If Hume has been hailed as a friend of feminists, Kant has often been declared the enemy. Feminists have rejected his rationalist ethics as the antithesis of feminine caring. They have charged his “unity of apperception” with being a prototype for illegitimate masculine authority and Western hubris. They have condemned “pure” reason as the sovereignty of “rational man” over feminine connectiveness. Where Hume emphasized the sociability of custom and habit, Kant idealized a delusive individualism that severs human ties. Where Hume approved feeling as the basis of morality, Kant made emotion the downfall of virtue.

In Cognition and Eros, Robin Schott traced a history from Plato to Kant of the idea that understanding and feeling are in opposition and that women, identified with eros, are a threat to knowledge. Such views, she charged, are typical of philosophy. They support and further male dominance. She described her own difficulty in accepting this judgment. Brought up in an analytic tradition with roots in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century rationalism, “schooled in the philosophical tradition of objectivity,” it was hard for her to conclude that universal forms of knowledge were not needed. At the same time, as a woman, she felt alienated, not capable of the detachment from feeling and relation that Kantian reason seemed to require. She had to “dirty” her hands in social history, she said, before she could free herself from the illusion of rational autonomy imposed on her by philosophical training. She had to go back in history for “original ascetic impulses” that distanced reason from physical desire. She had to combine these with a modern “flight from the body” blamed on “commodity capitalism” (Cognition and Eros, pp. ix–x). Philosophy, Schott concluded, is not “pure” reason. It has historical content. Seemingly neutral metaphysics and epistemology reflect and support oppressive social relations. Philosophy in
its Kantian and neo-Kantian forms promotes capitalist alienation and validates women’s exclusion from higher education, politics, and the work force.

Other feminists were in agreement, citing Kant as a primary example of alienated masculinity and fraudulent universality. Kristen Waters, in “Women in Kantian Ethics” (in Bar On (ed.), Modern Engendering), found a failure of universality both in Kant’s early precritical aesthetics where women are treated as objects rather than as human ends and in his late Anthropology where women’s potential is limited to their role in reproduction. Problems with gender, said Jean Rumsey, infect Kant’s moral agency (“Revisions of Agency in Kant’s Moral Theory” in Schott (ed.), Feminist Interpretations of Immanuel Kant). Instead of a balanced view of human action, he takes his idea of agency from a narrow group of men of his own time, class, and nationality, men who are self-willed and grasping, with a drive to independence and mastery and a fear of affiliation and intimacy.

But feminist critics could also show considerable ambivalence when contemplating a wholesale rejection of Kantian themes. Other essays in the Bar On and Schott collections gave Kant mixed reviews. Adrian Piper (“Xenophobia and Kantian Rationalism” in Feminist Interpretations) argued that if feminists adopted Strawson’s narrow interpretation of Kant’s transcendental necessity, Kant’s unity of apperception could help to explain racism and show how an expanded conception of “man” might be synthesized from wider experience. Holly Wilson, “Rethinking Kant from the Perspective of Ecofeminism,” found something to admire in the third critique’s recognition of vitality and purpose (in Schott (ed.), Feminist Interpretations). Also in Schott’s collection, Marcia Moen found “Feminist Themes in Unlikely Places,” namely in Kant’s Critique of Judgment. Although Kant was too much committed to the “atomic individual” fully to conceptualize a feminine “relational self,” his last critique, she said, linked knowing with feeling and acting. As a consequence, he was able to make steps in a feminist direction. Although he was “blocked” by limits inherent in the oppositional categories he inherited from philosophical tradition, he provided glimpses of a new kind of “cultural participant” as alternative to an autonomous rational knower. Especially promising if not decisive, said Moen, was Kant’s reference to the “communicability” of aesthetic pleasure.

Some who explicitly compared Hume and Kant did not single-mindedly award the feminist laurel to Hume. Marcia Brown (“Kantian Ethics and Claims of Detachment” in Feminist Interpretations) argued that although Kant
was hampered by his masculinity and downgraded emotion as a component in morality, his emphasis on detachment and universality might in the end be more conducive to social change than the socially conservative custom and habit highlighted by Hume. Nancy Tuana in *Woman and the History of Philosophy* was critical of Kant, but found Hume not much better. As she put it, her “initial prediction that women would fare better with a moral theory like that of Hume, which incorporates emotion, than with one like Kant’s, which excludes emotion from moral obligation, was erroneous. Despite significant differences in moral theory, Kant and Hume hold surprisingly similar positions concerning woman’s moral capabilities” (*Woman and the History of Philosophy*, p. 81). The difference as far as women are concerned, said Tuana, is one of degree: Kant holds that women are incapable of moral agency, Hume that they are less capable.

Tuana in her introduction laid out some of the maxims that should guide feminist judgments of this sort. A feminist philosopher, she said, should read philosophy “like a woman.” She should be conscious of her sex. She should focus on views expressed about her sex. She should be aware of the gender identity of the philosopher she reads and how gender affects his views. She should be ready to suggest alternate perspectives that come out of women’s experiences. Guided by such maxims, said Tuana, a woman reader of philosophy can critically assess approaches to ethics by asking: Does the philosopher in question describe women as possible moral agents? Does he value traits traditionally associated with masculinity? Does he see women as different morally? Does he describe morality as control of or exclusion of traits traditionally associated with femininity? By those standards, said Tuana, neither Kant nor Hume can be approved.

Tuana’s “reading like a woman” was, of course, heterodox in analytic circles where material relating to social prejudice or politics is typically edited out as irrelevant. A philosophical reading is supposed to be an intellectual reading, a reading of the mind that has nothing to do with the sex of a reader anymore than it has to do with any fact about bodies or physical circumstance. Nor, on this view, should philosophical critique be based on social utility. Philosophical approval should depend on clarity of definition, validity of argument, and consistency of principles, not on whether a theory advances the interests of the reader or of any social group to which she or he belongs. As noted by Schott, this ideal of objective dispassionate critique has a long pedigree going back to Descartes and Kant, and before them to Plato and Aristotle. It shaped twentieth-century movements of positivism.
and linguistic analysis. It continues to influence contemporary logical semantics and naturalized epistemology.

To many philosophers working within the profession it makes no sense to speak as Tuana did of experience as sexed or of gender generating different readings or evaluations of epistemology or metaphysics. Sense data are experienced by men and women. Men and women speak a common language. Logic is the same for men and women. A focus on women’s issues or any other social issues when reading philosophy is to rob philosophy of its last remaining authority and turn it to special pleading with no claim to truth and no academic standing. The dispute was not only between feminists and non-feminist philosophers, but also between feminists. Should a woman entering a field like philosophy, traditionally dominated by men, “read as a woman,” that is as an alienated outsider to tradition. Or should she read “like a man,” that is read attempting faithfully to honor methods and maxims that currently govern the discipline of philosophy. For many women philosophers, reading like a woman was an admission of failure to meet professional standards.

