

FEMINIST PHILOSOPHY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF RECENT OBJECTIONS

FILOSOFIA FEMINISTA: ANÁLISE CRÍTICA DE OBJEÇÕES RECENTES

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyze some recent objections to feminist philosophy and respond to these criticisms. First, we analyze Timothy Crowley's notes, which argue, above all, for the impossibility of a feminist philosophy committed to truth and honesty. Second, we analyze the arguments of Tuija Pulkkinen, who, although in favor of dialogue between the fields, defends maintaining the distinction between philosophy and feminism and rejects the expression "feminist philosophy". Finally, we present some arguments in favor of the thesis that the debate on the possibility of feminist philosophy needs to go through a meta-philosophical investigation that considers what has already been produced in this area by authors of feminist philosophy.

Keywords: Feminist philosophy. Women in philosophy. Gender and philosophical inquiry.

RESUMO

Este artigo tem o objetivo de analisar algumas objeções recentes à filosofia feminista e fornecer uma resposta a estas críticas. Primeiramente, analisamos os apontamentos de Timothy Crowley, que argumenta, sobretudo, pela impossibilidade de existência de uma filosofia feminista comprometida com verdade e honestidade. Em um segundo momento, analisamos os argumentos de Tuija Pulkkinen, que, embora favorável ao diálogo entre as áreas, defende a manutenção da distinção entre filosofia e feminismo e rejeita a expressão "filosofia feminista". Por fim, apresentamos alguns argumentos a favor da tese de que o debate sobre a possibilidade da filosofia feminista precisa passar por uma investigação metafilosófica que considere o que já foi produzido nessa área por autoras da filosofia feminista.

Palavras-chave: Filosofia feminista. Mulheres na filosofia. Gênero e investigação filosófica.

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Introduction

Feminist philosophy is already consolidated as a field of philosophical research. This recognition reflects the development of theories that investigate moral, political, and even metaphysical problems under the gender category, such as feminist ethics, feminist history of philosophy, feminist metaphysics, feminist political philosophy, feminist epistemology, and feminist phenomenology. Feminist philosophy thus involves reflecting on what philosophy is and what should be, since it asks whether widely accepted concepts in the philosophical tradition are free of gender influences or whether they reflect patriarchal values that exclude the experiences of women and other historically marginalized groups.

Although feminist philosophy is such a relevant approach to the contemporary scene, several critics challenge its plausibility. Kuhnen and Zirbel (2020) highlight three: the first problematizes its supposedly militant and ideological “pro-women” character, which would oppose essential principles of research — such as objectivity, neutrality, disinterest, and universality. The second critic points out the problem of its tendency towards interdisciplinarity. The third one questions whether it would be an area of its own and relevant to philosophy.

In the first criticism, the figure of Susan Haack is emblematic (2011, 2020). For Haack, the task of philosophy is “figuring things out” (2020, p. 134), i.e. acquiring objectively true knowledge. However, the certainty of this discovery depends on overcoming any subjective influences, such as political values. She argues that philosophical inquiry is and should be free of such values, since they would be irrelevant to its conduct and harmful, being capable of distorting and corrupting it. Since feminism is an eminently political endeavor, the philosopher argues it is impossible to reconcile research informed by feminist values with the search for truth. Thus, feminist philosophers engage in the investigative process only to promote women’s interests and achieve social justice. A philosophical investigation whose method is feminist, therefore, results in a totalitarian, dishonest, partial, and non-genuine investigation.

Although Haack’s criticisms have provoked negative reactions in the literature¹, certain authors support them and defend similar points, such as Timothy Crowley and Tuija Pulkkinen. In *Haack Among the Feminists: Or, Where are the Women?* (2020), Crowley supports and develops Haack’s criticisms of feminist philosophy and philosophers. Crowley argues that feminist philosophy, by aligning itself with political goals, compromises the impartiality and objectivity of philosophical inquiry. In addition, Crowley suggests feminist philosophers disregard thinkers who do not deal directly with feminist issues, marginalizing them in the debate.

