

A Curious Case of Feminist Logic

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Feminist logic

- ▶ *feminist logic* program was established by Val Plumwood (“The Politics of Reason: Towards a Feminist Logic”, 1993)
- ▶ recent surge of interest in the area (Eckert and Donahue 2020; Russell 2020; Restović 2023; Cook 2023; Ferguson 2023; Ficara 2024; Saint-Croix and Cook 2024; Fairbank *forthcoming* etc.)
- ▶ a relatively new field of research:
 - ▶ the main question is foundational:
What (if anything) is “feminist logic”?

In this talk....

- ▶ I explore three proposed meanings of “feminist logic”
- ▶ I claim that the original Plumwood’s definition is non-demanding regarding the context of discovery, i.e., that a logic can be *feminist* only in virtue of the context of justification
- ▶ as an example, I take my own work in feminist logic

The original meaning of “feminist logic”

- ▶ Plumwood (1993): **feminist logic is a logic that disables oppressive differentiation**
- ▶ it deals primarily with *logical negation* (because that's how we express difference)
- ▶ her position is founded on a (today well-trodden) feminist critique of “dualisms” and dualistic thinking

Dualisms

Pairs of binary conceptual contrasts characteristic of Western (philosophical) thought.

E.g.: *reason/emotion, mind/body, culture/nature, production/reproduction, universal/particular, subject/object, male/female...*

Properties of dualisms:

1. one term is considered inferior (superior)
2. inferior (superior) terms across different dualisms are associated with (map onto) each other
3. inferior(ized) terms are associated with the term *female* (as opposed to *male*)

Mapping: reason—mind—culture—subject (active)—*male*
emotion—body—nature—object (passive)—*female*

Plumwood's critique of classical logic

- ▶ dualisms rest on classical negation (mind = \neg body)
 - i.e. they are mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive
 - i.e. in the opposition of (classical) contradiction
- ▶ classical negation invites oppressive properties (but **only when** it is used to model notions found in dualisms)
 1. relational definition (incorporation)
 - ▶ woman defined in relation to man (and not vice versa)
 2. homogenization (stereotyping)
 - ▶ no further distinctions inside the *non-male* category
 3. radical exclusion (hyperseparation)
 - ▶ if terms are brought together, the system collapses
- ▶ feminist logic is a logic that disables oppressive differentiation

Two additional proposed meanings of “feminist logic”

1. logic guided by feminist values (Russell 2024; Saint-Croix and Cook 2024)
 2. logic developed from a feminist standpoint (Cook 2023)
- ▶ both parallel two influential approaches in feminist philosophy of *science*, which radically depart from traditional (scientific) epistemology

Feminist science as science guided by feminist values

Scientific inquiry:

1. **is not** free from political, cultural and social values
 - ▶ these values influence the formation/selection of problems and hypotheses
 - ▶ theories are underdetermined by data, so we fill the gap with values (Longino 1990)
2. **should not** be value-free
 - ▶ we should choose the right values
 - ▶ we shouldn't do so dogmatically or exhibit wishful thinking (Anderson 2004)

Feminist science as science developed from a feminist standpoint

1. all knowledge is (socially, historically, and culturally) **situated**:
by someone and *for* someone
2. socially oppressed groups have **epistemic privilege** in some domains of inquiry, which is afforded to them by their **lived experiences**
3. epistemic privilege is not automatically given by one's identity, but has to be **achieved** though (group) critical reflection

Differences and similarities

Similarities:

- ▶ all knowledge is socially situated (Crasnow 2020)
- ▶ there no such thing as a “view from nowhere”
- ▶ don't denounce objectivity, but offer a *reform* of the notion

The most salient difference:

- ▶ science guided by values: no group has epistemic advantage (although different perspectives help objectivity)
- e.g. Longino (1993): not a view from nowhere nor a view from somewhere, but a view from “many wheres”

But does this apply to logic as well?

Unsurprisingly, it all depends on how one views logic.