The dispute was occurring not only in philosophy but also in other areas of knowledge. Feminists lined up on either side of the question of whether knowledge is always relative and from a limited perspective, or whether with the proper methods universal truths can be discovered. Some adopted a “standpoint” view of knowledge, arguing that existing philosophy or existing science is from the point of view of the dominant social group, white Western men. This, in turn, could be used to explain why women and men of disadvantaged groups are underrepresented in science or philosophy even when legal barriers to their participation have been removed. Further supporting the standpoint view were mainstream lines of twentieth-century theory that relativized knowledge. The popular changing paradigm view of Thomas Kuhn made the epistemological standards of one scientific era incommensurable with those of other eras. “Science studies” in the 1980s and 1990s documented social factors shaping scientific problems and research methods. Marx’s critique of “bourgeois” science as ideological made forms of knowledge depend on economic interests. If, as Marx demanded, science in Western countries should be a worker’s science, geared to workers’ needs and activities, it was only a small step to a further demand. Science should be from the standpoint of progressive workers, and also from the standpoint of the subjugated sex-class of women.

Feminist studies proliferated, exploring “women’s ways of knowing”
based on traditional women’s work like mothering, social work, or nursing. Historians Susan Bordo and Carolyn Merchant searched back in history for premodern perspectives of knowledge more consistent with a “woman’s” standpoint, models in which the relation between man/woman and nature was no longer one of domination but one of respect and interaction, or in which intuition and sympathy generate knowledge rather than logic and manipulative experiment.

But in the rush to standpoint theory there was much second thought, and for those feminist critics who remained more orthodox in their approach to knowledge, even outrage. Standpoint theory was untenable, they argued. It threatened to leave women behind in the great advance of modern enlightenment that had brought the West to its present advanced state of scientific and political development. It devalued the relative emancipation of women in Western countries, an emancipation based on women’s rational abilities. Science is needed to establish the fact that common views concerning women’s incapacity are false. Philosophy is needed to prove that there is no rationally consistent way to exclude women from political participation. By not availing themselves of reason, feminists defeated their cause. If truth is always a matter of perspective or socially determined cognitive paradigms, how can feminist critique prevail or feminist truth be established? Feminist truth might be tolerated along with other free expression, but feminists would lack the authority to force change. Standpoint theorists might theorize about inclusion and diversity, but women and men of color would continue to be discouraged from entering masculine fields, and would be until they are able to make the claim that their methods are superior and their conclusions true. Women researchers might found alternative establishments in which to do science “as women”; they might try to win some acceptance for values “traditionally identified as feminine”; they could try to eliminate methods or policies that excluded or undervalued those qualities. Their efforts would remain marginal and underfunded.

Two equally unacceptable and mutually contradictory alternatives both seemed unavoidable. On one hand, all knowledge must be from a particular standpoint—women’s, European, men’s, third world, African-American. All knowledge must begin from necessarily different experiences and be constructed according to linguistic and discursive regularities that are culturally variable. If this is the case, truth, except in a very limited and relative sense, is an illusion and power politics must decide which of competing views prevails. At the same time, there are matters of fact, and the possibility must
exist of an accurate representation of those facts. A sure foundation and a
universally effective method can and must be found that leads to the discov-
ery and communication of truths common to all. Women experience and
understand the world in ways that are different from ways in which men
experience and understand the world, but if there is no common standard
of truth, feminist claims have no authority outside feminist circles.

Whatever complaints feminists might have about Kant’s views on women,
this modernist “antinomy” is at the heart of Kantian metaphysics. Surveying
two centuries of political and intellectual turmoil, Kant worked his way
through the major philosophers of the modern period. He was a rationalist
with Wolff, then “roused from dogmatic slumber” by Hume’s skeptical argu-
ments. He rejected religious enthusiasm with Locke and thrilled to Rousseau’s
stirring calls for freedom and nature. He rejected the genre rules of classical
aesthetics and turned instead to Baumgarten’s felt sensibility to natural beauty.
But out of those intellectual movements, he believed, had come no clear
modern vision of the world, and no hope that with more thought one was
forthcoming. Modern thought had stalled, mired down in incoherence. No
matter how many new observations were made in astronomy, cosmology
could make no coherent sense of time and space. Physics assumed and did
not assume that matter is infinitely divisible. There was no room for God in
the scientific view of the world, but some first cause is necessary. Scientists
must think that every event is determined by prior causes, but must also
acknowledge that intentional action requires that some events be uncaused.

Kantian epistemology is generated out of antinomy. Cartesian science pro-
jected an authoritative method of inquiry based on innate and necessarily
true rational principles universally valid for all researchers. But once the
proofs for the existence of God that Descartes used to support the veracity of
innate ideas were abandoned, Humean skepticism seemed inevitable. None
of a person’s ideas, whether its origin is inside the mind or outside the
mind, can be counted on to represent objective reality. All a would-be
knower has is his or her own experience, private and personal ideas that vary
according to situation and predilection. Although Locke retained much of
Cartesianism, including the assumption that rational principles govern the
sorting and abstracting of ideas, by Hume all last remaining universality due
to reason was compromised. Only shifting personal phenomenal flux of per-
ception is left, along with unvalidated, customary, habitual, and instinctual
ways of combining and imaginatively augmenting perception. Here as under-
stood by Kant was the modern dilemma. All knowledge must be from
variable human experience; at the same time, some sort of knowledge must be possible.

On the one hand, it appears that all experience is personal, conditioned by an individual’s particular place in space and time and in no way universal. Nor does it seem that there is any method or insight that can transcend that perspective to produce knowledge not mediated by an individual man’s or woman’s experience. Given that all experience is phenomenal, the only possible true judgment is the judgment that something appears a certain way to me, and even this minimal judgment, once a general word is used to characterize the experience, is questionable. Is a certain kind of behavior “sexual harassment”? A woman experiences it as such, but the man who initiates the behavior sees it as flattery or courtship. A simple claim to be experiencing “something or other” makes no claim to truth or universality; as a result feminist complaints have no more authority that those of any other group.

On the other hand, the force of the language used to make knowledge claims implies something very different. To say that a certain kind of behavior is harassing is not to express feelings but to characterize that behavior. To say, as the microbiologist and feminist historian of science Evelyn Fox Keller said, that the supposition of a pacemaker cell cannot account for slime mold aggregation is not to propose an alternative “woman’s” feeling for organic processes. It is to say that the thesis that all cellular processes can be explained by linear causal mechanisms is false (“The Force of the Pacemaker Concept in Theories of Aggregation in Cellular Slime Mold” in Reflections on Gender and Science, pp. 150–7). Similarly geneticist Barbara McClintock’s claim that transposition of genes occurs in multicelld organisms asserts that the opposing theory of genes as atomistic determinants is false and misleads research. The difference is described by Keller, ruminating on the importance of McClintock’s work. It is not that McClintock worked from a “feminist consciousness, or even from a female consciousness,” said Keller. Instead her revolutionary work came out of the “determination to claim science as a human rather than a male endeavor” (Reflections, p. 175). Being a woman and to some degree an outsider may have allowed McClintock to see more clearly false assumptions that distort reality, but her claim to truth is no less universal. The huge resources and energy devoted to science only make sense on the assumption that, regardless of appearances, there is an underlying reality, including the process of genetic inheritance, a reality potentially intelligible to the human mind.