Pulkkinen, in *Feminism and Philosophy - A Matter of History and Politics* (2023), criticizes the use of the term “feminist philosophy”. Although she supports gender studies and recognizes occasional intersections between philosophy and feminism,

¹ See Anderson, 2004, 1995, 2020; Nelson & Nelson, 2011; Vaccari, 2022.

she argues it is necessary to preserve the distinction between them, since they have different scopes and methodologies. For Pulkkinen, this does not mean rejecting dialogue between philosophy and feminism or suggesting that philosophy should distance itself from political issues, but recognizing that there are particularities that make these areas essentially different. Our aim in this article is to critically and thoroughly analyze the objections of both authors and then provide some answers to them.

On the relationship between philosophy and feminism: Timothy Crowley's criticisms

Following on from the objections raised by Susan Haack, Timothy Crowley also questions the legitimacy of feminist philosophy in *Haack Among the Feminists: Or, Where are the Women?* (2020). He begins the paper by problematizing the omission of certain philosophers, including Haack, from a commemorative poster of the Committee on the Status of Women (CSW) of the American Association of Philosophy (APA), hosted in his university's philosophy department.² The philosophers on the poster were mostly feminist philosophers, an unpleasant fact, Crowley complains, given that it was designed to honor women in the discipline indiscriminately.

Crowley sees this case as a good summary of the real aims of feminist philosophy and develops his criticisms based on it. We can list the main ones under the following headings: i) the imprecision of the concept of "feminism"; ii) the promotion of dishonest inquiry in the name of women's interests, iii) the omission of its critics, and iv) the distortion of the thought of past philosophers. Below, we will present these and other criticisms and counter-argue them.

Crowley's first criticism refers to the very concept of "feminism". This is an interesting point of analysis and one that makes sense to address now, although we will come back to it in the second section. Crowley does not seem to understand how it would be possible for there not to be a single and shared description of the concept and how it would be possible for it to exist in the plural (Crowley, 2020, p. 3). But what we do not understand is the reason for his misunderstanding. Given that it admits a plurality of responses, a precise and universal definition of the term "feminism" is still in dispute. It is possible to question, however, whether this makes up a real impediment to operating with it.

Drawing an analogy, the very nature of the discipline we are considering faces the same problem: we still have not found a universally agreed answer to what is called "philosophy". To take a more limited example, the very definition of "knowledge", which for analytical epistemology was unified until Gettier, is currently under discussion. This does not mean the search for precise definitions of concepts is irrelevant or

² The poster can be found here: <https://blog.apaonline.org/2018/02/12/celebrate-women-in-philosophy/#comments>

unnecessary, which would be controversial to the very philosophical activity we usually do and know. What we mean is that it is entirely possible and acceptable within philosophical practice to proceed from provisional definitions, since these concepts can acquire precision as they advance in the debate.

Like Haack, Crowley also claims that feminist philosophers are not interested in genuinely honest research that strives for the truth. On the contrary, they manifestly want to make of scientific or philosophical inquiry a tool for promoting their own interests, or the interests of the so-called ‘marginalized’ or ‘oppressed’ groups, into which they rather ridiculously insert themselves. By the same token, feminists seek to undermine science or philosophy as it is being done or as it has been done by identifying it as simply the promotion by an oppressing class of its own interests (Crowley, 2020, p. 7).

The main problem for Crowley lies in the fact that feminist philosophy is imbricated with political values, which does not guarantee a disinterested investigation and, therefore, without a predetermined commitment. Since feminists appropriate philosophy with the sole aim of promoting women’s interests, feminist philosophy could not even be classified as philosophy. In other words, while philosophy “indicates a love of wisdom, a respect for truth”, feminists subvert these notions, putting “in their place an explicit devotion to a superficial, partial and biased ideology that is opposed to the ideals of philosophy” (Crowley, 2020, p. 8). Therefore, being politically motivated, all the work by feminist epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, and the history of philosophy, for example, is characterized as activism disguised as study. Given that Haack is a critic of feminist philosophy, it is clear why she was omitted from the poster. On the other hand, the presence of Ayn Rand presupposes a distortion of her thought.

This brings us to her next criticism, which refers more specifically to the feminist history of philosophy. Why, Crowley asks, was Rand present on a poster made up of feminist philosophers? We know that Rand always took a stand against feminism and therefore such a relationship is contradictory. This shows nothing more than an intentional distortion of her figure, something that, for Crowley, feminist historians of philosophy commonly do: they “appropriate, colonize and distort” women to advance feminist interests (Crowley, 2020, pp. 10-11).