Opponents of “feminist logic”:

- ▶ logic is not like other scientific disciplines
- ▶ logic is abstract (topic-independent), a priori, singular, independent of reasoners
- ▶ “feminist logic” is a non-sensical term

Proponents of “feminist logic”:

- ▶ logic **is** like other disciplines
- i.e. anti-exceptionalism about logic: logic is continuous with science, it can change (Hjortland 2017)
- ▶ values influence knowledge in other areas – and logic is not exceptional (Saint-Croix and Cook 2024)
- ▶ members of some groups are in a better position to see the (logical) workings of dualisms (Cook 2023)

Values, standpoints, and the context of discovery

Both approaches put feminist prerequisites on the context of discovery:

1. feminist values: the **entire** process of inquiry should be guided by feminist values
2. feminist standpoint: some social locations are better **starting-points** for research

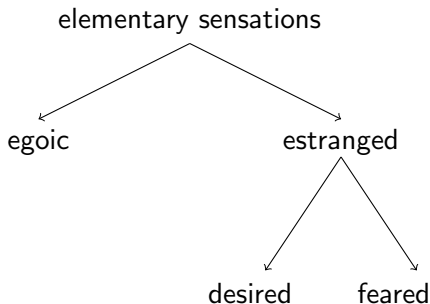
Both approaches put feminist prerequisites on the context of justification:

1. Longino (1993): blames standpoint theory for not dealing enough with the context of justification
2. Harding (1993): *a rigorous 'logic of discovery'* is necessary, but not sufficient

My own work in feminist logic – the context of discovery

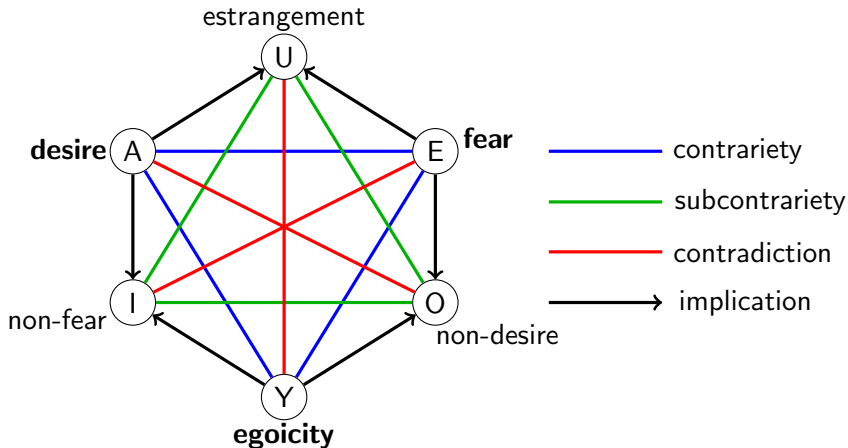
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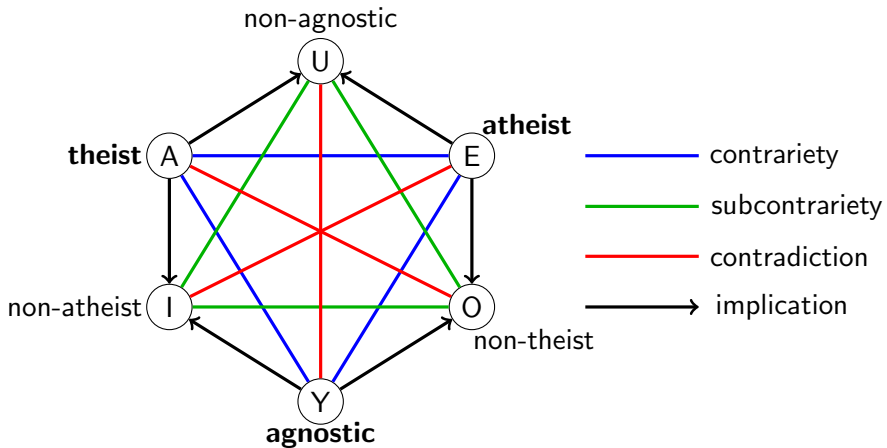
- ▶ I was working on a formal representation of L.E.J. Brouwer's "theory of the exodus of consciousness"
- ▶ all conscious material is built from **elementary sensations**, which are either **egoic** (not separated from the subject) or **estranged**
- ▶ estranged sensations are either **desired** or **feared**
- ▶ **complex sensations**: a mixture of elementary sensations
i.e. (desire, fear, egoicity, and estrangement can come in degrees)



- ▶ trichotomy: **egoicity/desire/fear**
- ▶ egoicity $\leftrightarrow \neg$ estrangement
- ▶ estrangement \leftrightarrow (desire \vee fear)
- ▶ egoicity \leftrightarrow (\neg desire \wedge \neg fear)
- ▶ desire $\rightarrow \neg$ fear