The feminist dilemma between standpoint and empiricist epistemologies
leads to a further ontological antinomy also with Kantian roots. A critical reading of philosophy in Tuana’s sense of “reading like a woman” requires identification of “feminine” and “masculine” characteristics. The feminist critic looks for evidence that traits associated with femininity are devalued. She looks for evidence that traits associated with masculinity have been made the basis for virtue. She searches for alternate feminine ways to think about morality. “Femininity” is an essential cluster of characteristics in contrast to “masculinity” with its own defining features. Again an antinomy of two contradictory but seemingly true principles emerges. On the one hand femininity and masculinity are matters of fact, and terms naming those facts figure prominently in feminist critique. The distinguishing features of men and women must be identified if manifestations of the power imbalance between them are to be brought to light. If masculinity and femininity are indiscernible, dominance relations between women and men will be indiscernible, submerged in empty counter-factual assumptions of human uniformity. To see how gender affects philosophy or any field of knowledge, it is necessary to define what gender is, to establish the categories that are the basis for feminist judgments of gender inequity or bias.

On the other hand, it seems also inescapably true that “femininity” and “masculinity” are not things-in-themselves, not objective fact, and name no prelinguistic essence. Instead they are nominal essences, variable social constructs without universal applicability. On this view femininity and masculinity mark a shifting bias that, far from being bedrock for feminist analysis, should be jettisoned as theoretically and practically suspect. To look for the feminine, worse to valorize the feminine, is to return women to social stereotypes that constrain their behavior.

Here again “antinomy” generated passionate and heated discussion among feminists, this time centered on “essentialism.” In the 1980s, social psychologist Carol Gilligan’s claim that women had a different “moral voice” challenged feminist philosophers to develop alternative feminist ethics. Care and relation were made the basis of moral responsibility to supplement or replace Kantian rationalist ethics based on justice or universal principle. Also again there was heated opposition. Should any voice or moral style be identified as “feminine”? Does a “feminine” virtue of care re-imprison women in the straitjacket of a false universal, relegating them once again to service work and self-sacrificial nurturance with feminist sanction. Or does such a perspective return women to a true and previously devalued feminine essence? Both theses seem true; both seem impossible. On the one hand femininity

IMMANUEL KANT

118
must be defined and defended if feminism is to have content. On the other hand, any such identification threatens to “imprison” women in the straitjacket of essence and restrict their “perfectibility”.

This antinomy also can be traced back to modernist debates as understood and confronted by Kant. On the one hand, the prevailing Christianized Aristotelianism of the medieval schools took for granted the existence of form in nature. If nature is formless, it is uncategorizable and therefore unknowable. The types of living organisms in general and the form of man in particular are obvious prototypes. Man, like other substances, has an ideal essence or nature, characterized by rationality, autonomy, and free will, an essence that defines him as a specific species of being. In turn, the form of man allows for sub-essences like masculinity and femininity, variants due to degeneration, changed circumstance, or specific function. Particular races may be designed as natural slaves, lower classes as less rational, women as a subspecies designed for specialized biological functions. On the other hand, from the perspective of the new experimental and mechanical sciences there are no fixed forms in nature, only changing and shifting patterns of observation that humans sort, abstract from, and causally relate in a variety of ways in order to isolate probable mechanisms that can be plotted and predicted.

The word “man,” Locke said, denotes a nominal, not a real essence. It is an abstraction of the human mind from necessarily limited experience. On this view there is no essential masculinity or femininity in nature, only a variety of appearances which, given similarities and differences, can be put into provisional categories. Hume went a step further. There is no reason why appearances might not change, no reason why apparent similarities might fail, no reason why women might not suddenly take on masculine characteristics or men’s lifestyles, or men suddenly become feminine. No reason why a man might not become a woman or a woman a man. No reason why a gorilla might not give birth to a man. Or a man to a gorilla. To think that this could not or would necessarily not happen is a matter of custom and habit, not reason.

Again there are consequences for feminist theory. If there is such a thing as femininity it is women who are its exemplars, and the defense and advancement of women must involve the discovery, defense, and promotion of femininity and consequently of women’s ways of knowing and feminine voices in philosophy. If on the other hand femininity is a nominal essence, either an artifact of sexist discourse or due to habit or custom that relegates women to nurturance or emotionality, then femininity must be denounced,
resisted, and, in the end, eradicated. The current idea of femininity might be as misguided as Locke’s little white boy’s idea that light skin is a defining characteristic of humanity. In that case, to read as a woman looking for feminine characteristics might support and maintain the construction of inferiorized gender identity. But the nominalist position also has pitfalls. What is to be the basis for feminist critique or feminist philosophy? If there is no femininity, or even, as some radical theorists argued, no “women,” if there is no “masculine” dominance as guideline, from what perspective or evaluative stance can a woman approach philosophy or any other tradition? If she has no grounded feminine essence, what is to be her feminist goal or purpose? Kant took a keen interest in the question of essence. He was both aware of and fascinated by natural history. He read Buffon. He knew the taxonomic innovations of Linnaeus. Early in his career he debated with Georg Forster, artist/scientist with the Cook expedition, about human origins. Africans and Caribbeans may look and act differently from Europeans, but science is not and cannot be only a collation of constant conjunctions, said Kant. Science has to orient itself by certain principles, one of which is that there is some purpose in nature beyond the random proliferation of unrelated organic mechanisms. Given the principle of teleology in nature, he concluded, one can see that what accounts for human diversity is not separate origins but the fact that humans are “designed” for maximum adaptability in a wide range of environments (“On the Use of Teleological Principles in Nature,” Part II of Critique of Judgment). Modern science brought to light the great and seemingly meaningless, purposeless, and disordered diversity and complexity of living organisms discovered macroscopically in exploration and microscopically with the tools of modern optics. But it could not, it seemed to Kant, eliminate the practical and theoretical necessity for form and function, for femininity, masculinity, for different species of animal, for categorizable human variation. Kant would devote the second half of the Critique of Judgment to understanding this conflict. The goal of modern science, he agreed, must be to find mechanical explanations for all phenomena without recourse to form or function. On the other hand, biological research would chase chimeras, if it did not take as presupposition an intuitive sense of functional purpose.

If the first part of Kant’s third Critique on aesthetic judgment gets little attention from contemporary philosophers, they have been even less interested in Kant’s speculations on form and purpose in nature. Given the
prevailing view that chance mechanisms of mutation and natural selection
govern organic change and the perceived danger that any mention of design
in nature gives credence to science’s old enemy theology, it can seem irra-
tional even to entertain the idea of purpose in nature. But, said Kant, in
actual scientific practice, especially in biology, purpose is a necessary oper-
ating assumption. A biologist needs the “guiding thread” of organic
function if she is not to collate meaningless data.