The same is true of Hannah Arendt, as evidenced by feminist efforts to appropriate her work. Feminist philosophers, in Crowley’s view, by assuming that all knowledge is gendered, claim that the same applies to Arendt’s writings. In other words, since Arendt is a woman, her thinking would be marked by “women’s ways of knowing”. However, we know the author stated that human thought is independent of gender (Crowley, 2020, p. 11). Once again, therefore, there would be a forced and inadequate attempt to establish a relationship. These cases show that the “feminist history of philosophy does not have the laudable aim of adding to our store of knowledge of the thought of the past; its function is to keep the sex— or the ‘gender’—dominant in the mind of the reader.” (Crowley, 2020, p. 10)

The choice of who was or was not present on the poster by the members of the CSW, therefore, represents the true commitments of those who do philosophy

from a feminist perspective: promoting dishonest research, omitting its critics, and distorting the thought of past philosophers in the name of the “feminist cause”. The result is that the aim of feminists - “to oppose the alleged unfair treatment of women in the past and present”, in Crowley’s words (2020, p. 5) - ends up falling flat; what they achieve is exactly the opposite.

Crowley is referring to the *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*. However, this book does not claim that Arendt was a feminist philosopher. The book series *Re-reading the Canon*, coordinated by Nancy Tuana, is just one example of the appropriation of ideas from several philosophers to advance issues of feminist theory, conducted regardless of whether the thinker has already addressed feminist issues, in either a theoretical or militant sense. This does not mean that these thinkers were feminists or produced philosophy from this perspective. So much so that there are also editions of *Feminist Interpretations of Saint Augustine*, *Feminist Interpretations of Aristotle* and *Feminist Interpretations of Thomas Hobbes*, for example. If this were the case, we would claim that Saint Augustine, Aristotle and Hobbes were feminist philosophers - a claim that is, to say the least, mistaken, given that these thinkers never dealt with feminist issues in their works. Furthermore, to characterize them as such would imply anachronism, something that is inadmissible in research into the history of philosophy.

Crowley also claims that there is a supposed idea that every woman philosopher *is* and *should be* a feminist philosopher. However, to the best of his knowledge, this has never been defended by women philosophers in serious academic circles. Crowley himself does not even provide a concrete example of his claim. Moreover, as he states, there is an obvious and radical difference between being a philosopher who is also, in a political sense, a feminist and being a feminist philosopher - precisely because feminism is a specific approach to the production of philosophical thought.

It is surprising that Crowley also claims that women “fit in quite ridiculously” (2020, p. 7) with the so-called marginalized/oppressed groups. This is because, if we look only at the field of philosophy, we realize that in the historical canon and current philosophical practice, or academic research, the presence of women is extremely low. This is clear from the studies taken by Waithe (1987, 1989, 1991, 1995), Hagengruber (2015, 2020), Araújo (2016, 2016a), Fanton et al (2024), Thompson et al (2016), Paxton et al (2012), Hutchison and Jenkins (2013), Schwitzgebel (2021).

Crowley says:

There is a disturbing tendency in contemporary feminist theory [...] in which [...] [it] persistently ignores the existence of women thinkers unless they declare openly their interest in feminism’. Women are dismissed by feminists if ‘they have ‘next to nothing’ to say on woman’, that is, little that is specifically relevant to the cause of feminism; or, if they do say something that is not grist to the feminist mill, they are traitors, accused of ‘sneaking into the men’s club’ (Markus 1987, 76). (Crowley, 2020, p. 9).

This claim, however, doesn't hold water either. This is because feminist philosophers value the recognition of all philosophers - regardless of whether they have been active in the feminist movement or have theoretically produced feminist philosophy. Feminist historians, for example, in their efforts to recover the names and works of philosophers excluded from the historical canon, have done so with Ayn Rand, a notorious anti-feminist philosopher, Simone Weil, who did not even address feminist or gender issues in her work, or Simone de Beauvoir, a self-declared feminist (to name but a few). Therefore, as feminist philosophy does not aim to "promote the interests of any class or group and demean the interests of another", consequently, the analogy with Nazi science (Crowley, 2020, p. 6) does not hold up either.

Crowley provides isolated and often decontextualized quotes to make his point. He says that Sandra Harding, for example, does not have truth as her goal (2020, p. 5) and argues that "feminists seek to undermine science or philosophy as it is being done or as it has been done, identifying it as the promotion by an oppressor class of its own interests", a conclusion drawn from a statement by Harding, who says that "male scientific investigations [...] have been done to pacify, control, exploit and manipulate women or to glorify men and their domination" (2020, p. 7).

