drew on the lessons learnt in Chapters Three, Four and Five in order to explain why I think that the approach of adopting difference is an inadequate challenge to dualism (because it is only a challenge of the dualised conception of sameness), and to describe the path ahead for feminists who wish to reinvent discourse based on the critique of dualism presented in this thesis. The lessons learnt in Chapters Three, Four and Five were not that it is through thinking in terms of sameness that dualism justifies men’s privilege and women’s oppression. That is, the problems of exclusion, devaluation

and reduction discussed in this thesis are not problems with dualised sameness, but with the choice between dualised sameness and dualised difference in dualised discourse. Thus, based on the critique of dualism in this thesis, the way forward for feminist theory is not through the adoption of difference (a dualised conception of difference incapable of articulating the demands of those theorists who have critiqued these problems of exclusion, devaluation and reduction), but through stretching our imagination beyond dualism to a new basis for feminist theory.

In Chapter Six I highlighted some examples of how we might begin to think in these new ways when we communicate across difference in feminist theory. Thus, in Chapter Six, I returned to my initial outline of the way forward for feminist theory, this time with evidence for my conclusion. To conclude, then, in this thesis I have asserted that the way forward for feminist theory is through the reimagination and reinvention of both sides of the basic conceptual categories of philosophy and Western discourse on non-dualistic terms.

The work of this thesis has been to describe a possible way forwards for feminist theory. Where this project leads is toward a collective, continuing and conscious feminist engagement with, and unthinking of, dualism. As I noted early on in this thesis, there are a number of lines of research – both feminist and non-feminist – which could be connected to this critique of dualism that I have not had the opportunity to investigate. The most obvious of these omissions, I think, have been the important feminist concerns over the aptness of the sex/gender distinction in feminist thought and on the relevancy of the mind/body distinction to this critique of dualism. I hope that this thesis, while I have not had time to do it myself here, can contribute to and be extended to these other areas of feminist inquiry – but also to the advancement of other social justice movements that share an interest in this critique of dualism.

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