Keller traces the continuing twentieth-century history of Kant’s anti-
nomy in *Refiguring Life*. The dominant strand in modern biology continued to
focus on mechanism, this time genetic mechanism. All illicit reference to
“teleology”—to form, function, or purpose—was eliminated. The goal of
science was to find linear causal mechanisms that can be duplicated in the
laboratory or clinic and used for genetically engineered crops, genetic thera-
pies, and in vitro reproductive techniques. Researchers in microbiology
searched for formulas that account for the ways a gene produces a biological
effect by way of a chain of duplicable reactions. As research continued, how-
ever, it became clear through the work of McClintock and others, argued
Keller, that such an approach cannot do justice to organic processes that are
often or even always interactive and self-organizing. McClintock made her
discoveries by thinking not in terms of chains of impacting molecules, but in
terms of purpose. When she noted patterns in coloration in corn, an intuition
of adaptive purpose led her to the interactive processes by which genetic
changes were carried out, processes that had been ruled out by current
assumptions of genetic determinism. In fact, self-regulating organic processes
could not be understood only in terms of linear causality. The standard
empiricist model of objective observation and logical deduction had been
valuable but was insufficient for understanding.

McClintock’s subject was corn. When applied to human organisms, the
question of form and purpose is even more difficult. What is the purpose of
a man? Or a woman? Proud, independent, social, caring, heterosexual, self-
interested? Even if it is taken for granted that all characteristics evolve by
chance mutation and natural selection, in providing the evidence and illus-
tration that even evolution requires, antinomy resurfaces. How is a biologist
to make sense of organic form sufficiently so as to trace an evolutionary pro-
gression? What is to count as an individual trait? Are feminine and
masculine traits to be automatically approved as validated in natural selec-
tion? Or is there a human function and form that can be altered or distorted
by chance mutation or environmental stress. Which traits are to be altered or
removed by education, upbringing, or medical intervention? These ques-
tions, given the development of new forms of genetic selection and therapy,
are no longer only theoretical.

The problem of form in nature can be taken to a further level of antinomy,
again with Kantian roots. Given a mechanistic view of natural processes,
how are feminist purposes or any human purposes to be understood? Con-
temporary genetic research deepens the antinomy as more and more human
traits, including masculinity and femininity, are linked to specific genetic
variations, and techniques of genetic manipulation are developed. Genetic
explanations both support mechanism as the reality behind all appearance
and allow for change subject to human desire. Are human purposes equally
and blindly determined by genes or are they freely chosen and undeter-
dined? Given new genetic interventions, women can be made more or less
“feminine.” Homosexuals can be “treated” by genetic therapies to be more
or less heterosexual. Masculine characteristics can be enhanced to make
better warriors or athletes. Racial characteristics might be altered or sup-
pressed. On the one hand the goal of science must and should be the utmost
reach of mechanical molecular explanation, with the assumption that all
physical phenomena are caused by chains of impacting atoms. On the other
hand, the fact that humans engage in freely chosen action and judge actions
good or bad assumes that not all phenomena are caused, that some choices
are available, and that some interventions may not be consistent with human
purpose or form. Keller quotes the founder of quantum theory, Erwin
Schroedinger.

Let’s see whether we cannot draw the correct, noncontradictory
conclusion from the following two premises:

My body functions as a pure mechanism according to the Laws of
Nature.

Yet I know, by incontrovertible direct experience, that I am direct-
ing its motions.

(Refiguring Life, p. 77)

Feminists are in no position to give up either of Schroedinger’s premises.
Any progressive movement must document oppression, trace its causes and
its necessary effects on victims, find out the mechanisms that lead to its
perpetuation. On the other hand every progressive movement must also
hold out hope for change. Feminist research in history and social science
painstakingly documents male dominance and traces its varied causes and effects. Feminist philosophers expose the social inequalities that generate discriminatory theories of rights or justice. Scientists like Keller and McClintonck explore the complicated process of genetic inheritance. Kant’s synthetic a priori principle of human cognition that every event has a cause drives on these inquiries. It cannot just have happened without cause that in so many cultures and eras women have had less power than men and their lack of power persists. The great success of feminist social science is to have shown the deep social and psychological determinants of sexual inequality and the economic, psychic, and even biological mechanisms that hold it in place. The great success of feminist philosophy is to show how inequality is embedded in the very ideas with which we think. As Kant put one side of the antinomy: “There is no freedom; everything in the world takes place solely in accordance with laws of nature” (Critique of Pure Reason, p. 409).

But this thesis, seemingly the foundation for modern science, is fatal for moral or progressive action, including feminist action. If a moral agent or political activist not only envisions change but hopes to be effective in promoting change, she must, it seems, be able to interrupt causal sequences. If not, a feminist might dream of communities of women scholars or laboratories in which diverse methods are respected, but she could not hope for them. Given the necessary causal determinants of material life there is no reason to think that such projects could be realized as a result of her intentions. For feminist projects to be effective, for there to be any hope that feminists might change the world for the better, the anti-thesis is necessary. Again as stated by Kant: “Causality in accordance with laws of nature is not the only causality from which the appearances of the world can one and all be derived. To explain these appearances it is necessary to assume that there is also another causality, that of freedom” (Critique of Pure Reason, p. 409).

As in other Kantian antinomies, strong and apparently irrefutable arguments show the unacceptability and impossibility of both alternatives—of causal determinacy and of free will. If spontaneous uncaused beginnings are allowed, the unity of nature and therefore the basis for science is undermined. An uncaused cause “is not to be met with in any experience, and is therefore an empty thought-entity” (Critique of Pure Reason, p. 410). On the other hand, the universality of causation is incoherent not only in that it rules out free action but also in that it assumes an endless regress of causes with no beginning at all.

Standpoint as opposed to empiricist epistemologies, essentialist as opposed
to nominal ontologies, mechanistic determinism as opposed to free will: might a postmodern feminist simply lay these metaphysical antinomies aside? Should she follow the lead of contemporary pragmatists like Richard Rorty and reduce antinomy to a conversation topic without pressing existential significance? Should she stop worrying the issue of standpoint as opposed to empiricist approaches to knowledge and adopt a naturalized epistemology? Should she accept science as an extension of animal survival tactics and applaud its “success” in promoting physical survival and the maximization of “pleasurable stimulations”? Should she become a scientific realist, avoiding antinomy in the opposite direction by allowing science to have the last word on the nature of “things-in-themselves”?

For feminists concerned about the misrepresentation of women in science or philosophy, or with establishing a common cause between women of diverse races, or developing realistic goals and purposes for feminist politics, a relaxed and accepting antimetaphysical attitude is difficult to sustain. For women conscious of bias in science and the historic exclusion of work by women that does not fit established paradigms, objectivity cannot be guaranteed simply by accepting science’s choice of objects and methods. How is the supposed “success” of science to be measured? In terms of weapons systems? Or the elimination of trouble-making behavior? Which pleasurable stimulations are to be maximized? Pornographic stimulations? Violent video games? Faced with these questions, good-natured acceptance of a variety of metaphysical and epistemological views as part of philosophical “conversation” is hard to maintain.

In *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant proposed three questions that metaphysics must try to answer. What can I know? What should I do? What can I hope for? These metaphysical questions might well be asked by a feminist reading philosophy.