Both of Crowley's claims can be countered with the concept of *strong objectivity*, developed by Harding herself. Harding argues that although traditional science may have been influenced by the interests of a dominant group, this does not mean that we should abandon the search for truth or objectivity. On the contrary, she proposes that including diverse perspectives, especially from historically marginalized groups, can correct the distortions introduced by partial biases. Thus, by broadening the scope of knowledge production to include these voices, we are moving closer to a more complete and objective truth, capable of revealing a more accurate understanding of reality. Harding, therefore, does not undermine science and philosophy, but enhances it, proposing a path towards a more robust and less distorted objectivity.

In the same line of argument as his criticism of Harding, Crowley now criticizes Elizabeth Anderson, also a classic feminist philosopher:

Anderson, in a piece purporting to defend feminist epistemology from the charge that it is politically motivated, seems unaware that she admits precisely that: 'doing science as a feminist' she writes, '[means] the pursuit of empirical inquiry... with the aim of discovering knowledge that is useful to women in liberating them from sexism' (Anderson 2004, p. 9).

"Freeing women from sexism", however, is only *one* of the numerous objectives of feminist epistemology. One of the most classic examples is Carol Gilligan's research in *In A Different Voice* (1982). In short, Gilligan denounces the androcentrism contained above all in Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development, indicating the erasure of women's moral point of view in the production of this knowledge. In his initial research, Kohlberg based his theory on an exclusively male sample (Kohlberg, 1992,

p. 330). Later, although he included girls and women in his interviews, he did not give sufficient value and attention to the conceptions of care and responsibility, which guide the moral problem-solving of women. Kohlberg considers them to be less morally elevated than the notions of justice and principles, which also characterize the responses of boys and men. Gilligan, on the other hand, considers the female mode of resolution to be equally important and develops her theory based on the notion of complementarity between the two voices: the achievement of moral maturity results from the union between the ethics of principles and the ethics of care (Gilligan, 1982).

By criticizing Kohlberg and developing her moral theory, Gilligan claims the participation of women and aims to ensure that their experiences are included in the processes of acquiring knowledge, recognizing their ways of thinking as legitimate. In no way does this mean conducting research with a predetermined commitment or appropriating research to promote women's interests; rather, it is an attempt to correct the tendency of research into moral development to only take a male perspective to base a universal standard of morality. This is one case that shows us how it is possible, through feminist theorizing, to liberate both women and philosophical and scientific research from sexism.

We can easily see that the claim that feminist philosophers “omit their critics” doesn't hold up either. Besides what we are doing here in this text, many others have rebutted criticisms of feminist philosophy (Anderson, 2004, 1995, 2020; Nelson & Nelson, 2011; Kuhnen & Zirbel, 2020; Vaccari, 2022).

Crowley finally argues:

The fact is that CSW, and also SWIP, is neither about philosophy nor about women. Their interest is in feminist philosophers, whose claim to be philosophers is, as we have seen, dubious. So while these organizations declare their deep concern about the “under-representation” of women in philosophy, they don't represent women in philosophy (2020, p. 12).

However, this claim does not hold up either. This is because the historiographical work of recovering the philosophers of the past is conducted regardless of whether or not they are feminists. At a global level, besides the CSW and SWIP, several other research, teaching, and outreach initiatives do truly democratic work by opening up and recognizing the voices of all philosophers excluded from the philosophical canon.³

³ Some of them are: *History of Women Philosophers*, by Mary Ellen Waithe, *Historical Dictionary of Feminist Philosophy*, by Catherine Gardner; *Early Modern Philosophy: An Anthology*, by Lisa Shapiro and Marcy Lascano; *An Unconventional History of Western Philosophy: Conversations Between Men and Women Philosophers*, by Karen Warren, Blog Mulheres na Filosofia; Projeto Uma Filósofa Por Mês; Vozes: Mulheres na História da Filosofia; As outras constelações: uma antologia de filósofas do romantismo alemão; Escola As Pensadoras; The Vox Project, Center for the History of Women Philosophers and Scientists, Rede Brasileira de Mulheres Filósofas; Red de Mujeres Filósofas de América Latina; Encyclopedia of Concise Concepts by Women Philosophers; Émilie: Research and Translation Group; the translations from English into Portuguese of the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entries for the Série Investigação Filosófica.