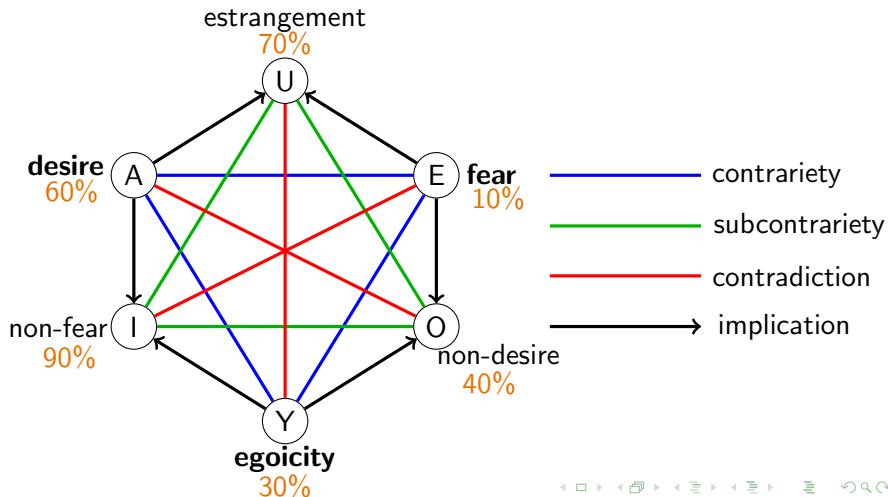
- ▶ logically describing trichotomies:
the (classical) logical hexagon
- ▶ it makes explicit all the logical relations





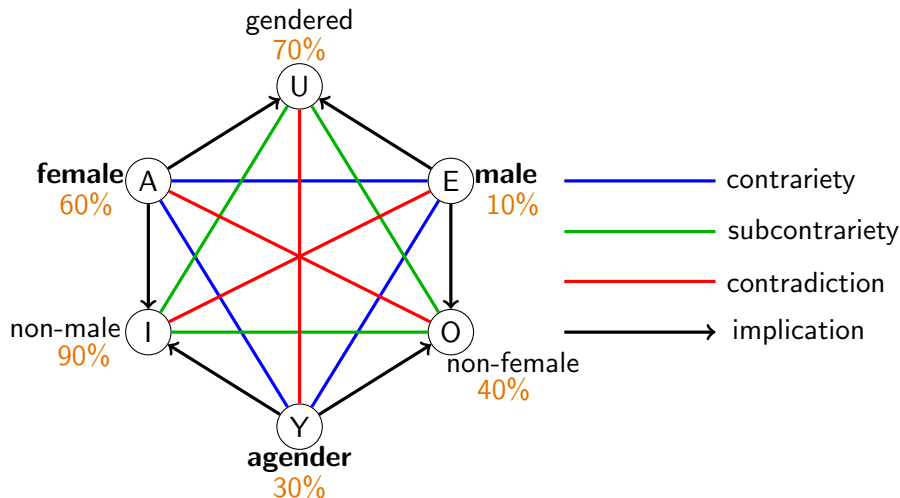
Complex sensations in Brouwer's theory

- ▶ complex sensation: partly egoic, partly desired, partly feared
- ▶ egoicity + desire + fear = 100% **(like a pie-chart)**
- ▶ when properties behave like this: **fuzzy logical hexagon**



What I discovered

- ▶ I was curious about other meaningful conceptual decorations of the fuzzy logical hexagon, and I tried this decoration:



After the discovery of the “Fuzzy Gender Hexagon”

- ▶ I found out about Plumwood’s work
- ▶ I found out that the opposition of **fuzzy contrariety** in the FGH fits her criteria for a feminist logic (a feminist differentiation between the gender categories):
 1. no relational definition
 - ▶ percentage of femaleness cannot be defined by the percentage of maleness
 2. no radical exclusion
 - ▶ femaleness and maleness can mix
 3. no homogenization
 - ▶ many different ways of being non-male
- ▶ Plumwood’s work provided a **(feminist) context of justification**

How the discovery had (not) come about

- ▶ my discovery was fairly accidental
1. I wasn't (consciously) guided by feminist values
 - ▶ unless a recognition of non-traditional gender identities constitutes a feminist value
 - ▶ Plumwood, on the other hand, **was** (it seems) guided by feminist values – the idea that we should (logically) dismantle rigid conceptual dualisms (Russell 2024)
 2. I didn't occupy a feminist standpoint
 - ▶ my idea did not come from a critical reflection/discussions on gender (achievement thesis)
 - ▶ I wasn't aware of the literature (achievement thesis)
 - ▶ I don't have lived experience of having a non-traditional gender identity (epistemic privilege thesis)

What all this shows

- i. a logic can be feminist (in Plumwood's sense) and have a non-feminist context of discovery
 - ii. all we may need is that there be feminist justification
-
- ▶ somewhat ironically, this is similar to the traditionalist view about the context of discovery – it doesn't matter
 - ▶ in my view: **it does not have to matter**

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