First. What can I know? Does a philosopher’s theory of knowledge preclude feminist agency? Does the philosopher indicate what methods and procedures in science and in the philosophic oversight of science will be most conducive to the production of knowledge useful in furthering progressive goals. Does the philosopher indicate what kind of scientific community can best deliver that knowledge?

Second: What should I do? Is there an account of moral agency given by the philosopher that accommodates visionary and effective action especially in relations between the sexes, where so much behavior is instinctual, programmed, and seemingly outside the bounds of normative theory? Does the
philosopher provide some explanation of how common unifying progressive goals can be established that are not authoritarian and that accommodate diverse aspirations? Does the philosopher provide some way of closing the apparent gap between feeling and caring on the one hand and justice and rights on the other in a way that acknowledges principle and human relation? What is the final good that should be aimed at? Where might one look for inspiration? Can it be found in the past, as Kant suggests, in a study of the Greek and Latin classics, or should other ancient sources be canvassed such as the Kabbalah?

Third, perhaps the most difficult question of all: What can we hope for? Throughout the modern period, characterized by the enormous success of mechanical explanations in science and technological applications of science, philosophers ruminated on the conflict between the deterministic materialism assumed by modern science and the seemingly ineradicable human sense that things should be better and that with human effort they can become better. As the drive to eliminate any non-empirical “metaphysical” concepts and questions intensified in twentieth-century philosophy, this primal modern puzzle was shelved. Philosophy became more and more descriptive: this is the way our language works; these are the language games we happen to play; this is the logic we follow; this is the way our brains are wired. Reading as a feminist aware of the effect on women and disadvantaged groups of ways in which “we” currently think, act, and talk, the normative element in philosophy is not so easily left behind.

Given modern science, and the “success” of the scientific view of the world, how are ideals to be realized? How should humans live? What kinds of relations should they have? How is it possible to believe that with human effort idealistic goals can be realized? Much as the disappointed and sometimes misogynous Kant seems an unlikely source of inspiration, Kant’s questions are also feminist questions.

**Further reading**

“Women’s ways of knowing” are explored in Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter’s collection *Feminist Epistemologies*, and by Sandra Harding in *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* Harding also considers the effects of race on methods in science in *The "Racial" Economy of Science*. Jane Duran gives an overview of feminist epistemologies and their relation to mainstream analytic epistemologies in *Philosophies of Science/Feminist Theories*.
Carol Gilligan described her findings that women experience a different moral development and have a different moral voice in *In a Different Voice*. Two collections of papers with a variety of approaches to the controversy in ethics between “feminine” ethics of care and “masculine” duty ethics are Claudia Card’s *Feminist Ethics* and Eve Cole and Susan McQuin’s *Explorations in Feminist Ethics*. Monique Wittig’s argument that “woman” is a suspect category is in *The Straight Mind*. See also Judith Butler’s discussion of the revolutionary possibilities in transgressing gender in *Gender Trouble*.

The philosophical implications of Barbara McClintock’s Nobel Prize winning work in genetics are described in Keller’s *A Feeling for the Organism*. See also Keller’s *Secrets of Life, Secrets of Death* and *Making Sense of Life*. 
Kant’s overriding aim was critical, the launching of a powerful and passionate onslaught against dogma, polemic, and speculative theology. For Kant the scope of what can be known a priori by reason alone—namely the necessary spatial and temporal dimensions of human experience and some very general logical forms and categories necessary for objective judgment—was very small. Constantly Kant warned against the improper use of the “transcendent” and purely “regulative” supposition that there must be something beyond the world as experienced by humans in space and time. Never should the idea of “things-in-themselves” go beyond supposition; never should one think that there could be any substantive knowledge beyond experience.

Kant’s “unity of apperception” provides only a small basis of commonality, uniting humans in a common spatial and temporal world. Human experience, unlike animal sensation, is never strictly private. My experiences are mine. But to be “experience” at all, to take the form of communicable impressions or ideas, experience presupposes an objective world of space and time that is a community in the sense that objects and events in that world are interconnected. Any representation involves the sense that my ideas are mine in a form that potentially can be communicated to others. If this is true, reconciliation between standpoint theory and objective truth cannot lie either in the establishment of a privileged standpoint from which to view things-in-themselves (of an underclass, oppressed races, a subordinated sex) or in the establishment of a direct link (by way of ostension or observation) between things-in-themselves and representations. For Kant, both are illusory and an improper use of metaphysics. Unexperienced reality must remain unexperienced, marking only a negative limit beyond which knowledge cannot go.
So Kant mapped out a “small Safe Island,” or modest “secure dwelling house,” of truth. To venture out on the high seas of extrasensory speculation about God, the soul, or purpose in the cosmos, he warned, is very dangerous. Inherent in Kant’s caution was a sense of human diversity. Given the limited materials with which human knowledge must be constructed—space, time, causality, elementary logic—any attempt at a “Tower of Babel” is doomed. A diversity of “tongues” ensures differences between builders of knowledge around the world, with the result that different groups will build knowledge after their own design (Critique of Judgment, p. 573). There can be no conquering the world in the name of truth, only the building of humble “dwelling houses” obeying the structural laws of physical reality, big enough for science and perhaps some overlooking of science on the part of a properly critical philosophy that sees that science does not go arrogantly beyond the boundaries of empirical knowledge.

For many analytic readers of philosophy the empty positing of an unknowable world of things-in-themselves was already too much metaphysics, but for Kant the supposition of a noumenal world is the necessary source of the impulse that presses critique past “weariness and complete indifference” (Critique of Pure Reason, p. 8). To go on with critical reflection once one becomes aware of the limits of knowledge assumes that thought and action are not irrevocably determined by pre-existing material causes, that there is reason to hope that human purposes can be realized, and that something comes of right action. These suppositions allow Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason to end not with Humean skepticism but with the outlines of a critical practice in which reason is “disciplined,” and so loses some of its dangerous tendency to dogmatism and autocracy. It is a process that Kant admitted might seem strange.

But that reason, whose proper duty it is to prescribe a discipline for all other endeavors, should itself stand in need of such discipline may indeed seem strange; and it has, in fact, hitherto escaped this humiliation, only because, in view of its stately guise and established standing, nobody could lightly come to suspect it of idly substituting fancies for concepts, and words for things.

(Critique of Pure Reason, p. 575)

Reason must discipline itself, said Kant. Especially it must do so when reason takes the form of a “culture” that develops around a set of skills or
behaviors that tries in the name of reason to barricade itself against critique (p. 575). As examples of the need for discipline, Kant singled out quasi-geometric or logical versions of philosophy that propose to begin with rigid definitions and axioms and proceed to demonstrations of truth. Such philosophies are no more than “houses of cards” or “empty air,” said Kant (p. 585). Definitions, unless of arbitrarily invented words, are never complete or clear but always limited. They vary among individuals and are explanatory, expository, and open to revision. As a consequence, demonstrations are only as valid as the uncertain concepts in which their premises are expressed. Only in mathematics can there be axioms and proofs.