In summary, what we see is that Crowley's allegations lack knowledge and theoretical rigor about the work performed in feminist philosophy. The author also cannot consider the possibility that the choices of philosophers on the CSW poster may have followed some other criteria, or simply no criteria at all. In what follows, we will analyze another approach that is also critical of the possibility of an intersection between philosophy and feminism.

The idea of avoiding the term “feminist philosophy”: counter-arguments to consider

Besides explicit criticisms of the very possibility of a connection between philosophy and feminism, we also find approaches that, while favoring gender studies in general and occasional intersections between the areas, accept and defend maintaining the distinction between philosophy and feminism, understanding that they are fields of study with different scopes and methodologies. Here, it is not a general rejection of the dialog between philosophy and feminism or the demand that philosophy should not get involved with political issues, but the idea that there are differences that make the areas essentially distinct.

Tuija Pulkkinen, in *Feminism and Philosophy - A Matter of History and Politics* (2023), adopts an approach that follows this direction. The author, who has a background in philosophy and gender studies, accepts that philosophy can contribute to feminism, but under certain conditions. These include the need for philosophy to be developed in combination with historical and political studies. Even so, the author says that we should maintain the conceptual and terminological distinction between the two fields of study and argues that “rather than talk of ‘feminist philosophy’ it would be more radical instead to use the phrase ‘feminist theorizing’” (Pulkkinen, 2003, p. 29). An analysis of the author's arguments will allow us to investigate a point of view that is favorable to gender studies, but which nevertheless maintains a conception of philosophy that sees feminist philosophy as a term to be avoided.

Pulkkinen seeks to investigate the question of the relationship between feminism and philosophy from two aspects that she considers relevant: history and politics. The author's interest is centered on how philosophy and feminism relate to these topics, which, according to her, occur in different ways, contributing to what is sometimes called a tension between the two areas. Emphasizing non-pejorative meanings of the idea of tension, she argues that the polemical relationship between philosophy and feminism can be approached from a positive point of view, as a productive and stimulating tension. The author does not intend, therefore, to reconcile and dissolve the possible friction between philosophical and feminist theories, nor to connect them into a single field of study — which is, in general, what happens when one intends to develop a feminist philosophy — but to present fruitful potentials for dialog between the two areas, as long as their separation and specificities are maintained.

On the topic of history, Pulkkinen observes that philosophy and feminist theory follow opposite paths: while the former seeks supposedly eternal and universal truths, the latter takes the idea of historically situated knowledge as its starting point. The author uses the notion of omnitemporality, a term present in Derrida's work, to present what she considers being some typical characteristics of philosophy about time and historicity: i) the ability to investigate questions from within one's own thinking, without direct mention of historical context and tradition, as these factors are considered irrelevant or not fundamental; ii) the possibility of taking texts and ideas from other cultures and times as interlocutors that are as relevant or more relevant than contemporary ones. Although Pulkkinen does not include this explicitly, we could also mention, as a consequence of the idea of omnitemporality, the tendency to disregard the historical and sociocultural identity of the subject who produces knowledge.

The reason behind these assumptions is the "level of universal validity and abstraction from context" present in philosophical investigations (Pulkkinen, 2003, p. 30). The author recognizes, however, that this is not a rule followed by all of philosophy and that, in practice, philosophical knowledge is produced based on standards and conventions specific to the field of study, following a certain form of writing, typical themes, and so on, as happens in other areas. Even so, "quite often the discussion is posed in philosophy as if it started from a new beginning around a table which could be in any place and at any time" (Pulkkinen, 2003, p. 31).

The author contrasts the way philosophy relates to historicity and the way feminist studies engage with the same issue. With feminism, location, and historical context are fundamental conditions for the arguments presented. Feminist theory not only does not claim to be impartial, but many times questions the possibility and relevance of impartiality in the face of blatant injustices. Knowledge is seen as the product of a specific, historically situated time. The production of engaged knowledge has the potential to contribute to the critical analysis of ideas that can be changed, however rooted they may be in a particular culture and era. Thus, the tension between feminist and philosophical studies is clear: "The profound impulse for change, on the one hand, and the ideal of omnitemporality, on the other; high history-consciousness, on the one hand, and an imperative to universalize and maximize stability, on the other. Unsurprisingly, the two orientations often clash" (Pulkkinen, 2003, p. 32-3).

