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Logic as a feminist nightmare

A new field of study has emerged within philosophy, namely, *feminist (philosophy of) logic*. The research program was initiated in 1993 in a seminal paper by Val Plumwood. The last few years have seen a considerable surge in literature on the subject.

In a nutshell, proponents of feminist logic argue that logic, just like any other discipline within philosophy, is susceptible to feminist critique. Now, this inevitably brings to mind another recent trend, that of *anti-exceptionalism* about logic, which is encapsulated in the oft-cited claim that logic is not special, but “continuous with science” (Hjortland 2017). Thus, feminist logic is being recognized as a continuation of anti-exceptionalist sentiment, but with a further twist (Russell 2024; Saint-Croix & Cook 2024).

The feminist logic program today is decisively *pro-logic oriented* (and this is perhaps why the field is most commonly called ‘feminist logic’, as opposed to ‘feminist *philosophy of logic*’). This logic-friendly approach dates back to Plumwood (1993), who sought to pave the way “towards a feminist logic”. However, her seminal paper was written as a response to *anti-logic feminism*, espoused by Andrea Nye (1990). Nye claimed that logic is by its very nature antithetical to the feminist cause. For her, it is a male-oriented and male-centered enterprise, ultimately oppressive towards women and other marginalized individuals and groups. Plumwood, on the other hand, was only against *classical logic*, accusing it of an overly rigid binarism that curtails the myriad possible ways of being and thinking. Thus, for both Plumwood and most contemporary proponents of feminist logic, the way forward is *logical pluralism* (and thus *more logic*).

In this talk, I want to reassess some of Nye’s (1990) concerns. I argue that, if we use the framing of anti-exceptionalism provided by Martin and Hjortland (2022), logic can be construed as a *feminist nightmare*. Hjortland and Martin describe anti-exceptionalism about logic as the rejection – or at least significant reform – of certain properties traditionally ascribed to it, such as normativity, apriority, and topic-neutrality. Now, if one takes a look at the full list of traits traditionally assigned to logic, they end up being everything that feminist philosophy is (customarily) opposed to. Logic is said to be universal, whereas feminist philosophy values particularity. Logic is topic-neutral, while feminist approaches embrace context-sensitivity. Logic is formal, whereas feminism is content-oriented. And so on. It almost seems as if logic were designed to counter feminism (or vice versa).

Now, all this *must be* an exaggeration, as can be inferred from testimonies of many women (and feminist) logicians who find that the theory and practice of logic has a great emancipatory potential (e.g., Ayim 1995; Uckelman *forthcoming*). And all this is, according to the testimonies, notwithstanding the possible (and actual!) misuses of logic, such as weaponization of logic for

various kinds of epistemic injustice; logic, to repeat, is a tool like any other, so no wonder it can also be used for bad. Nevertheless, I want to question the prevailing optimism within the feminist logic program and argue that certain anti-logic feminist concerns – such as accusations of excessive abstraction and mathematization – warrant further exploration.

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