Equally in need of critique, said Kant, is “polemical” response to undisciplined reason. Polemical attacks—Marxist, humanist, atheist, feminist—on a dogmatic or established culture or set of beliefs assume dogmatic positions of their own from which to attack, and these positions are therefore as much in need of “discipline” as the dogmas of their opponents. Somehow the discipliner of reason must criticize without herself becoming a dogmatist or polemicist. Here, one feminist reader of Kant pointed out, is the paradox of any critical theory, including feminist critical theory (Kimberly Hutchings in *Kant, Critique, and Politics*). Critique constantly undermines its own critical stance. To be critical requires a principle or value on which to base criticism. If a position is to be claimed wrong, it must be wrong in the name of some truth. But if the critic assumes such a truth, she has become a dogmatist herself. On what can feminists base a critique of philosophy or culture if not on the idea of a feminine essence, or the privilege of a woman’s standpoint? Criticism, including feminist criticism, requires a perpetual oscillation between authoritarianism and relativism, between the assumption of necessary truth and the denial of any truth at all. Even when feminists follow Foucault and propose a contrarian perpetual critique disruptive of any “regime of truth,” said Hutchings, even then they assume dogmatically the uncriticized value of freedom and self-creation. Nor did Hutchings find Kant’s own account of the dogma-free disciplining of reason convincing.

A successful critic, as described by Kant in the concluding chapters of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, takes neither the dogmatic nor the polemic position. He (or she) remains on the sideline as onlooker, “from the safe seat of the critic” (p. 598). Eventually the argument dies down, “opposing parties having learned to recognize the illusions and prejudices which have set them at variance” (p. 599). Such a removed disinterested stance alone might seem no better than Humean skepticism and of little use to a committed reformer.
But, said Kant, the critic can go a step further. Beyond amusement, skepticism, and indifference, he, or she, can move to surer ground, immune to the charge of dogmatism. Heated irresolvable conflicts—conflicts between standpoint and empiricist epistemologies, between essentialism and social constructivism, between determinism and visionary politics, for example—may have no “practical outcome” by themselves, but if debate is carried out freely, sincerely, and with thoroughness, it can advance understanding and with it reconciliation. In time, as long as the critic is not drawn into debate as dogmatist or polemicist, an antinomy will appear at the core of the dispute, revealing a boundary beyond which reason cannot go. At this point the “limits of reason” are known with absolute certainty. Critical reason has become a non-dogmatic “tribunal” that gives the “peace of a legal order,” legislating limits to dispute and putting to rest controversy (p. 601). By showing the futility of debate about what one cannot know, critical reason sets—not customary or habitual limits as with Hume—but necessary limits to knowledge. It can do so with certainty because reason is in a privileged position in respect to itself. This, said Kant, makes his critical method more powerful than Hume’s. Hume’s critique lacks force, is based on conjecture, and is easily refuted. But once the necessary limits of reason are understood, the craving that pushes a thinker out on the wild uncharted seas of speculation is both curbed and satisfied. He knows something with certainty, even if it is only a boundary beyond which he cannot go.

It is not surprising that feminist critical theorists, pressed by more than metaphysical cravings, are likely to require more from critical theory than the end of hostilities, but some feminist readers of Kant found hints of further emancipatory possibilities in critical method described in the concluding passages of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant, they said, veered from a legislative and possibly authoritative dogmatic function of critical reason to procedural considerations that promise more than cessation of debate. Understanding the limits of reason, said Kant, establishes the “right to submit openly for discussion the thoughts and doubts with which we find ourselves unable to deal and to do so without being decried as troublesome and dangerous citizens” (*Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 602). For women whose contributions had been dismissed or excluded, this alone was a welcome principle, but Kant’s non-dogmatic and non-polemic critical stance does more than allow the expression of differing viewpoints. In open and sincere discussion, a disputant may work toward a shared and sympathetic grasp of the roots of a conflict as understood by both sides. As Kant put it, she “develops the
dialectic which lies concealed in [her] own breast no less than in that of [her] antagonist” (p. 603). Resisting being drawn into an exchange of sophistic arguments invented to support opposing theses, the critic achieves a deeper understanding of controversy. Feminist philosophers often expressed discomfort with the hostile and fruitless adversarial style of philosophical discussion. Here, in a few brief passages, Kant seemed to project not only tolerance but a more participatory and constructive style of debate.

Following the thread of these ideas as they were taken up and developed in post-Kantian German critical theory, feminist critical theorist Seyla Benhabib addressed the paradox—how is critical practice possible if it assumes neither a dogmatic norm nor a visionary utopia (Critique, Norm, and Utopia)? Firmly rejecting postmodern approaches that embrace relativism, she found the beginnings of a feminist critical practice and emancipatory politics in Jurgen Habermas’s Theory of Communicative Action. Habermas suffered from a limited masculine perspective, said Benhabib; he could, for example, call marriage “heaven in a heartless world,” a characterization that would make little sense to a woman. But this defect can be diagnosed and corrected. A deeper problem lies in the excessive formalism of the procedural principles that are Habermas’s version of Kant’s discipline of reason. Starting from Kant’s brief suggestions of a discursive ethics, Habermas articulated norms for discussion regulated by principles to which everyone can conform as rational beings. The derivation of such universally acceptable rules involves understanding others, but others for Habermas are not concrete others—women, people of color, workers—but a “generalized other.” Too often, said Benhabib, that other is, just like Habermas himself, a white European male academic. As a result, the normative rules that are to guarantee a truthful outcome do not reflect the fact of difference, the fact of unique needs, talents, and capacities. In addition to the rules of order of public discourse, suggested Benhabib, some consideration is needed of affective bonds between people who are different, bonds like friendship, solidarity, and loyalty. Habermas was led astray by Kant and by the philosophical tradition. He reasserted the rule of reason over feeling. He relegated affective relations to ineffective aesthetic and expressive activities (Critique, Norm, and Utopia, pp. 340–1). The weakness, said Benhabib, can be overcome by an infusion of feminist ethics and a closer reading of Kant.

On the one hand are formal rules of procedure where everyone is equal, but within which nothing substantive can be decided. On the other hand are particular self-interests and loyalties of different groups. Again antinomy
resurfaces between dogmatism and relativism. In order to articulate a nexus between individual self-interest and universal principles that avoids the “either relativism or dogmatism paradox,” Benhabib turned to Hannah Arendt, another innovative reader of Kant. When tradition has utterly failed, as Arendt believed it had in the twentieth century, how can one dare to act? On what principle? Arendt’s major concern was with the Holocaust, environmental collapse, and nuclear war, but the question can also be asked in feminist terms. Given that the Western tradition has been dominated by men, given that its physical and theoretical constitution has been based on racial and sexual inequality, how is feminist action possible? How can a woman have any sense of what to do? How can she have any sense of what she can know, what she might accomplish, and what she might hope for? How can she dare to take action, given the tragic outcome, as Kant himself noted, of so many idealistic schemes?