The analysis of the topic of politics follows a similar line of argument. The author believes that there is a fundamental difference in the way feminist theory and philosophy deal with political issues. Philosophy is based on an approach that seeks impartiality and critical distance, so that a given political issue is investigated impartially, seeking a comprehensive view in which the best rational arguments prevail. Pulkkinen says that "philosophical truth is not supposed to be a matter of politics, it is opposed to politics" (Pulkkinen, 2003, p. 38). This position that places philosophy and politics on different sides is largely based on the idea that politics involves conflict and opposition, which contrasts with the "calm" and measured search for truth that is typical of philosophical inquiry.

The author argues that something very different occurs with the relationship between feminist theory and politics. Given the very nature and assumptions of feminism, the connection arises immediately. Since feminist studies are based on the search for gender equality and the denunciation of cases of violence against women, they are anchored in political practice. It is not seen as problematic to intend to interfere and demand concrete changes, to enter disputes, or even to avoid arguments in a calm and disinterested tone.

Pulkkinen says that “gender studies is different precisely because it does not aim to establish truths but to contest established truths. (...) You do not apologize for having an agenda, as you would in a philosophy or social science setting” (Pulkkinen, 2003, p. 39-40). Although she recognizes that involvement with political agendas can be central to some lines of philosophical inquiry, she still maintains that the differences are considerable, because “intervention is not the goal in philosophical scholarship, as it is in feminist scholarship; in philosophy, the goal is truth, the non-political truth” (Pulkkinen, 2003, p. 40). This does not mean, according to the author, that feminist theory does not meet the fundamental requirements of any field of academic study, such as the need to argue coherently and presenting appropriate foundations, data, and references. However, unlike with philosophical studies, it is not required to defend supposed eternal and universal truths.

To present what we find problematic in some of Pulkkinen’s arguments, it is crucial to draw attention to certain aspects of the way she approaches the issue: she takes as her starting point the distinction between philosophy and feminism accepting a series of methodological and definitional assumptions. By introducing the notions of history and politics about feminism and philosophy, she presents feminism as a “social movement”, and philosophy as “a particular type of textual tradition”; about politics, she states it is “inextricably intertwined with feminism”, but “ideally remains outside of philosophy as a tradition of pure thought” (Pulkkinen, 2003, p. 27). In other words, Pulkkinen starts from a conception of philosophy that presents precisely the characteristics that feminist philosophy criticizes and seeks to change in philosophical activity. What feminist philosophy usually does involves questioning this definition of philosophy and replacing it with another.

This acceptance of a specific vision of philosophy is very evident in Pulkkinen’s analysis contrasting the differences between the conceptions of historicity present in feminism and philosophy: as we have seen, the author finds an opposition between, on the one hand, situated and historically informed knowledge and, on the other, omnitemporality and the search for eternal truths. However, this antagonism only arises when it is accepted that philosophy can be characterized in this way, which is questioned by feminist philosophers. The idea that any production of knowledge — including philosophy — results from a specific historical and social context is precisely one of the most frequent assumptions of feminist philosophy. Part of this field of study, therefore, involves disputing what can and cannot be called philosophy. In this process, it is common for more traditional conceptions to be criticized.

Furthermore, the discussion about the nature of philosophical activity is, in itself, a typical issue in the field. Nor are feminist philosophers the only ones, or even the first, to question the supposed omnitemporality of philosophy: it is a common criticism among thinkers linked to Marxism, existentialism, hermeneutics, neopragmatism, and critical theory, to name but a few philosophical lines. The fact that some areas, methodologies, or definitions found in the history of philosophy are based on the assumption that they are disconnected from historicity does not mean that this characterizes the area in its totality, especially considering the various counterexamples. This is precisely a philosophical issue in dispute. By accepting and taking as a starting point this conception of philosophy, we are already simultaneously taking a position on the characterization of philosophy.

As we have seen, Pulkkinen recognizes that the search for omnitemporality is not present in every philosophy. She is an author versed in both classical philosophy and feminist theory, so she is fully aware of the criticisms of feminist philosophers on this point. However, by accepting this characterization of philosophical activity in her analysis, since, according to her, “it is a strong feature in the textual tradition and practice of philosophy” (Pulkkinen, 2003, p. 30), she ends up reinforcing the idea of philosophy as opposed to feminism. We believe that this is one reason the author suggests using the expression feminist theorizing instead of feminist philosophy, which is even more clear in her considerations about the relationship between feminism and philosophy and politics.

