

Logic as a Feminist Nightmare

Ivan Restović
Institute of Philosophy, Zagreb
irestovic@ifzg.hr

The 6th International Congress of the Portuguese Philosophical Society
(Lisbon, 1–3 September 2025)



Funded by
the European Union
NextGenerationEU



HRZZ
Croatian Science
Foundation

Thesis of the talk

The traditional account of logic is opposed to insights from feminist philosophy, so we need to adopt logical anti-exceptionalism (also) for feminist reasons.

Overview of the talk

1. Feminist (philosophy of) logic
2. Logical anti-exceptionalism
3. Feminist logic + logical anti-exceptionalism

Feminist (philosophy of) logic

“Feminist logic” – a new field of research

- since 2020: a surge of interest in *feminist logic* (a lot of papers, workshops, a special issue of *Synthese*...)
- the most recent feminist intervention in philosophy (we already have “feminist ethics”, “feminist metaphysics”, “feminist epistemology”...)
- two seminal works:
 - Andrea Nye (1990): *Words of Power: A Feminist Reading of the History of Logic*
 - Val Plumwood (1993): “The Politics of Reason: Towards a Feminist Logic”

Andrea Nye's 1990 book

- angle of **literary studies** (not analytic philosophy)
- Nye provides historical readings of works by Plato, Aristotle, Abelard, Ockham, Frege...
(puts their work in cultural and historical context)
- a radical stance: logic is a tool of oppression
- we should replace logic by “reading”
(a technical term from literary studies)

Nye's radical view – the famous quote

*“Desperate, lonely, cut off from the human community which in many cases has ceased to exist, under the sentence of violent death, wracked by desires for intimacy they do not know how to fulfil, at the same time tormented by the presence of women, **men turn to logic.**”*

Nye's problem with logic

- logic is removed from lived experience
- logic abstracts away from historical and personal context
- logic claims to provide eternal and necessary truths
- mathematical logic is even more abstract and artificial:
“an idiom from everything human has been erased”
- there can be no “feminist logic”

Val Plumwood (1993) – the founder of “feminist logic”

- Plumwood calls Nye's approach “part of the **aggressive contemporary movement of the literary paradigm** against other disciplines, especially philosophy”
- criticizes Nye for misrepresenting logic: Nye did not take into account the **plurality of logics**
- **the problem lies only in *classical logic***

Plumwood's critique of classical logic

- in logic, we express difference by **negation**
- classical negation is a **too rigid** way to express difference
- problems: *excluded middle*, *ex falso*
- it contributes to “dualistic thinking” (all-or-nothing)

- a **feminist logic** = a logic with appropriate negation
- (Plumwood's proposal: relevant logic)

Some other accounts of feminist logic

1. the use logical tools for feminist ends (e.g., to uncover biases in arguments) (Russell 2024)
2. logic done by feminists (Fairbank 202x, cf. Longino 1987)
3. formal systems developed from a feminist standpoint (Cook 2023)
4. logical analysis of feminist topics (gender identity, social hierarchies...) (Russell 2024)

Logical anti-exceptionalism

Anti-exceptionalism: a new trend in philosophy of logic

- the most famous quote (Hjortland 2017):

Logic isn't special. Its theories are continuous with science; its method continuous with scientific method. Logic isn't a priori, nor are its truths analytic truths. Logical theories are revisable, and if they are revised, they are revised on the same grounds as scientific theories.

Continuing the quote (Hjortland 2017)

These are the tenets of anti-exceptionalism about logical theories, a position that has its most famous proponent in Quine (1951). In recent years, broadly anti-exceptionalist positions have been defended by Maddy, Russell, and Williamson.

Two approaches to anti-exceptionalism

1. **continuity approach** (Hjortland 2017)
 - logic is not special because it's like other sciences
 - logical theories are chosen *abductively*
 - criteria for rational theory choice: simplicity, fruitfulness, adequacy to the data, unifying power...
2. **tradition rejection approach** (Martin & Hjortland 2022)
 - logic is not special because it doesn't have *special (traditional) properties*
 - anti-exceptionalism: to deny *at least one* traditional property of logic (according to Martin and Hjortland 2022)

Special properties of logic (Martin & Hjortland 2022, 2024)

1. generality
 2. formality
 3. foundationality
 4. apriority
 5. analyticity
 6. necessity
 7. normativity
 8. topic-neutrality
 9. self-evidence
 10. non-inferentiality
- some of them stand/fall together (M&H: “clusters”)
 - a belief that logic has all the special properties:
 “full-blooded logical exceptionalism” (Ferrari & Carrara 2025)

Feminist logic + logical anti-exceptionalism

Connecting feminist logic and logical anti-exceptionalism

- **Russell** (2024): some accounts of feminist logic require anti-exceptionalism
- **Fairbank** (202x), **Mangraviti** (2025): anti-exceptionalism is not necessary for feminist logic
- **Saint-Croix & Cook** (2024): Plumwood's revisionist account of classical logic requires anti-exceptionalism
- (they all explore how different accounts of feminist logic work with anti-exceptionalism)

My approach is different (I think)

- I **don't** look for an account of feminist logic (just one among many)
- I look for a feminist account of logic (as a discipline)
- my claim: **a feminist account of logic should reject almost all the special properties of logic**, given feminist insights in metaphysics and epistemology

Feminist insights in metaphysics

Feminist research in metaphysics:

- skepticism about the **fundamental** and **natural**
 - skepticism about connecting the fundamental with **self-evident**
 - skepticism about connecting the natural with **necessary** and **desirable**
- (because those in power often **falsely proclaim** that something is fundamental/natural, but it is a **social construct**)

Beauvoir: “One is not born but rather becomes a woman.”