Arendt found inspiration in Kant for answers to these kinds of questions. If together in a public arena of political action, free citizens sincerely present their stories and ideas to each other and are heard by others, out of that process might come principles that can be the basis for political action. The danger that projects will miscarry is tempered by the assurance that actions will be judged in “public” tolerant discussion, by a free press and a free academy. Political action will be restrained and, in the case of failure, forgiven so new beginnings can be made.

Putting together Arendt’s Kant, the post-Kantian discourse theory of Jurgen Habermas, and feminist ethics that emphasize feeling for and relationships with “concrete” others, Benhabib theorized a feminist critical practice that was to steer between the authoritarian dangers of transcendent principle and the nihilism of postmodern relativism. From Habermas she took an extensive elaboration of Kant’s call for freedom of speech as necessary normative condition for participatory debate. She supplemented what otherwise might have been a purely formal abstraction with insights into relations between self and other taken from feminist ethics. She added Arendt’s interpretation of Kantian judgment as a mediating device by which transcendent truth is replaced by thought and judgment from the perspective of concrete others whom one knows. Political participants would no longer read, think, or judge only as a woman, or even as a feminist, but as a man, child, African, domestic worker, as every man and every woman.

The post-Kantian ethical constructions of Onora O’Neill draw on some of the same sources. Kant’s categorical imperative and maxim that people
should be treated as ends and not means, said O’Neill, can be humanized and relativized for particular circumstances of interest to women, such as coercion and deception in prostitution and pornography, respect and abuse in sexual relationships, and the treatment of children. Again the key to correct moral and legal judgment is public discussion that establishes norms and policies with general and not just particular validity.

O’Neill expanded on Kant’s call for “tolerance” in the concluding chapters of the Critique of Pure Reason (Constructions of Reason, pp. 28–50). What Kant meant or should have meant, she said, is not freedom of speech as it is usually understood in liberal democracies. If speech is allowed but elicits only indifference, if it is not heard or understood, then nothing is accomplished. Tolerated speech, said O’Neill is public speech that elicits response. Speech tailored for a particular audience, or group of supporters, relying on an accepted bedrock of common assumptions such as that God exists, or that women are oppressed, or that a workers’ state is the only free state, or that evolution is necessary truth, is not spoken to be heard and understood by everyone. Kantian toleration, said O’Neill, is double-pronged, imposing obligations on hearers and speakers alike. To speak “publicly” in Kant’s sense is to be willing to call any assumption into question, to depend on no unexamined consensus.

In order to explain how agreement among diverse people is possible, O’Neill and Benhabib, like Arendt, turned from Kant’s remarks on the disciplining of reason in the Critique of Pure Reason to the first part of the Critique of Judgment on aesthetic judgment. There Kant had made passing reference to a “sensus communis.” This he distinguished both from ordinary common sense, which is only compacted social prejudice, and from the necessary shared logic of objective judgments of fact. “In all judgments by which we describe anything as beautiful,” said Kant, “we allow no one to be of another opinion, without, however, grounding our judgments on concepts but only on our feelings, which we therefore place at its basis, not as a private, but as a common feeling” (Critique of Judgment, p. 76). Creatively expanding this brief mention of the presumption of a “common feeling” in aesthetic judgment, feminist critical theorists worked to deflect and adapt the Kantian legacy. Arendt’s, Benhabib’s, and O’Neill’s Kant moved away from alienated emotionless reason. He began to develop the idea of an integrated human being capable of both rational and feeling response. He projected the ability to synthesize one’s own sensations with the needs and desires of others.
Kant had often been accused by feminists of denying the role of emotion in knowledge and morality; now a careful reading of the Critique of Judgment indicated that it was not all feeling that Kant excluded but only certain kinds of feeling. Within the vague category of “emotion,” defined only negatively as what is not rational, Kant made distinctions. Both humans and animals have instinctive drives for nutrition and sex. Although Kant credits these drives with considerable importance in maintaining health and in providing pleasurable recreation, they do not figure in knowledge or morality. More dangerous to morality are sophisticated human desires for objects that bring future pleasures, either sensual pleasures or pleasure in being famous or exercising power. Antithetical to both knowledge and morality are stronger “agitations,” such as obsessive and unhealthy hatred, rage, or love.

But Kant also described other more benign kinds of feeling response. He cited feelings of respect and loving admiration that can attach to the contemplation of a moral principle, to principled moral action, or to a virtuous person. He alluded to the pleasure a researcher takes in the discovery of principles that unite several different phenomena. Most important for feminist critical theorists, Kant described a pleasurable sense of beauty that is not the same as, but analogous and interactive with moral pleasure (Critique of Judgment, p. 23). Here at the very level of direct intuitive sensibility, unmediated by logic or mathematical grids of space and time, the judgment that a thing is beautiful, said Kant, presupposes a shared and enlarged response that is presumed to be common to all.

Aesthetics has its own modern history. Cartesian attempts to find rational principles that account for beauty gave way to Hume’s empirical derivation of standards of taste. Descriptive accounts of the mechanisms of perception were replaced by the Third Earl of Shaftesbury’s romantic spiritualist celebration of form in nature. In Germany Baumgarten expanded the concept of aesthetics from fine art to perceptual response in general. Kant followed Shaftesbury and Baumgarten’s lead. As with Shaftesbury and Baumgarten, aesthetic reaction for him was a universal and perpetual response of human beings to beauty in nature and to imitations of nature in decorative arts. Shells, bird wings, flowers, landscapes, and also gardens, wall papers, table decorations, furniture designs, fabrics with motifs borrowed from nature, all were used by Kant as examples of the beauty of form which gives aesthetic pleasure, presumably pleasure shared by all.

In fine art, said Kant, aesthetic judgment is less certain and less common. Although development of a social consensus in aesthetics is a natural devel-
development given the communicability inherent in aesthetic judgment, in art the fact of agreement can become more important than any real feeling response to beauty. As a result, all sorts of social and commercial interests intercede. Art connoisseurs are often given up to “idle, capricious, mischievous passions” (Critique of Judgment, p. 140). Although the appreciation of beauty in nature is a sign of a good soul, this may not be true in the case of exhibitors and patrons of art. Kant’s aesthetic sensibility is not the exclusive province of Hume’s sophisticated experienced European museum goer. It is shared by native peoples, expressed universally in gardens, fashions, body paint, home decorating. It is a response to bird songs, flowers, seashells, ice crystals, in which aspects of nature stripped away by mechanical science are rediscovered.

Again the challenge as Kant saw it is the negotiation of antinomy, the steering between two seemingly necessary, but contradictory and also intolerable alternatives. The judgment that a thing is beautiful seems necessarily to be a statement of personal response—“This gives me pleasure.” Alternatively, the fact that we argue about beauty indicates that there is a fact of the matter, and some set of criteria determines the thing-in-itself that is beauty. Two apparently inescapable alternatives are both unacceptable on theoretical and pragmatic grounds. A personal statement is inconsistent with the logic of beauty judgments. Beauty can be argued and debated, which would make no sense if aesthetic appreciation is a private sensation of pleasure. Alternatively, there seems to be no way to define beauty rationally as one might give an account of a natural phenomenon in science, given the great variety of forms of beauty and the emotional nature of responses to beauty. In the first case, there is little point to sharing beauty; each person remains locked in his own private sensations. In the second, a dogmatic standard illegitimately imposes an arbitrary standard, making beauty calculable from some fixed set of criteria.