Within this discussion, as we analyzed earlier, Pulkkinen starts from the idea that philosophy and politics are in “opposite” camps, since philosophy involves detachment and impartial rationality, while politics arises from conflict and the - sometimes passionate - defense of a disputed position. Following this line of argument means, once again, accepting a very specific description of philosophy which, although not literally, comes close to the idea that it should be an apolitical activity. This view follows, to a large extent, some of the presuppositions we have already seen, present in criticisms of feminist philosophy. These objections are anchored precisely in the idea that philosophy should be away from the questions of everyday life and demands justice for particular social groups so that it should remain as politically neutral as possible. The central point, however, is whether this is possible, or even desirable. As we have seen, feminist philosophy answers no to both questions.

Another notable aspect of Pulkkinen’s arguments concerns how she understands the relationship between philosophy and feminism with the concept of truth. As we have seen, she states that philosophy aims to find “non-political truth” and feminist theory, on the other hand, does not seek to establish truths, but to challenge supposed truths that have already been established. These are two statements that can be questioned depending on which conception of philosophy and feminism we hold. About philosophy, the same aspects have already been mentioned: it is possible to defend a meta-philosophical position in which it is understood that all philosophical thought already starts from a certain political conception so that it would be impossible to find anything that could be classified as a truth completely unrelated to the political

field. The same can be said of the claims that feminist philosophers do not value truth and that feminists have objectives that are distinct from those of philosophy, as Crowley (2020, 5-8) states.

As far as feminist theory is concerned, it depends on the concept of truth we are using. Although some lines of feminist thought question the idea of truth when it is understood as a type of universal and timeless knowledge, this does not mean, of course, that there is not a broad discussion involving different conceptions of truth. As we have seen, Pulkkinen seems to understand the idea of truth in a very specific and restrictive way, saying that gender studies “do not aim to establish truths” (Pulkkinen, 2003, p. 39). When Simone de Beauvoir states that “one is not born, but becomes a woman”, she claims that this is a true proposition, which adequately explains certain phenomena and aspects of the construction of gender identity. In debates like this, therefore, it will also be necessary to do philosophy and determine the concepts used. To assume that feminist theory necessarily adopts a conception that is averse to the notion of truth is to ignore the fact that this is precisely one issue that feminist philosophy needs to investigate.

Conclusion

The analysis of some recent criticisms of feminist philosophy, as presented here, allows us to observe some patterns in the arguments. As we have seen, Crowley and Pulkkinen start from different perspectives: the former unreservedly rejects feminist insertions in the philosophical field, while the latter accepts the dialog between philosophy and feminism as productive, but believes that they are areas that should not be unified - hence her rejection of the term “feminist philosophy”. Even so, despite their different starting points, both authors present common aspects in their lines of argument.

The first point to highlight is the defense that philosophy and feminism are essentially distinct fields of study. The reasons given by the authors vary, but they have in common the idea that, unlike philosophy, feminist theory rejects the notions of truth and objectivity, resulting in a radical split between the fields. In Crowley’s case, as we have seen, this claim is based on a distortion of the position of feminist philosophers, such as Sandra Harding. The author claims that there is a rejection of the idea of truth when what is defended is precisely the opposite.

Harding, like various authors who investigate epistemological issues from a feminist perspective, does not intend to deny the concept of objective truth but argues that: i) traditional science and epistemology have been influenced by the interests of economically and socially dominant groups; ii) the inclusion of multiple perspectives, especially from historically excluded groups, can correct the distortions caused by the partial biases of the privileged groups historically responsible for most of the production of knowledge. Therefore, Harding not only maintains the idea of

objective truth in science and philosophy but also suggests that it can be improved from a feminist and politically critical perspective.

Pulkkinen, on the other hand, although a feminist author, presents an argument that goes in the same direction as what Crowley criticizes in feminist thought: she argues gender studies do not intend to establish truths, which would be a contrast with philosophy. The first aspect to question is the generalization presented by the philosopher. As we have seen, this is not a consensus in feminist studies. We could even question what exactly Pulkkinen means by “truth” in her argument since no clear description of the concept is given. What we can infer from her analysis, as we presented earlier, would be the contrast she establishes between what she identifies as the truth sought by philosophy - a non-political truth, of a universal and timeless nature - and the politically engaged and historically situated statements of feminist studies, which she chooses not to call “truths”.