A feminist metaphysics

e.g. Haslanger (2000): “*aporematic metaphysics*”:

- metaphysics is **not a foundational** project
- metaphysics has **no authority** over other fields
- **not** a quest for **self-evident** premises
- it is “immanent metaphysics”: responds to **current** practical and theoretical demands
- questions and answers are a “**parochial** matter”: depend on cultural and historical **context** (supports **fallibilism** and **holism**)

Rejecting special properties of logic (metaphysics)

- **foundationality, non-inferentiality, apriority** (not a foundational project)
- **necessity, analyticity** (no authority, fallible)
- **self-evidence** (not a quest for self-evident premises)
- **generality, topic-neutrality, formality** (parochial, current demands)
- **normativity** stays (feminist theory is normative)

Feminist insights in epistemology

Feminist research in epistemology:

- rejecting the traditional notion of objectivity as a **“god trick of seeing everything from nowhere”** (Haraway 1988)
- **all knowledge is** historically, socially, and culturally **situated** (absence of perspective is not possible)
- **absence of ideology** (values, agendas) **is not possible**
- (theories are underdetermined by data, so we fill the gap with values (Longino 1990))

Feminist epistemologies

e.g. Harding (1991), Longino (2001), Anderson (2004)

- **embracing plurality** of perspectives
- (making place for marginalized perspectives)
- **incorporating** (political, social) **values**
- **don't look for a single** grand (unifying) **theory**

Rejecting special properties of logic (epistemology)

- **generality, topic-neutrality, formality, foundationality** (no grand theory, knowledge is situated)
- **necessity, apriority, self-evidence** (no “view from nowhere”)
- **non-inferentiality, analyticity** (input of values)
- **normativity** stays (feminist theory is normative)

Nye was (kind of) right

- Nye misrepresented logic
- (took *pars pro toto*: talked only about the traditional, full-blooded exceptionalist account)
- however, she was right that the **traditional account of logic is anti-feminist**

A contemporary example of a non-traditionalist account

e.g. logic without special properties: **Priest's** (2014, 2016)
anti-exceptionalist (abductivist) approach

- criteria for rational theory choice: adequacy to the data, simplicity, consistency, explanatory power, avoidance of *ad hoc* elements
- says **logic is a “social science”** (a social construct)
- (the object of research may change with the theory)
- **allows for logical pluralism** (even though he is a monist)

However:

- **doesn't incorporate values** in his criteria of theory choice
(needs more feminist intervention)

This talk is part of research projects *Feminist philosophy of formal logic* (acronym: FFFL) and *Intentionality and Modes of Existence* (acronym: IMEX). FFFL project is reviewed by the Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Croatia and financed through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan by the European Union – NextGenerationEU. IMEX project is financed by the Croatian Science Foundation.

Literature i

- Anderson, Elizabeth (2004). "Uses of Value Judgments in Science: A General Argument, with Lessons from a Case Study of Feminist Research on Divorce", *Hypatia* 19(1), 1–24.
- Cook, Roy T. (2023). "Perspectival Logical Pluralism", *Res Philosophica* 100(2), 171–202.
- Fairbank, Viviane (202x). "What is feminist philosophy of logic? Revisiting the feminist critique of reason". In *Oxford Handbook to the philosophy of logic*, Oxford University Press. Forthcoming.
- Ferrari, Filippo & Carrara, Massimiliano (2025). *Logic and Science*, Cambridge.
- Haraway, Donna (1988). "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective", *Feminist Studies* 14(3), 575–599.
- Harding, Sandra (1991). *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking form Women's Lives*, Cornell University Press

Literature ii

- Haslanger, Sally (2000). "Feminism in Metaphysics: Negotiating the Natural". In Fricker, M. & Hornsby, J. (Eds.): *The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy* (pp. 107-126.), Cambridge University Press.
- Hjortland, Ole T. (2017). "Anti-exceptionalism about logic", *Philosophical Studies* 174(3), 631–658.
- Longino, Helen (1990). *Science as Social Knowledge: Values and Objectivity in Scientific Inquiry*, Princeton University Press.
- Longino, Helen (2001). *The Fate of Knowledge*, Princeton University Press.
- Mangraviti, Franci (2025). "Feminist Logic, Broadly Speaking", *Synthese* 206(2).

Literature iii

Martin, Ben & Hjortland, Ole T. (2022). "Anti-exceptionalism about logic as tradition rejection", *Synthese* 200(2).

Martin, Ben & Hjortland, Ole T. (2024). "Anti-Exceptionalism about Logic (Part I): From Naturalism to Anti-Exceptionalism", *Philosophy Compass* 19(8).

Nye, Andrea (1990). *Words of Power: A Feminist Reading of the History of Logic*, Routledge.

Plumwood, Val (1993). "The Politics of Reason: Towards a Feminist Logic", *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 71(4), 436–462.

Priest, Graham (2014). "Revising Logic", In Rush, P (Ed.): *The Metaphysics of Logic* (pp. 211-223), Cambridge University Press.

Literature iv

- Priest, Graham (2016). "Logical Disputes and the A Priori", *Logique & Analyse* 236, 347-36.
- Russell, Gillian (2024). "From Anti-exceptionalism to Feminist Logic", *Hypatia* 39(1), 79-96.
- Saint-Croix, Catharine & Cook, Roy T. (2024). "(What) Is Feminist Logic? (What) Do We Want It To Be?", *History and Philosophy of Logic* 45(1), 20-45.