In this conflict in Kantian aesthetics, between personal response and universal judgment, feminist theorists saw a possible political analogy. In politics the dilemma is similar. Political judgment either assumes an unwarranted dogmatic universality or is an expression of individual feeling without applicability to others. Could the communicability tentatively imagined by Kant as inherent in judgments of beauty be used as a bridge between individual or group self-interest and universal judgment so as to generate political principles common to all? Kant’s aesthetic sensibility to beauty directly incorporates human sociability in that it involves a projected sense of
how others will respond. Alone on a desert island, not many, said Kant, would decorate their huts or persons. The sense of beauty is a communal sense, not in the sense of being programmed or caused either genetically or socially, but in the sense we have of living together in a world in which form and structure reflect human ideals. An individual forming an aesthetic judgment knows that she judges for concrete different others as well as for herself, and is ready to face those others’ responses in free tolerant discussion. If such a judgment is used as a prototype not just in aesthetics but also for political judgment, the feminist critic might be able to balance on the edge of Hutching’s paradox, not judging only from her own perspective, and not imposing on others a dogmatic or polemical principle.

The suggestions in the Critique of Judgment of communicability and common sensibility are not developed at any length. Kant provided no theory of power, no way of thinking about material and political barriers to participation in scientific, political, or aesthetic debates. He gave no account of the ways in which self-interest and bias infect judgment, and so provided no critical procedure for uncovering metaphors and constructs that distort findings in science, such as have been exposed by feminist epistemologists. Like other modern philosophers, he neglected language and the role played by language structures in shaping concepts and inferences. Nevertheless, Kant provided for feminists the germ of an idea by which paradoxes in critical theory might be reconciled.

Kant might also offer ways to approach feminist antinomies. How is it possible to steer a course between relativism and confidence in science as usual? A critical feminist theorist after Kant would not give up objectivity. She would not give up the regulative transcendence of assuming that there is a truth to be approached, causal mechanisms to be sought, and a global “community” to the physical world in which events are interactive. She would diligently work for consistency in scientific theory. At the same time she would not assume that a direct correspondence could be established between theories and things-in-themselves. She would remain open to resynthesisization of her and other’s experience. Given the importance of intuitive and aesthetic attention to form and purpose in nature, hers would be a science open to different styles of research. It would be a science that provides public forums in which speech is “tolerant” in O’Neill’s Kantian sense. The result would be a successive enlargement of scientific knowledge, and avoidance of blind spots and distortions as were encountered in genetics by Keller and McClintock.
Functional form exists in nature in two ways for Kant, first as a necessary presupposition in biological research, as was also pointed out by Keller, and second as the basis for the communicability of beauty in nature. Following Kant’s lead in the *Critique of Judgment*, mechanisms, including mechanisms that causally determine masculine and feminine behavior, can and should be studied in evolutionary biology and genetics, but they could be studied with the understanding that ideas of form and function play a formative role, not as unwarranted assumptions or imported metaphors but as the result of direct aesthetic appreciation of perceived reality. Science in this sense is not a tabulation of prerecorded research results that assumes an unexamined infrastructure of concepts, but requires direct perceptual intuition and attentiveness to natural processes and structures such as Keller found in the work of McClintock. Biological structures and processes play a role in survival and reproduction; organic form gives aesthetic pleasure, a necessary aspect of scientific investigation.

Related is a possible resolution to debates surrounding essentialism. Following Kant, femininity or masculinity might be retained as substantive ideals. On this view, femininity would not be a thing-in-itself, a natural straitjacket or pre-existing form to which all women must and should conform. Nor would femininity be a genetic mechanism that is necessarily adaptive and successful given the logic of neo-Darwinian evolutionary theory. Femininity, as well as masculinity or humanity, might be taken as a quasi-aesthetic functional ideal, open to the enlargement that comes from seeing women and men from and for many perspectives. A moral theorist, then, unless she or he restricts the scope of philosophy to description of existing uses of moral language or existing moral behavior, might evoke a communicable ideal of a virtuous and therefore beautiful man, woman, or human. Without assuming a fixed biological purpose, or a purely private response, aesthetic judgment links that ideal with others. Judgments on current standards and norms of femininity or masculinity are made for others, and so are judgments that can and must be debated freely, sincerely, and publicly. On this view, femininity, masculinity, humanity, are not provable statistics, nor are they projections of personal feeling, but the result of judgment that must be enlarged by communication and mutual understanding. Nowhere is this clearer than in Kant’s distinction between potentially universal human ideals and human norms that vary by race and location. “A Negro,” said Kant, “must have a different idea of the beauty of the [human figure] from a white man, a Chinaman a different normal idea from a European” (*Critique of Judgment,* 137).
Ideal beauty, said Kant, is different. It “consists in the expression of the moral without which the object would not please universally” (p. 72).

Neither Kant nor post-Kantian critical feminist theorists have yet given a very clear account of how such public tolerated speech and enlarged judgment is to be fostered. Sometimes Kant seems content to be an elitist, assuming that masses of people will remain at the level of animal sensation and will take the word of the educated classes as to what is beautiful and moral. Other times, still with a note of condescension, Kant suggests that less tutored and more natural responses such as those of non-European peoples and lower classes are needed to temper elitist sensibility in order to create a “true” aesthetic culture. Such a culture, he projected, must be based on “the art of reciprocal communication of ideas between the cultivated and uncultivated classes,” a communication that will “harmonize the large-mindedness and refinement of the former with the natural simplicity and originality of the latter” (Critique of Judgment, p. 201). Given that neither elitism nor a token injection of “enriching” diversity is likely to satisfy feminist critics, more would have to be said about a truly cosmopolitan aesthetic culture. Material arrangements would have to be designed to ensure that the voices of working people, of postcolonial people, of women, are heard and understood. Some account is necessary of mechanisms that could force the installation of those arrangements, given that those in power have an interest in silencing others.

Most speculative, and most suspect from a contemporary point of view, are Kant’s perilous ventures on the stormy seas of metaphysical speculation about freedom of the will. At this point, given the current antimetaphysical climate in philosophy, all but the most foolhardy of feminist philosophers might turn back, especially as one virtue often claimed by feminist philosophy is a grounding in practice that protects against empty theorizing. Deduction without content and logical systems without reference have to be less tempting for feminists always called back to the reality of women’s condition and women’s aspirations. But the Kantian line of critical thought leads directly from the antinomy between determinism and practical efficacy of purpose to cosmic questions of meaning. By Kant’s reasoning, the moral beauty or political purpose that is the object of a “sensus communis” presupposes a moral purpose to human life and in turn moral purpose in the cosmos. Without that perilous venture into metaphysics, Kant’s “sense in common” is in danger of becoming either groundless presumption that allows a feminist critic to impose her view on others, or standardless coherence to feminist correctness.