Here, it is worth emphasizing three aspects that seem central to an adequate analysis of the relationship between philosophy and feminism: first, the concept of truth is a classic philosophical theme, which is certainly unavoidable; second, there is no consensus on which conception of truth is inherent or most appropriate to philosophical activity, and that this is precisely a disputed issue; and third, that how we respond to this problem surrounding the concept of truth influences and, many times, determines how we respond to the question of what philosophy is and which method is most appropriate for its investigation.

If we want to do philosophy, whether or not feminist, we inevitably answer these questions fairly and clearly. We must not, as Crowley does, misrepresent the notion of truth presented by feminist philosophers in the name of a stereotype of feminism as a politically engaged movement; nor can we, as Pulkkinen does, attribute to gender studies and philosophy univocal conceptions about the notion of truth, since this is a debate in dispute in both areas. In this sense, a second common pattern to be highlighted in Crowley and Pulkkinen’s argument is the lack of depth in a metaphilosophical investigation⁴, which, in our view, is crucial to answering the question of the relevance of feminist philosophy. If we start from predetermined conceptions of what feminism is and what philosophy is, the debate on the possibility of feminist philosophy is compromised beforehand.

As we have seen, Crowley does so from a misreading of the thought of feminist philosophers, and from the criticism that there is an imprecision in the concept of feminism, since we find different conceptions of feminist theory. However, the same occurs with philosophy itself, an issue that the author does not mention directly, presenting an implied conception of philosophy and simplifying the debate, as if there were a consensual definition. This is a flaw in his arguments, given that this is a fundamental issue for the discussion since his critique of feminist philosophy involves the delimitation of philosophical activity.

⁴ We understand metaphilosophy, following Overgaard, Gilbert e Burwood (2013, p. vii), “the branch of philosophy that asks what philosophy is, how it should be done and why we should do it”.

Pulkkinen, on the other hand, ends up avoiding a deeper meta-philosophical discussion by starting from previous conceptions of philosophy and feminism without the necessary critical deepening. As we have shown, the author connects philosophy with some particular characteristics, such as “pure thought”, omnitemporality, and the search for non-political truth. Understood in this way, philosophical activity would appear to be necessarily distant from feminist studies. What Pulkkinen does not elaborate on, however, are the criticisms of feminist philosophers about characterizing philosophy in this way. Again, this is a significant flaw in the analysis, since questioning the method and focus of philosophical activity is precisely one of the most significant aims of feminist philosophy.

Our main point here is not to defend any specific meta-philosophical conception supported by feminist philosophy. There is, as we mentioned, a diversity of readings on this aspect and, of course, it is possible to present good counter-arguments to some interpretations of philosophy by feminist authors. It is even perfectly possible to consider feminist authors’ most frequent criticisms of “traditional” conceptions of philosophy to be inadequate. What we are emphasizing, however, is that any objection to feminist philosophy, to be well realized, needs to consider the meta-philosophical discussion that this field of study undertakes.⁵ It is not enough to take some specific conception of philosophy, however traditional, and present it in contrast to feminist philosophy if we do not address feminist philosophy’s criticisms of these same traditional definitions.

Thus, although, given the scope of the discussion, this is not our aim in this text, we understand that any rejection of feminist philosophy needs to go through the meta-philosophical investigation, presenting the proposal of a particular definition of philosophy, which adequately justifies the supposed impossibility of its intersection with feminism. In our view, this is one of the central flaws in Crowley and Pulkkinen’s arguments. Criticism of the notion of feminist philosophy that does not thoroughly question the delimitation of philosophical activity and that does not present forceful counter-arguments to the meta-philosophy produced by feminist philosophers incurs the mistake of sustaining superficial conceptions of feminist theory and philosophy, avoiding some of the more forceful philosophical arguments presented by authors who produce philosophy from a feminist perspective.

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⁵ For a recent study on the importance of feminist metaphilosophy, see Miolli (2021). “I think that feminist philosophy can strongly contribute to contemporary metaphilosophical reflection by working against this separation among research fields. For example, feminist theorization can play an important role in developing a response to the criticism of abstractness directed at philosophy” (p. 212).

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